

*[This interview is one of ten oral history interviews of Kansas legislators in 2015 that Dr. Burdett Loomis did under the auspices of the University of Kansas and the Shawnee County Historical Society with funding from the Kansas Humanities Council. This set of interviews became the foundation for the Kansas Oral History Project with its incorporation.]*

BUNTEN: I wish I had something that I could look back at on my mother and father. But, of course, he was born in 1898, and all this stuff that we have now—well, you can go on—

LOOMIS: Okay, there we go. Okay. It's ticking away here. So today we're interviewing former representative, former senator [William W.] "Bill" Bunten at his home in Topeka, Mulvane and 30<sup>th</sup> Street. Thanks very much for agreeing to talk with us today.

BUNTEN: It's my pleasure, Burdett.

LOOMIS: So my usual first question is: How did you get involved in politics at the very beginning? How'd you come to run for the legislature?

BUNTEN: Well, it's a good question, and I'm not sure that I have a definitive answer. I just began to get interested in what was going on in our city and our state and business here, and—

LOOMIS: What year would this have been, about?

BUNTEN: This would be in about 1960. Joanne and I were married in 1950, and I began to think in terms of running for the state legislature, and finally I just said, "I think I'm gonna do it," and everybody said, "Oh." But I did. And—

LOOMIS: So what was the first year you ran?

BUNTEN: That would be 1962.

LOOMIS: Okay. So this was before reapportionment and redistricting.

BUNTEN: Yes. Of course, I wasn't aware of any of those things. I just knew that it was an interesting thing, and [Robert C.] "Bob" Taggart and others that I knew had served there. Ralph [E.] Skoog went in before me. He and I were junior high school teammates on a city championship football team. LOOMIS: We were both in school together. He was a mid-termer, but he was very bright and got a law degree, and it's not usual: lawyers get in the legislature and see how the system works.

LOOMIS: Right, right.

BUNTEN: So I ran, and had a lot of help, and I ran against an incumbent Republican, and I talked with him about it, and he said, "Take me on if you want to serve." And I did, and I won that race.

LOOMIS: When you say you had a lot of help, what does that mean? How did you put together a campaign in those days?

BUNTEN: Well, you did it mostly yourself. There were only four seats in Shawnee County at that time. This was a largely Republican seat. So we figured out you're going to have a brochure, you're going to have to have some signs, I want to have some television advertising and radio advertising, so we put together a huge sum of money, I think maybe close to a thousand dollars. And [I] ran and won and continued in there for twenty years— twenty-eight years.

LOOMIS: So the real contest was the Republican primary, not the general election against a Democrat at that time.

BUNTEN: Yeah.

LOOMIS: What part of Topeka did you represent?

BUNTEN: Well, it's generally this area. We've lived in this house for fifty-two years. Maybe longer. We were married in 1950, so it would be fifty-four years. And haven't seen any reason to change. It's built up around us as the years went by, but we like the house, and we're near good schools, and so we've just been here and added on things, finished the basement, put a fence around the back yard and —porch and a patio and—it's been a good house.

LOOMIS: Yeah, yeah. In your campaign, did you have some people who had run campaigns before or did you just pretty much try to figure it out on your own?

BUNTEN: Well, the people that I had helping me had no experience whatsoever. [James] "Jim" Lagerberg was my treasurer, and he had never been involved in politics, and he continued to be my treasurer until I didn't run. And there were others that [helped], but for the most part, like, Joanne and I, just went door to door to virtually every home in the district. And we got a good reception. Sometimes if you knock on the door or ring the doorbell at a home where there is a child who Mom just got to sleep— that's not too good.

LOOMIS: Well, right. So here you are. You won election. Can you recall what you did to sort of get ready to become a legislator, before you were sworn in, even?

BUNTEN: Well, the first thing I did was to go and see A. Harry Crane, who was a Republican—he was a Republican chairman of the party in this county, and my father knew him and I knew him, and I went, and I talked to him. And I said I was thinking about running against the incumbent, who was a Republican, and he discouraged me.

LOOMIS: I'm sure. Yeah.

BUNTEN: He thought that—as I recall, he said that there were—they usually wanted to give an incumbent two terms— and then he could run in the primary. I said, "Well, I think I'm gonna

run anyway.” And so I did. And won. I got paid back when, a few years later, I ran to be the Republican chairman, and I had the votes, and I went to the meeting, and people came up to me and said, “Some things have come up, and I’m not going to be able to assist you”, “and vote for you.” And I was defeated.

LOOMIS: I’ll be darned.

BUNTEN: Well, that was a good lesson. I mean, it was a good lesson for me. It’s not the way things should work, but it *was* the way it worked in the old days. In the old days, the Democratic and Republican chair people had a lot of authority in getting jobs for people and things like that. And they in turn would go to the national convention and cast their votes for someone, so Harry Crane was a good man, was a very successful attorney, and he was the long-time chairman of the Republican Party and it [was a good time.].

LOOMIS: Aside from that, did you get along with him okay?

BUNTEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. A good politician—they’re always easy to get along with. They just—they know.

LOOMIS: Right, right, exactly. So you talked to him. You’ve lived in Topeka. You’d lived in the state capital. What was it like when you first entered that building as a legislator? What did you learn when you were first there, do you think?

BUNTEN: Well, I learned that I was very unimportant and that I was a disaster at public speaking. The first time I got up to speak on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1962, I was trembling with concern that I would stutter and stammer, which I did. But over the years, when you get to know what you’re talking about, why, it comes a little easier. That’s the point. One of the things I learned, that don’t speak about something that you’re not knowledgeable about because you’re wasting everybody’s time.

LOOMIS: And, of course, I assume you had—there were some examples of people in the House who might have done that on a regular basis—you know, spoke on things, everything that came up.

BUNTEN: Yes, yes, that’s true.

LOOMIS: So what kind of committees were you on to start with?

BUNTEN: I can’t remember the committees that I was on over all those years. Over half a century. But they were pretty modest. I think I was on what is now the Federal and State Affairs Committee and [unintelligible; 12:55]. And later on, after about, oh, six or eight years, why I was put on as a representative from Topeka on what was then the Ways and Means Committee. And that’s pretty serious business.

BUNTEN: In those days, the legislature met, I believe on odd years, for ninety days and on even years, for thirty days and dealt only with budget—

LOOMIS: The so-called budget session.

BUNTEN: So the pay was five dollars a day, and seven dollars a day expenses— which was one of the better jobs I had in my life.

LOOMIS: So did you seek to get on the Ways and Means Committee?

BUNTEN: I did. That was the most important committee, and to be on there was—it made your service more meaningful. It dealt with big-time problems. I think the budget—it could be checked, but I think the budget for the state at that time was about \$40 million.

LOOMIS: Probably \$400 million. I've checked that.

BUNTEN: \$400 million. I'm sorry.

LOOMIS: I think four hundred is about right, yeah.

BUNTEN: \$400 million, and we didn't have such things as school finance, or we didn't have Wichita State [University] receiving funds or Washburn [University] or community colleges or— a lot of the welfare programs. There was no retirement program and things like that.

BUNTEN: So, it was pretty simple in many way but, at the same time, still important.

LOOMIS: And you also—and we'll talk a little bit more about you lived through a time in which all of those things came into being, so you were part of the creation of, say, KPERS [State of Kansas Retirement System for Public Employees] and school finance.

BUNTEN: Yes.

LOOMIS: Let me talk a little bit, first, about the politics of the—how long did you serve as a representative?

BUNTEN: I served for twenty-eight years in the House of Representatives and two in the state Senate.

LOOMIS: Right, right. I knew you'd gone back to the Senate. Twenty-eight years. Did you ever have a serious challenge in those years?

BUNTEN: Yes. I can't remember the lady's name, but she was a young and attractive lady and had I believe four children, and she worked very, very hard. And I think the children went with her campaigning. At least with those that she could. And I thought I was in pretty big trouble.

I worked hard, myself. The truth of the matter is that people don't spend a lot of time thinking about state government or local government or even the federal government.

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: And they're not really knowledgeable about all the things that go into it— and the advantage of having a Republican from a Republican district on the Ways and Means Committee probably didn't turn the minds of very many people at all. So she was a Democrat that ran against you?

BUNTEN: Yes. Uh-huh.

LOOMIS: So you *did* have to, in '66, '68, after *Baker v. Carr* and all the court cases, there was redistricting here.

BUNTEN: Mm-hm.

LOOMIS: Did you take part in that?

BUNTEN: Yes.

LOOMIS: Did you get to draw your own district?

BUNTEN: Well, I later became the chairman of the Redistricting Committee, and it's not an easy thing.

LOOMIS: No.

BUNTEN: You can say, "Well, we'll just take Shawnee County, and we can make the districts work and be just fine." But when you put *that* into what everybody else wants— it doesn't work. And so we struggled with it, but I think it was fair at the time, and still is.

LOOMIS: Yeah. When you got on the Ways and Means, how did your job in the legislature change?

BUNTEN: Well, it didn't really change much. We met virtually every day and had hearings from all the cities that needed funding, so there was a lot of time, as a member—you worked with the chairman and the vice chairman to try to get a Republican plan passed. But the Republican majorities in those days was so great— that really the Democrats just had to hope that they didn't get a bad deal out of reapportionment.

LOOMIS: Sure, sure. I mean, one of the things that occurred was the balance between rural legislators and urban/suburban legislators changed a fair amount with reapportionment, and yet my sense is the rural guys always did pretty well. So how did that rural-urban thing play out in the legislature?

BUNTEN: Well, a lot of times, it played out pretty well because the speaker of the House was [from Lawrence.]

LOOMIS: Right. So who was the speaker? Which speaker? There were several speakers, of course.

BUNTEN: Yes. I was doing a little thinking last night about how I finally got on to be the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. But [Duane S.] “Pete” McGill was from Winfield. “Mike” Hayden from western Kansas.

LOOMIS: Right, from Atwood.

BUNTEN: And Jim Braden from Clay Center. Wendell Lady was the one who was from Johnson County. Was from one of the larger communities. So if you wanted to get along, why, you went along with a lot of that. Not to the point—if you disagreed with something, why, you weren’t going to vote for it, but—there were a lot of bills that other committees had given study to, and unless you had a real serious objection, why, [you supported] the committee [chair.]

LOOMIS: Right. So let’s go back to—what were your dealings with, say, Clyde Hill before you became on Ways and Means, I assume?

BUNTEN: Yes. I don’t believe he was the chairman when I was on there. He was the speaker of the House.

BUNTEN: And he was a good man—you know, small in stature but clearly knew what he was doing. And, of course, the speaker of the House works with the governor and others in the Senate, so my relationship with him was very cordial. I don’t recall that he ever had to put some pressure on me to do this or that. I’m not sure.

LOOMIS: Yeah, yeah. So how long between the time you got onto Ways and Means and—how long was it before you became chair?

BUNTEN: Well, I’m not sure of the exact number, but I was chairman, I believe, for eight years. And I probably was on six or eight years before that. I was vice chairman for a while, and it may [be] interesting to—if I might use my cheat sheet here—about how I became the chairman.

LOOMIS: Absolutely. No, that’s a very—

BUNTEN: It’s interesting. I was the vice chairman, and Pete McGill was the first chairman of the committee, and when he left that position to run for speaker of the House, he said initially that he would like me to be his chairman of the committee. However, he needed the Johnson County votes and the big-city votes.

BUNTEN: And so he came to me and said, "I'm gonna appoint Wendell Lady." I said, "That's fine." He was a really good man, and I would stay on as vice chairman. So Wendell was the chair, and then *he* decided to run[for Speaker]. And he said that he was going to appoint me as the chairman.

BUNTEN: Then he came to me a little later, and he said, "I need the western Kansas vote, and I'm going to appoint Mike Hayden as the chairman." And I became vice chairman again. But eventually Mike left and—

LOOMIS: Became speaker.

BUNTEN: Yeah, became the speaker, and I believe it was Jim Braden appointed me twice to be the chairman.

LOOMIS: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So it took a while.

BUNTEN: It did. And that's the politics of it. But I wouldn't argue one bit and you had some really special people there: McGill and Wendell Lady and Mike Hayden and Jim Braden—all of them, really good people. LOOMIS: All of them eventually became Speaker of the House of Representatives. And one of them became the governor.

LOOMIS: Right, right. I've always heard that as good as Hayden was as speaker, I also think he was a pretty good governor—

BUNTEN: Mm-hm.

LOOMIS: —that he was a really, really good Ways and Means chair.

BUNTEN: He was good at everything he did. I think that the one drawback, the thing that cost him reelection was that he had a western Kansas twang—

LOOMIS: Yes.

BUNTEN: —that the Shawnee Mission people—that was a [school] district up there [in Johnson County disliked]. He was a very special guy. His father had actually played football at KU [University of Kansas].

LOOMIS: I didn't know that.

BUNTEN: Yes, and he went to Kansas State [University] and got his degree. Then he went into the Army during the Vietnam War.

LOOMIS: Right.

BUNTEN: And he never said very much about it. But one day—he was governor, and I was out there, and we were sitting in a little room there, talking, and he told me one of the stories of what it was like in Vietnam, because he saw a lot of heavy combat. He never brought that up as a combat veteran when he was a candidate for governor. There's another one, too, and I'm going to struggle with the name—Gov. [Robert F.] “Bob” Bennett. He was a Marine—and was involved in the invasion at Inchon [Korea], and he saw heavy combat as well—and never mentioned it.

LOOMIS: Yeah, yeah. Speaking of Senator and then Governor Bennett, did you work directly with Bob Bennett on some things?

BUNTEN: I'm sure I did. But I don't—I wasn't chairman when he was there, so—

LOOMIS: —right.

BUNTEN: But I remember that he came by and said he wanted to talk to me about something, and it was 5:30, and so we went over to the Topeka Country Club and I was a member there, and I ordered—we ordered a drink, which is exactly what it was: a drink because he left, and then I left, too. And on my income tax, I wrote down that my eight dollars or whatever I spent there was deductible. And the IRS came, and they interviewed me, and they said that this wasn't deductible. I said, “What do you mean, it's not deductible. It was a business expense.” So then they said, “Well, we'll do this: We'll let you deduct the water but not the whiskey.” And I said— I didn't have to pay it.

LOOMIS: That's funny.

BUNTEN: It is. That's the only experience that I've had with that agency. I hope after they see this, they don't target me.

LOOMIS: [Chuckles.] I don't think so. One of the things that happened in the late '60s but particularly the early '70s, in Bennett's term as governor, is that there was a lot of governmental reform. Pete McGill was involved, [Richard C.] “Pete” Loux [pronounced LUX]. There were a lot of good legislators. Bennett, of course. You know, were you involved in some of those changes? You know, whether it was KPERs or creating new departments, like Transportation, stuff like that?

BUNTEN: Well, you're involved in it because you're a member of the legislature.

LOOMIS: Right.

BUNTEN: But as far as being in a leadership position —no, I was not. As the budget grew and as we expanded, what we would be involved in, we took a really big step in establishing a department that would help us gather information from whatever sources necessary so that we can make a better decision on how we would [unintelligible; 30:53].



LOOMIS: What department was that?

BUNTEN: Well, I can't remember the exact—

LOOMIS: But you had Legislative Research before that.

BUNTEN: The Legislative Research was what I was talking about, and that was available to us. And that's one of the changes that they made. We had our own attorney. The House of Representatives did quite a lot of things, and then, of course, we expanded to a session every year. And with that, the pay skyrocketed to I believe ten dollars a day.

LOOMIS: [Chuckles.] Yes, right, right.

BUNTEN: You don't do these things for the money.

LOOMIS: Of course you don't. Even today, of course, you don't. Speaking of that—so here you are in Topeka. You're going to the legislature. You're now four months a year with the ninety-day session. How did you make a living all this time? Because the legislature certainly wasn't going to pay the bills.

BUNTEN: Well, no. First of all, it's not expensive for me to come because I've just got to drive downtown as opposed to driving in here and getting a motel room for ninety days or more.

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: But my brother and I ran an alfalfa dehydrating company. We had plants in Kansas and Nebraska, and so during the winter, most of our work was—although we did store alfalfa and sell it all year long, we weren't harvesting and repairing equipment and making sales and things like that.

LOOMIS: So it was a good business to be in for being a legislator.

BUNTEN: My brother was a good man and would cover for me. He could sell alfalfa as well as I could. He ran it anyway. I was just—

LOOMIS: [Laughs.] So was your plant here in Topeka to do that, or did you have others?

BUNTEN: We had—at one time, we had a plant in Topeka, one at Rossville, Kansas, one at Lawrence, Kansas, and one at Brady, Nebraska. It was a good business, and we did quite well. But as the years went by, the business changed. You had government in for emissions and for safety reasons, and the railroad rates would change, and computers came in, and if you get too high and you're getting something else to replace alfalfa. So it became harder and harder in the 1970s—it was 1982 when we closed it down.

LOOMIS: What did you do after that?

BUNTEN: Well, I had an office in—well, it was in the Merchants National Bank building at 8<sup>th</sup> and I was asked to keep that, so—it's a longer story. It would take me a long time, but I was officing there, and also the people that bought it—I arranged the financing for, and I had and have a small interest in it.

LOOMIS: I see. So you could still basically control your time so you could—you know, being in the legislature was not— BUNTEN: Yeah, I had to walk about a hundred yards.

LOOMIS: [Laughs.] When you think back on your days particularly as vice chair and then chair of Ways and Means, what are the—do you have some high points of your time there and things that you are really pleased with your accomplishment? Because that's a really significant position—you know, holding it for a long time.

BUNTEN: Well, always had an interest in Washburn University, and we were able to begin supporting them to some extent, like Wichita. I believe I did not support bringing Wichita State into the system. It was a municipal university, like Washburn was, but it was a bigger community, and I didn't know that it was necessary. But I'm glad people brighter than I got the job done. Pete McGill wanted to bring the community colleges and the church colleges as well, and we began to fund them in some small way. But, you know, I rarely confess that I was not a thinker and a person that was looking at the overall picture of state government and say, "We need to do this and we need to do that." But when the speaker or the governor had those innovations in mind, why, I for the most part supported it. The prisons and highways and school finance and the university system and welfare system—all of those things changed from when I was initially in the legislature until, at the end, it was big business, and it took big...

LOOMIS: How did the job of being on Appropriations change over that—or Ways and Means change over that period? Because the business of government got so much bigger.

BUNTEN: Well, one thing is that the place was filled with lobbyists. Another—let me speak to that. The people were telling me, as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, that we weren't going to help you.

LOOMIS: Right.

BUNTEN: Well, my policy was—perhaps not at first but pretty quickly as I served—all these people wanted to visit with you and have your ear because you could bring up a bill or you could not bring it up. And my policy in the later years of my service was that I would not accept a contribution in excess of \$100. Because you couldn't buy my vote for \$100.

LOOMIS: Right.

BUNTEN: Or \$200. The amount of money that is being spent today on a Senate seat or a particular House seat is just remarkable. The figures that I had heard, sometimes reaching six figures—for a part-time job in the legislature is frightening.

LOOMIS: —outside money. You're not raising that. You know, people are coming to you, raising it in larger and larger amounts. So talk a little bit about lobbying and how that has, you know, changed from, say, the '60s into the '80s or early '90s. Because I was around in the late '80s, and certainly there was a large lobbying community then.

BUNTEN: Well, lobbyists are important because they're knowledgeable about whatever the issue might be, whereas I might be starting from scratch. Why did we need Wichita State in there?

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: They had a [laundry list.]. You can come here and you can talk and say, "This is why we need it." So I'm not opposed to lobbyists at all. I believe that there should be—and maybe there is by now, that there should be some limits on the amount of money that you can put into a campaign for someone seeking public office. And I think there might very well be by now. But I don't believe I ever spent more than a thousand dollars. Maybe I spent fifteen hundred dollars.

LOOMIS: Sure. But you did come—one of the—in political science they talk a lot about lobbyists providing information, and that was basically your relationship with them.

BUNTEN: Yes. Because I had a part-time job, and if there were questions about workers' compensation, which I'm not familiar about, I could talk to the Chamber of Commerce, the state Chamber of Commerce and the local Chamber of Commerce, and they can tell me what their side is. And I can go talk to the union representatives and find what the other side is. And so I have no quarrel with lobbyists at all. I think those that [unintelligible; 42:00]. I think in Washington, D.C., it's probably out of hand.

LOOMIS: Pretty big, yeah. One of the things that happened with Pete McGill is that he came back and for many years ran maybe the most notable lobbying firm around the capital. Would he come and talk to you about things that were on his agenda?

BUNTEN: Well, he probably didn't need to.

LOOMIS: [Laughs.]

BUNTEN: By the time he was out and I was the chairman, I was pretty knowledgeable about the various issues. But he had the advantage of having been through the seats from back-row member of the House of Representatives to a chairman of a large committee to Speaker of the House. And as Speaker of the House, you're dealing with the governor and you're dealing with the senators. So his efforts were appreciated by I think everybody. And he wasn't the kind of person that threatened you. I *will* tell you a quick story, if I may.

LOOMIS: By all means.

BUNTEN: I was over in the Senate, and I was talking to Senator Richard—from Manhattan. Anyway, I was talking to a senator. Let's come back to that because the names are fun, and it's just a funny little anecdote. [Pause.]

BUNTEN: Bill—he lost his arm in the war, I think, or in some sort of an accident.

LOOMIS: Well, it's not coming back to me, either.

BUNTEN: I'll think of it.

LOOMIS: So as Appropriations chair, what were your relations with Mike Hayden once he became governor? Did you talk on a regular basis in those days?

BUNTEN: We became personal friends beyond the politics of it. He was an infantryman, and I was.

LOOMIS: Yeah.

BUNTEN: We were both pretty right of center in our politics. My wife worked in his office.

LOOMIS: Oh, is that right?

BUNTEN: Mm-hm. And became good friends with Patty Hayden. And I still talk to him from time to time.

LOOMIS: Yeah.

BUNTEN: I thought there were a lot of good governors, and Bob Bennett was a really good governor, and I think that Mike Hayden was the best of them all. We got in a Conference Committee between the House and the Senate and had reached a point where "We just can't resolve this." You could go up and sit down in his office, and he'd listen to us, and things like that, and then he'd say, "Well, what about this?"

LOOMIS: Mm-hm.

BUNTEN: Light bulb.

LOOMIS: Uh-huh. So he really knew how the system worked.

BUNTEN: Yes.

LOOMIS: Yeah, I think—you know, it strikes me that—I worked with him a little bit in the [Kathleen] Sebelius administration, when he was in Parks and Wildlife [sic; Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, of which he was secretary], and in some ways I think he might have

enjoyed that job more than any other job he had in state government, because, you know, his interests were so much attuned to the interests of that department.

BUNTEN: Yes, and one of my big disappointments was that the governor didn't reappoint him, because he loved it and—

LOOMIS: You're talking Governor [Samuel Dale ("Sam")] Brownback.

BUNTEN: Yes. And there were reasons that he had were fair, but you don't get a job forever, anyway.

LOOMIS: No, right, right.

BUNTEN: People—I lost my thought.

LOOMIS: Well, speaking of a job forever, you stayed in the House for twenty-eight years. That's a very, very long time, staying in the Kansas House. In retrospect, you know, why do you think you stayed so long? I mean, because other people would come in for a few years, leave. You know, what impelled you to stay for that time?

BUNTEN: Well, I was chairman of Ways and Means Committee for eight years or whatever. That's a good reason to want to come back—

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: —because you can affect things. So that would probably be the main reason. But then also I am free in summers, for much of that time, and it was so close.

LOOMIS: Right, right. It wasn't heavy lifting to—

BUNTEN: Three miles from my house..

LOOMIS: Right, right. I think that that's—I was talking to [Robert C.] "Bob" Storey, and, you know, he just said, "If I had to come here for ninety days, it would have been much more difficult. I can just drive home, keep my law practice going."

BUNTEN: Yeah.

LOOMIS: Why in the end did you decide to leave?

BUNTEN: Well, I think I just was tired. There was a new governor, and if that's the case, you've got the governor of one party and the legislature of another party—

LOOMIS: You're talking about Joan Finney, then.

BUNTEN: Finney. And she's going to have ideas that you may not want and that you've got to address so you're not only acting on what a governor of your same party is involved in— what he has recommended; in this instance, why, you have to determine whether the new governor, from another party, has the same philosophy about what government should and shouldn't do as you do.

LOOMIS: And Joan Finney had her own problems with her own party, to say nothing of the Republicans.

BUNTEN: Yeah, yeah.

LOOMIS: So what was the interval between your leaving the House and then coming back for a couple of years in the Senate?

BUNTEN: Well, when they tried to figure out—remember the dates, the years I missed—I was out starting in 2000. I was not in the legislature and not involved in politics very much at all.

LOOMIS: Uh-huh.

BUNTEN: And then in 2005, I decided—I'm not sure that's the right—

LOOMIS: That's not—yeah.

BUNTEN: I decided to run for the mayor. And so I spent a lot of time on that and lost in an election that was skewed by the fact that there were three candidates seeking the office instead of two, because Joan Wagnon, who was the sitting mayor, who had lost in the primary, wasn't one of the two. Her supporters urged her to have a write-in vote— —largely because of the “crapper caper,” which was what was—that describes, for those who aren't good at the English language as others, they took a commode, put a dummy upside down, and put a sign on it that said: “Slash Wagnon.” And that's just unacceptable, and everybody was just astounded. Actually, they put it outside the office of the mayor's door.

LOOMIS: Right, right.

BUNTEN: So she ran, and she was going to support me because she didn't like the other candidate [Butch Felker]. But she got about 5,000 votes that might have come—and I lost by about 1,000. And [Harry L.] “Butch” [Felker, III] became the mayor. Then he—it turned out he had accepted some illegal contributions, as I recall, and the district attorney was firm and was going to prosecute, so he resigned, and they had to have a [deputy] mayor fill out the last two years of the term. And I had been second, so I thought, *Well*—so I ran, and I appeared before the City Council, and I got one vote.

LOOMIS: [Laughs.]

BUNTEN: Which was a little bit of a surprise, but I believe that they had pretty much agreed who they wanted to be [Mayor]—since I wasn't the mayor, I was now available, and the senator from our district here was going to take the job as the state treasurer. And so that seat came open, and I decided to run for it. I had to contact all the members of the Republican Central Committee.

LOOMIS: Right, right.

BUNTEN: And I found that another candidate had pretty much gathered nearly enough votes to win on the first ballot. I thought, *Well, I'm going to tough it out.* And so we had the meeting, and they had a number of candidates, and they would take a vote and then the one who had the fewest votes ...until finally it was down to me and another one, and I won. So I became a state senator.

LOOMIS: Right, right.

BUNTEN: I'll tell you this story. I thought it was funny, but I don't think anybody else did. But I was put on the Ways and Means Committee in the Senate. The then-president of the Senate was at odds with now Congressman—from the western part of the state.

LOOMIS: [Timothy Alan] Huelskamp, right?

BUNTEN: Yeah, Mr. Huelskamp. And he called me, and he said, "I'm going to take Sen. Huelskamp off of the Ways and Means Committee. Do you want that seat?" And I said, "Well, I sure hate to start the first day up here taking somebody's seat." And he said, "Well, it's up to you, but he's not gonna be on it. If you want it, you got it ." "Okay, I'll accept that position." And I went down to talk with Huelskamp, and there was a bunch of other really very, very conservative people there. And I told them, "I've just been with the president, and he's going to make a change, and I'm going to accept." He was very gracious about it. I think he probably recognized that he wasn't going to be on it. So that's how I got on the Ways and Means Committee there. And then at the first meeting that we had, some of the staff—one of the staff persons, a young lady, gave an explanation of a bill that was pretty mundane, not much consequence. And after it was over, the chairman of the committee said thank you to the staff person and said, "Are there any questions?" And there weren't any. I raised my hand. And I turned to this young lady, and I said, "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" [Transcriber's note: This is the question that Sen. Joseph McCarthy asked at his HUAC hearings.] And everybody—

LOOMIS: [Laughs.]

BUNTEN: And so then I turned to—and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought that's the kind of questions that senators asked."

LOOMIS: [Laughs.] I can see why [ unintelligible].

BUNTEN: [Laughs.] Well, another thing was that I kept standing up in the Senate. They'd recognize me. I'd say, "Thank you, Mr. Speaker."

LOOMIS: [Laughs.]

BUNTEN: ... one day I wanted to be recognized, and I stood up, and I said—he would—he turned to me and said, "I'll be happy to recognize you at the same time that you will start calling me Mr. President."

LOOMIS: [Chuckles.] Of course. Well, twenty-eight years—it's hard habit to break.

BUNTEN: I think if you take things so seriously that you can't have a little fun with it, then damn well you're going to have an ulcer.

LOOMIS: So let's go back to—not particularly Huelskamp, but as you said, you went down to his office, and there were a bunch of—when you came back to the Senate, was it a different legislature than the one that you had left a few years later [sic; earlier], with the introduction of more of these social conservatives, do you think?

BUNTEN: The social conservatives, the real right-wing people want to unpave the roads. They were gathering some steam in my last couple of years there, and I don't quarrel with their ideology. It's up to them whether they want something or they don't, but they were intractable in being willing to see if we could find some middle ground.

LOOMIS: Sure, sure.

BUNTEN: And that made it pretty difficult. But that was the deal.

LOOMIS: Yeah, yeah. Did you enjoy being a senator?

BUNTEN: Oh, yeah, yeah. [unintelligible; 60:51] they call you "Senator."

LOOMIS: [Laughs.] That's my attitude toward [Charles Patrick] "Pat" Roberts. When he ran, he wanted to be called "Senator" first. You know, one of the things we talk about a lot is the differences between the House and the Senate. Were there a couple of things that stick out, you know, serving in the Senate versus serving in the House all those years?

BUNTEN: Not really. The issues are the same. You've got a smaller group. They're all good people. I enjoyed it, and I knew I wasn't going to—I was going to be there a few years, and then I was out— And I was going to run for mayor again.

LOOMIS: Yeah. That's kind of a freeing, too, to know that you're not going to keep go—so what was motivating you as your left—earlier, and then as you left the Senate—what was motivating you to run for mayor of Topeka?



BUNTEN: Well, I'd run before. And I lost. And I'm not a very good loser. I thought that we were implementing a new form of government, and I thought that I was supportive of that, and I thought maybe we can really get some things done. But it didn't turn out that way. It turned out, to my surprise, that we had a very, very flawed document that had been approved by the people, and that particularly somebody who'd been in the legislature and comes over here, they apparently thought I was sort of the hot shot coming in there and going to make a lot of changes.

LOOMIS: Mm-hm.

BUNTEN: And, again, [I had] a couple of committees that I formed to [make] recommendations, but the document was so flawed—let me just give you one idea: The mayor and the council people are the governing body of the city. The mayor is a voting member. And the city council does not have—he's a member, and he also has the right to veto. And the council was not given the authority to override a veto, so you have what was called a weak mayor, who could vote on an issue. If he didn't like it, he could veto it, and they couldn't override it. Now, I didn't ever do that. I explained that this is—I [didn't? 64:13] veto it, but something that—I thought we needed this thing fixed, and the truth of the matter is that, at the risk of if they see this tape, they probably [had] never read the charter ordinance.

BUNTEN: And I bet you could ask them today how many of them had sat down and read it—first of all, it's very difficult because there's charter ordinance this, and then there's another charter that all affects things.

LOOMIS: Sure. I want to go back a little bit. I knew [Robert C.] “Bob” Harder pretty well over the years. How did the Shawnee County group, the Topeka group—did you guys work together? Would you conference together, have lunch or anything, or did you pretty much go your own way?

BUNTEN: I would say the Republicans talked a lot about it, but we didn't talk with Bob about it. He was a liberal Democrat. I'm a pretty conservative Republican. And we got along just fine. I admired him. And he asked me, when I was still in the legislature, I believe—he taught a class here for the teacher's association.

LOOMIS: Right, at the public management school.

BUNTEN: And he would invite me each year to go over there. He also worked with one of the grade schools here, helping them have their school elections. And he asked me, when I was mayor, to come over there and present the new—“Here's your new mayor.”

LOOMIS: Right, right.

BUNTEN: And so I liked him. I liked his wife. I differed with him on how to resolve problems. And that's what the difference is. And if you don't like somebody—because they're in this party or that party, people are drawn to this party because they feel that this is the best way to resolve a

problem, and others feel differently. They belong to another party. But that doesn't mean that you have to be nasty with someone.

LOOMIS: —you're not directly involved today, but, I mean, I think it strikes most people in the state that what you're just describing is not nearly as much of the process today as it might have been twenty or thirty years ago.

BUNTEN: That's my understanding, that they have a group of Republicans that are not very flexible. I had a thought, and then it slipped away. Maybe it'll come back.

LOOMIS: One of the other things was—like, I was over there for a couple of years, writing a book in the late '80s and got to know people. It just struck me that that group of people that was in the legislature in the '70s and '80s was just a particularly good group. I don't know. You know, clearly, they had their differences. They were—you know. But it just struck me that the legislature in those days was a pretty good place to be. You could go home at night feeling pretty good about what you'd done there. BUNTEN: Well, I agree with that. What we did is we could go down on the floor, and we could argue these things and pass them or not pass them, but if we had a problem—for example, if I had a problem, I could talk—we'd go out to one of the local bars— and sit down and have a drink and talk about it, and after a couple of drinks, why, things didn't seem so serious.

LOOMIS: Uh-huh.

BUNTEN: And a lot of people, a lot of issues were settled by sitting down socially and saying, "What do you think about this?"

LOOMIS: Right.

BUNTEN: —if they were willing to talk about it at that point in time.

LOOMIS: Right, right, right, right. Did you go to the lobby rooms in the Jayhawk Hotel [sic: Hotel Jayhawk] in their day?

BUNTEN: I did some of them, but not much of that. And the reason is because I'm here— And I wanted to be here— —much more than I wanted to be in the room.

LOOMIS: Yeah, exactly. One of the things that—someone might have told me, or we might even have had a conversation earlier, a while back on this—do you think that your thinking about politics evolved over the time that you were in the legislature? In terms of—you said several times, you know, you were pretty conservative. And yet government grew quite a bit while you were in office. So I don't know how to ask: Do you think your thinking evolved a bit? Or did you come out pretty much the same fairly conservative guy that you went in?

BUNTEN: No, I think I changed my mind about some things. I think the school finance bill is something that was positive. I think we have to be careful about it now because it's the lobbyists,

again. This is the way I see the school lobby. People in the national education—they have all these members saying we've got to have an increase in the amount of money we spend on education, so they have a lobbyist, and they tell him, "We need more money." He doesn't know we need more money, but he's, "Okay,

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: So he goes down to the legislature, and he talks to the legislators that we need more money for schools. And the legislator doesn't know whether they need more money for schools, but "Okay." And what you've got is a whole bunch of people voting on something that they really don't understand at all.

BUNTEN: When I was in the Senate, I introduced a bill that simply said that a school district must have a budget for each school in the school district, and for each program, like, transportation or food service or whatever it might be, so that lay people can look at it and say, "We're not spending that money. We're spending enough." But when you—like here in Topeka, when I go down to Jardine Middle School and see that there are bleachers around the football fields— and then the oldest kid in the school is in eighth grade. And the football field is irrigated. You begin to wonder-- So it's wasn't a matter of should we have—be willing to help the schools— particularly those that don't have a large property tax base—Yes, we should. And I *was* supportive of that, I'm sure.

BUNTEN: But now they need to be a little careful about it. One of the reasons we have the big problem today with the state's finances is that the Supreme Court required —two or three years ago, that they put an additional \$700 million in the budget. Well, there's a shortage now.

LOOMIS: Yeah, that's part of it.

BUNTEN: How do *they* know? Well, the school in Topeka has the same needs as down in Crawford County. I'm sorry.

LOOMIS: No, no, no, that's good. That's good. Is there anything else, something I've, you know, missed that was really important to the way your life in the legislature—you know, a really long run and a good one. So, you know, if there's something I've missed or you'd like to, you know, mention.

BUNTEN: I don't know. There's probably some things here that as soon as you leave, *I wish I'd talked to him about that*. But I would just end our conversation by saying first of all, I appreciate what you're doing and what the others have been supporting— —a history of what goes on there, particularly somebody who started when it was \$400 million and ended up when it was— LOOMIS: However million, yeah.

BUNTEN: I think we've done a pretty good job, but I think the government, at all levels, has to be a little careful so that—they became so—wanted to be helpful to those who need help and

may be unemployed and things like that, that you get them dependent on—so they don't reach down into themselves and make the commitment—resolve their problems themselves.

LOOMIS: Sure.

BUNTEN: For those that—my son and daughter-in-law have a child who is academically challenged. Nice little girl I'm very proud of. The mother was married to somebody else. This isn't my son's daughter. We need to help people. We do. She's in a special education program. And not only that, I have two granddaughters who are in the gifted program. I've got a six-year-old daughter [sic] in the first grade who can read—she can read anything out there. And so those are good programs.

LOOMIS: Yeah.

BUNTEN: But I think what most fiscal conservatives want to do is just make sure the programs are there, but make sure they're run responsibly.

LOOMIS: Right, right. Well, you know, so let's—we'll cut it there. And I really thank you very, very much for your time here. It's been great. [End of interview.]