

Interview of Richard L. Bond by Joan Wagnon, September 6, 2019
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Joan Wagnon: Good afternoon. This is September 6th, 2019 and this is an oral history on Richard L. Bond, otherwise known as Dick, the former president of the Kansas Senate, and it's being conducted under the auspices of the Kansas Oral History Project. It's a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of establishing an archive of oral histories of Kansas legislators who served prior to the year of 2000. Former legislator Joan Wagnon and member of the KOHP board is conducting this interview at the State House in the Senate Chambers. This interview is videotaped by David Heinemann, also a KOHP board member and former legislator and will be posted at the Kansas Historical Society on Kansas Memory.

Mr. Bond, who was born in 1935, now retired, has been a banker, attorney, and served fourteen years in the Kansas Senate. He currently resides in Overland Park with his wife, Sue. He graduated from the University of Kansas, KU, in 1957, and from KU Law School in 1960. Prior to his Senate service, Mr. Bond spent twenty-five years as a top aide to several members of Congress. Is that correct?

Richard L. Bond: That's correct.

JW: He rejected opportunities for a Congressional run himself and then when the Senate seat opened up after [Senator] Jack Walker became lieutenant governor, you decided to take office in 1986. You sought it, and you won.

RLB: Right. Actually '86, I was appointed, but my first session was '87.

JW: Okay. So, you didn't have to run for that first one.

RLB: No.

JW: Okay, my information on that was not right.

RLB: Then I ran, after serving those two years, which were Lieutenant Governor Jack Walker's two years, then I ran three times, so a total of fourteen years. My last four, of course, was President of the Senate until January 2001.

JW: Did anybody contest your wanting Jack Walker's seat? Did you have to go to a convention of precinct people? How did that work?

RLB: We had a precinct meeting of all the precincts in that 8th Senate district. A number of people said they were going to run, but when it got down to it, everybody backed out. I had been involved in politics in Johnson County for twenty-five years, chief of staff to three members of Congress, and was fairly well known. So, they decided I didn't need an opponent. I was just sort of unanimously appointed to the Senate for that two-year term.

JW: I think that's a good way to do it.

RLB: It was a great way to do it.

JW: I also looked up your committee service because every member of the Senate, it seems like they serve on half a dozen committees every session.

RLB: Yes.

JW: During that fourteen years, you were vice chair of Public Health and Welfare for those first two years you were there, and then you were chair of Financial Institutions and Insurance from '89 to '96.

RLB: For eight years.

JW: Before you became president of the Senate.

RLB: Yes. That's accurate. Of course, I was vice chairman of Public Health because Dr. Jack Walker, they put him on the Public Health Committee as a physician. I assumed his committees, not exactly having the experience that Jack Walker had.

JW: But there was an opening, and you were the new kid on the block.

RLB: That's right.

JW: But they didn't put you on Judiciary either.

RLB: No.

JW: But you're an attorney?

RLB: But then the other twelve years, I was on Judiciary.

JW: I thought I saw your track marks through the statute books on some of those issues. Well, we're going to talk about a number of things today in a very casual manner, and I'm going to ask you some questions about your background and how you got involved in politics. I think I read that you were born in Kansas City.

RLB: Kansas City, Kansas.

JW: And at some point, moved to Overland Park.

RLB: As an infant. My parents moved me actually to Mission, Kansas, Johnson County, and we stayed.

JW: When did you develop an interest in politics? Was this from your family? What piqued your interest in all of this?

RLB: My father, who was a butcher, at Swift's Packing House, was very active in the labor union, the national treasurer of the labor union.

JW: The meat packers.

RLB: The meat packers, the Independent Brotherhood of Packing House Workers, it was called, and he was also a founding member of the Kansas Credit Union. He would come to Topeka every once in a while to lobby for either credit union issues, but sometimes labor union issues and would bring me along. I would come up here and meet with various governors.

The Supreme Court in those days was extremely powerful politically. It was very important. The Supreme Court officed here, had their headquarters here in the Capitol. If you really wanted to get something passed, you went to see the chief justice, too, as well as legislators.

JW: That certainly is in contrast to the way it happens today.

RLB: Totally, yes.

JW: Very interesting. So, you kind of grew up with politics around you and developed that interest. How did you get tapped to work in Congressional offices? I was curious, since so many people who serve in Congress have come from that staff side; you didn't want to go to Congress?

RLB: Well, I thought I did for a long time. Pat Roberts and I, Pat was administrative assistant to Keith Sebelius, Congressman Sebelius from the Big First, and I was chief of staff to [Congressman] Larry Winn of the Third District, and we became close friends. So the big plan was, we were going to succeed our bosses and join hands and be in the House of Representatives together.

JW: Well, Pat made it.

RLB: Pat made it and was very unhappy when I called him and said, "I'm not going to run." He said, "Well, you can win." I said, "I know I can win." I'd spent twenty-five years—I knew everybody that gave a dime. I knew all the Democrats and all the Republicans. In fact, a number of them came to me and said, "If you run, I won't run."

But soon I met and decided—we went to the beach in Puerto Vallarta—had a yellow pad and wrote down all the reasons to run. The reasons to run were it would be good for my ego. It would be wonderful to be called Congressman. Your grandchildren could say, "My grandfather was," and the fourth reason was everybody expected me to run.

But we decided that maybe it would be nice to do something else. Just because people think you ought to go to Congress doesn't mean you need to go. So I became chairman of the board of a bank and joined Governor Bob Bennett's old law firm in Johnson County. That's what I did to start.

Then Jack Walker who was selected by [Governor] Mike Hayden, Jack was our state senator, first term state senator and was a KU med [Kansas University Medical School] doctor, he was selected to be running mate with Mike Hayden. When he got elected, Jack came to me and said, "Dick, you ought to succeed me as state senator." I said, "Oh, well, let me think about it." Well, I forgot. He came back to me two weeks later and said, "Well, what have you decided?" I said, "Oh, I've got to talk to Bennett and the law firm. I've got to talk to my wife, talk to my fellow investors in the bank." I finally did that. I went to see Bennett, and he said, "Dick, you'd be great in the Senate." He said, "It was horrible being governor. I loved being in the Senate."

So, anyway, I did. I spent all of those years in Congress, and I knew nothing important took place in the state legislature. Only important things happened on the Potomac. Well, when I got here, I decided that wasn't true.

JW: That's right!

RLB: It's particularly not true, today. Congress can't do anything. Anyway, Sue said, "Well, it might be interesting to do." My partners in banking said, "Why don't you do that part time?" And so I came here in 1987 and started the first term, served ten years as a senator and four years as president of the Senate. It was a great experience.

JW: When you got here in '87, I think Bob Talkington was president of the Senate, and Mike Hayden was governor.

RLB: That's right. Hayden came in as governor at the same time, '87. He was governor my first four years. Joan Finney was governor my second four years, and then Bill Graves my last six.

JW: Yes. There were a lot of issues. When I started going back through a lot of clips, you remember the famous clips that we all pass around, and in that first six years, it seemed like there were a lot of issues that had percolated up. There were Constitutional amendments. There was tort reform. There was corporate hog farming, branch banking.

RLB: Liquor by the drink.

JW: Liquor by the drink, the death penalty, economic development, all of that was just racing through here until about 1995, and then the issue suddenly changed a lot, I think because of the composition of the legislature. I want to talk about the composition of the legislature in a few minutes, but right now, of those issues that we just listed, which ones had the greatest impact on Kansas?

RLB: Certainly liquor by the drink was a huge issue. I've got to tell you a story.

RLB: Jack Walker had been on Fed and State [Federal and State Affairs Committee]. So I went on Fed and State for that first two years. I knew [Senator] Ed Reilly who was chairman of the committee. Ed, at the first meeting, said, "Okay now"—[John] Carlin had been governor, and Carlin had pushed through this Constitutional amendment. He did unbelievable things with the Republican legislature, pushed through reapportionment, pushed through liquor by the drink, and pushed through pari-mutuel, all in one year. In the '86 general election, we voted on those things.

Anyway, I go to my first week meeting of Fed and the State, and Reilly looks out there and he said, "The Fed and the State Committee is going to have to write the bills for liquor by the drink. We don't have any legislation." He said, "There's only one member of this committee that's a lawyer," and it's me. I'd been there for four days. He said, "Senator Bond, you're chairman of rewriting all the liquor laws for Kansas." That was a wonderful experience.

JW: It was certainly was a huge experience.

RLB: It was a huge job. We did our best. A lot of it needs to be rewritten.

JW: I would agree with that.

RLB: It was a huge change, especially a huge change for my part of the state where all the good restaurants were in Missouri, the bars, and the same thing's true all around the state. They went to Missouri, or they went to Colorado, or they went to Oklahoma.

JW: Or to someplace illegal.

RLB: That's right. We had those semi-legal bars.

JW: I was there in the House during that same period. It seemed like what broke the logjam on a lot of that was the ability to have a local vote so that some communities that wanted it could have it, and if they didn't want it, they didn't.

RLB: They could stay dry.

JW: Was that your doing?

RLB: No. That may have been part of the language of the Constitutional amendment.

JW: I don't recall, yes.

RLB: I don't recall, either, but we had some—I think we still have some dry counties.

JW: We do, but not very many.

RLB: No. All of them figured out it was an economic development issue that would make hotels and restaurants grow.

JW: What about the Economic Development Initiatives of that time? We had the Tony Redwood Krider report. All of that came out of KU. We had all of the banking issues. I remember having constituents on both sides, community banks versus the large banks. Did your banking experience help you a lot navigate that? Did you get interested in all of those things?

RLB: It did. It put me on opposite sides of a guy named Jim Maag at the Kansas Bankers [Association]. Jim Maag had a high percentage of his members were small banks. They weren't particularly interested in branching, branch banking. From where I came from in Johnson County, they were very interested in branch banking into Missouri. So, yes, we made some big changes in banking law.

JW: Education and tax issues also came up at that time. By '92, we had had a number of court cases about education funding, and a number of attempts had been made to figure out what the formula ought to look like. But in '92, we passed a formula that changed the whole philosophy behind how schools are funded. Were you a part of that in any way? You were pretty influential by then.

RLB: No, I wasn't particularly influential by then, but I—yes, I was involved, but not in a committee. Obviously, my school district was very interested in figuring out ways to get better funded because they had not been better funded.

Of course, at that same time came along funding for higher ed. The Regents had a legislation that you and I voted on.

JW: It was a reorganization of the governance mechanisms.

RLB: Yes, but there was a three-year funding program for higher ed. It only got funded one year.

JW: Oh, the Margin of Excellence.

RLB: That's right, the Margin of Excellence. So my first year in the legislature and my second year here, I introduced legislation to increase the cigarette tax to pay for the Margin of Excellence. The chancellor at KU, the president at K State [Kansas State University] spent most of their time in my office cheering on this funding of the Margin of Excellence. I got it through the Senate twice. I never could get it through the House.

JW: Yes, the House thought there were better ways to pay for education funding, I think.

RLB: They didn't like that specific funding mechanism for it.

JW: Right, and generally in the House Tax Committee and generally in the House, earmarking taxes was not something that people were interested in doing.

RLB: No, they didn't like earmarked taxes. But I can assure you, the chancellor and the president of K State liked the idea.

JW: I'm sure they did. I want to read you a quote that I found when I was doing research on you for the interview: "Bond left his state capitol in much better shape than he found it, both literally as well as figuratively. Thanks to his fiscal skills and precision characteristics of his long political career, Bond balanced interest accrued between the state's unclaimed funds and pension accounts and raised 40 million dollars for the renovation of the Kansas capitol building, the first since World War I. He said, 'The only thing I've done that will have lasting value and importance.'" Can we talk about the Capitol renovation?

RLB: Let's do it.

JW: You were just visionary in your approach to this.

RLB: I appreciate that plaudit, but the reality is, when I became president of the Senate in 1996, a member of the state architect group, a guy named Bill Groth [spells], came to see me to tell me about the terrible problems we have in this building, and how dangerous it is. Bill Groth said, "If you're on the fourth or fifth floor of this building, and a fire starts on the first floor, you'll be dead in five minutes because this center part of the building will just take the smoke right to the top." There were no alarms. There was nothing to stop a fire. It was very, very dangerous, no extinguishers, nothing.

In addition to that, he said, "We've got chunks of limestone falling off this building and have come close to hitting people." The building was in terrible shape. At some point, when they put in air conditioning, I think they did it with a chainsaw and just went in and cut holes in the wall and brought through piping for air conditioning. It was horrible. They shut off some of the stairways on up to the upper levels. So we had major safety issues and major space issues.

After hearing Bill Groth and others, I went to see the speaker and I went to see the governor, and I went to see several of the leaders of important committees of the Senate and the House and said, "Guys, we'd better do something." Iowa, Ohio, and Minnesota had all finished restoration. So I got us some airplanes and flew to those three sites. We went overnight to Ohio, but we did day trips to Iowa and Minnesota to see how they did it.

In fact, walking in here this morning, you walk in the Visitors Area, and here's a map on the floor of the state of Kansas with your county on it. That was an idea I stole from Ohio. I watched all these kids come in from all around Ohio, and they want to stand on their county that's on the floor.

Then in Ohio, they had a little classroom, and when the kids got off the bus, instead of just turning them loose like crazy Indians throughout the building, they went in and sat down and had a video that said, "This is what you're going to see. This is what the Capitol is all about." I said, "We've got to have that."

Many of these things, we stole from other states. For example, when you and I started here, if you wanted to hang up a picture, all you needed was a hammer and a nail. You'd just hammer it into the wall and hang it up. I hope they still prohibit that because after a few dozens of years of that, things look pretty bad.

We were able to put together—[Senator] Dave Kerr was a big help in the funding of that as chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, and we were able to come up with a 50 million dollar appropriation for the first tranche of funding for a new building. I remember my last week as president of the Senate, I had a press conference and said, "Well, 50 million is going to get us started, but this restoration may cost as much as 150 million." 330 million dollars later and fourteen years of construction, this is what we've got, and it's really fantastic.

JW: As I look around and as I watch people enjoying the space here, it was probably worth every penny. I cannot imagine that it was easy to put a coalition together to come up with a prolonged request or a kind of a serial appropriation. How did that work? How did you manage to get that done? Dave Kerr helped. We interviewed him last week.

RLB: It did. The Senate presidents that followed me, Kerr and Steve Morris, both continued that. The speakers did a good job. We had one governor, whose name was [Sam] Brownback, that I was told wanted to stop that renovation because it was so expensive. When I left here, I sat down with the architect that was hired to manage the whole process, Trainor architects out of Lawrence. I said, "Guys, whatever you do, never finish up a project and say we're out of money. When you're out of money, I want a whole lot of stuff torn up, so legislators have to come in here and say, 'Well, we can't leave it like that. We need to appropriate more money to fix it up. I encouraged them to try to finish the Senate side first so that the House would say, 'We want that, too.'"

JW: Was [Tim] Shallenberger the speaker when you started that?

RLB: Yes, he was, and he was very helpful. Then we had—

JW: Doug Mays?

RLB: No.

JW: Oh, Kent Glasscock from Manhattan?

RLB: No, we didn't have Glasscock. We had from western Kansas—

JW: Robin Jennison. I'm interviewing Robin in a month.

RLB: Good. Jennison and—

JW: Melvin Neufeld.

RLB: No. They were very helpful.

JW: But speakers in general, you all worked as a team to develop funding. Is that a correct statement?

RLB: That's right. That's exactly right. We had great cooperation between the House and the Senate leadership, or it wouldn't have happened. It was a huge deal. [laughs] When you think about, as it ended up, 330 million dollars.

JW: That's half of what we appropriated in the state the first year I came here. It's just an enormous amount of money. Do you think that that renovation was the high point of your legislative service?

RLB: Sure. It had to be. There were a lot of things that went on while I was here. I think we had two ten-year highway plans.

JW: We did.

RLB: That was a big deal. We had major changes in funding of education, and that was a big deal. Pari-mutuel, liquor by the drink, all those things that came out of Carlin's effort to push through the legislature Constitutional amendments, but there's no question, capitol restoration, both in what it meant physically, and what it meant in terms of dollars was huge.

JW: I had fun reading the clips to try to prepare for this. It looked to me like there was—even though I was here either serving or working for the governor-- that there was a real change that happened somewhere around 1995. Reapportionment had changed the composition of the legislature, and the legislature began to become more conservative, perhaps not in the way that Kansas had traditionally viewed conservatism. There were some different political interests. I'm thinking of Americans for Prosperity, Kansans for Life, and people were even saying we had three political parties. What is your take on that? I was curious whether or not you had any experience with the Koch brothers, Charles and David Koch.

RLB: Yes. I had some. Actually with Charles and Bill Koch. The issue of the legislature becoming more conservative was not unique to Kansas.

JW: No.

RLB: This was a national issue that occurred—you'll recall very well the solid Democrat South. The evangelicals made a huge difference in political thought, both in the Congress and in every state with people like Robertson [Pat Robertson, Christian Coalition] and Dobson [James Dobson, Focus on the Family] and Liberty College, what was his name?

JW: I don't like to remember it.

RLB: They made this major difference in who went to Congress, a major difference in state legislatures. All of a sudden, abortion became the issue. Yes, abortion was there when I was there, but it was the moderate Republicans and Democrats could always stop anything on abortion.

&Pretty much that was true for the death penalty. However, in 1987, when Hayden was elected, he was elected on a platform of "Bring back the death penalty." He tried hard. I went on Fed and State Affairs because Jack Walker had been there. When I went to Fed and State, there were even numbers for and against death penalty. The chairman looked at me and said, "Where are you? You're the difference."

&I wouldn't tell him for quite a long time. I went back to my law office and up to Bob Bennett and said, "What in the world do I do here, Governor? I'm the swing vote to whether this goes to the floor or not." He said, "Well, you probably ought to let it to the floor. You probably ought to introduce something that says we'll move it forward without recommendation." That's what I did.

JW: That's good strategy.

RLB: So it got out of Fed and State and came to the floor of the Senate. We defeated it. Then I introduced the bill to do a hard 50 as opposed to death penalty, and that passed. That was the law for a while. Then finally a sort of watered-down death penalty, a death penalty was passed. I didn't like it.

JW: I never voted for it either. It's a tough issue, and it's one that people tend to vote their own personal beliefs and conscience on.

RLB: Yes.

JW: We [KOHP] did interview Ed Reilly. He was chairing that Fed and State committee forever.

RLB: He would carry the death penalty on the floor. He enjoyed that. [laughs]

JW: I think we've pretty much covered some of that. The leadership question is one that I like to ask because as we have developed these series of interviews, people have different leadership styles, but they all are characterized by an ability to encourage others to come on board with

some kind of a program and to move legislation. In your earlier comment, you talked about how nothing ever gets through Congress anymore.

RLB: Right.

JW: I don't know if we're at that point in the Kansas legislature or not. It seems to me that it still works. It just doesn't work perhaps quite as well as it did when people like you were in the leadership and understood that we had to get the government's work done. Do you want to talk about that?

RLB: You've got a particular problem now, particularly in the Senate, with the president [Susan Wagle] running for higher office. The president of the Senate has a totally different agenda than running state government. I think that is harmful for progress. Yes, we always had leaders of the House and Senate that wanted to be governor, but I'm not sure it hampered progress as much as we have today.

I would characterize some of those on the far conservative side as being filled with hate. I know that's strong, but I believe it. Certainly it's true in Washington. There's a lot of hate. When I first went with the Congress in 1961, Republicans and Democrats were going out every evening for a beer. They played golf on the weekends because in those days, Congressmen only got one free ride home per month. Their families were in Washington. They knew each other's families. It was different. Today in Congress, they fly in and out on Tuesdays and Thursdays or at least Mondays and Thursdays. Their families are not there for the most part. They don't know each other's families. They don't play golf together. The camaraderie is gone. It is a much tougher atmosphere to get anything passed because you don't know each other.

I'll never forget my boss, Larry Winn, was on the Space Committee, the Committee on Science and Technology, the Space Committee back when it was at its high point. That's when we were post-JFK. We were going to go to the moon. I was involved with all of those astronauts and knew them all. Larry Winn was involved with them. The Democrats and Republicans worked together. I mean, they had their arm around each other to say, "We've got to be in this together. We've got to get these appropriations." We'd go to the space shots together. It was a whole different world than it is today. They wanted to work together.

Now it seems they almost want to be on opposite sides. Having successful legislation is very, very difficult. You see what's happening in the US Senate today with [Senate Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell not wanting to pass anything.

JW: It's perplexing.

RLB: We're not quite there yet at state government, but we're getting closer.

JW: I think a lot of people don't want to see Kansas in the legislature emulate Congress.

RLB: No.

JW: That's why I was asking the question. Anybody that you worked with, you talked about three governors—Hayden, Finney, and Graves—legislative leaders like [Robert] Talkington, [Gus] Bogina, Bud Burke, others--anybody whose leadership style you want to talk about as being particularly effective? Our hope is that we'll be able to pull some nuggets of information in these interviews, put them together, and it will be a good way to train other legislators or use it in schools. Would you have some advice on that?

RLB: I have an observation. That is of those three governors—Hayden, Finney, Graves—Hayden kind of kept his door closed at the governor's office. I would talk to his staff constantly, saying, "Why don't you let some of us come up there and just sit down and visit with the governor?" Mike did not want to do it until late in his fourth year, and it was a mistake. I think it really hurt his effectiveness. It also impacted his ability to get re-elected.

Joan Finney was always friendly, but I never felt like she really understood what the agenda was. I'll never forget, I was handling a bill to restore veterans—we had taxed veterans' pensions.

JW: I remember that pension bill, and all the veterans coming up. It was huge.

RLB: I introduced a bill to relieve the veterans of having to pay tax on their pension. It was flying through. The governor called me down to her office to tell me she didn't like that bill. I'll never forget, I walked into the governor's office. All the seats were full but one, for me. I sat down and said, "Governor, it's good to see you." I said, "Oh, by the way, Governor, I've got a new grandson, and his name is Spencer," her husband's name. Oh, she was so excited that I had a grandson named Spencer. We talked about a lot of issues. She forgot to talk about the veterans' pension. Finally I said, "Well, I've got to get back to the Senate. Thank you, Governor. It's good to see you all."

JW: That's pretty clever.

RLB: And we left. She had a big difficult time of working with the legislators. Her daughter, Mary, did her best.

JW: Yes.

RLB: I thought Mary tried to be effective on a number of occasions with legislators and was to some extent. But that's about all Joan Finney had going for her was her daughter. Her daughter worked hard.

Graves was totally different, far more collegial, congenial, but I always thought Graves caved too early on tax issues. When Phill Kline, Double L Phil Kline, would go over and raise hell about needing a tax cut, Graves always gave in too soon. I hold myself responsible for some of those

tax cuts that we could have used, I think, to pay for tuition at the six Regents institutions based on need. We could have done it, but, no, the conservatives who were in the minority had their day. That was I think a mistake.

JW: That was that point after '94, starting in '95. You had the Contract for America. You had the changes that you had just described happening at a federal level. All of that began to ripple through the Kansas legislature for the next—it's still rippling through.

RLB: Oh, yes. It's very powerful.

JW: Did you ever recruit candidates as Senate president?

RLB: Oh, sure. I was up to my neck in it. After Talkington went out for two years, Bud Burke became Senate president. I went to high school with Bud Burke. Bud knew I had spent twenty-five years with the Congress, raising money and was the optimum political whore. Burke put me in charge of the Senate campaign. I thought up bus trips throughout the state. We had fundraisers all around the state. We had more money than the Senate had ever seen by just doing it. It was fun. I really enjoyed it and was involved also in recruiting candidates, but to a larger extent, in raising money to get candidates elected.

JW: I've been asking that question of everyone because I think it's interesting. Some of our leaders really get involved, and some leave that to political parties. I was just curious to know what your style was.

RLB: Get the candidates and raise money for them and get them elected.

JW: I've got a couple of other questions that I wanted to follow up on. When you look back on the last nineteen years since you left the Senate, how do you see the political culture of the state, the rural versus the urban, the religious fundamentalists versus the secularists, and we talked a little bit about the abortion issue, and how that's changed. Overall it seems like the culture is very different than when you were leading the Senate.

RLB: There's no question. If I walked on to the Senate floor today, there are still a few people around, but only one would come over and hug me, and he is the Senate minority leader.

JW: Anthony.

RLB: [Senator] Anthony Hensley, because of the relationship we had. The second day I was president of the Senate, I went to Anthony Hensley's office, and he saw me come in and said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I intend to be here often unless you throw me out."

I'd go over there and see him, and there were occasions when Anthony would say, "Would you come over and explain the highway bill to my people?" Our relationships, Democrat, Republican, were warm 90 percent of the time. It was not nearly the kind of partisan

relationship they have today. I think that is a horrible mistake. If you want cooperation, if we all really want the same thing, why aren't we working together? But they don't. So I'd ask you, "Will it ever turn around?"

JW: I don't know. It's hard to determine what is the basis for the loss of that. I think you're right. Relationships are the key to everything and the reasons why people run.

RLB: Right.

JW: You ran because people wanted you to. You ran because you had a lot of experience in this, and quite frankly, you enjoy being in the middle of both the politics and the policy. But a lot of people are up here because they're one-issue people. They want to cut taxes. They want to stop abortions. If you don't get to do that, you don't get involved in other things. I think it's the lack of a more generalist agenda perhaps. I don't know. How would you characterize it? You've crossed the aisle and supported Democrats.

RLB: Oh, yes.

JW: You did several, including the current governor [Laura Kelly].

RLB: That's correct. I did a little TV for Mr. [Paul] Davis. I don't know whether I would have done that many years ago, but it got easier when I could see how wrong my party was by being too extreme. Sam Brownback was a friend of mine, and his family were friends, but his policy I felt to be really bad for Kansas, and it proved to be bad for Kansas, and we haven't recovered yet. I think somebody has to be responsible, and who is it that's going to step up?

The problem the Democrats have is they don't have the numbers. It's terribly hard for Democrats to lead in the legislature when you're so greatly in the minority unless they can get enough moderate Republicans to join with them. That kind of varies from year to year in the House. When I was here, the moderates controlled. It was far easier, far more sane.

JW: That's why I asked the question about whether or not you were involved in candidate recruitment. It seems that sometimes candidate recruitment has been left to interest groups.

RLB: Yes.

JW: Not political parties or legislative leaders. Do you think that's an accurate assumption?

RLB: I think it is accurate. There's no question, the Right to Life movement has recruited a lot of candidates, and early on in primaries, put a stamp of approval on—we've got that today with Kris Kobach [former Kansas Secretary of State]. He's a viable candidate because he, like Donald Trump, has a base. A Kris Kobach can win with 20 percent base, if you have enough candidates running in the primary.

JW: There's a lesson there.

RLB: A huge lesson, yes, and they're beginning to get out of the race, but perhaps others will get in. The worst thing for a political candidate is to have a mirror. You look in the mirror, and you really think you're important.

JW: Well, we've covered a broad range of topics. I think I've covered just about everything I can think of. I don't know how you go through fourteen legislative sessions in an hour, especially for someone that was as involved as you were, but I want to offer you the last word. You can look at David [Heinemann, videographer] and the camera and tell them whatever you think people need to know about why it is important for the Kansas legislature to—I'll let you finish the sentence.

RLB: As I said, I wasn't interested in coming to the Kansas Senate because I had spent twenty-five years as chief of staff to members of Congress and knew how important it was—everything that happened on the Potomac was so important until I got here. All of a sudden, I found out that every day, you're dealing with things that affect families and affect life and affect jobs. What could be more important than that?

I think it's getting worse in Washington. The Congress won't do anything. Now we have a president [Donald Trump] that's doing everything by executive order, which is so dangerous. It gives greater importance to state legislatures and greater importance to all of us recruiting quality people who care about education, who care about the quality of life and care about the future of Kansas. That's really important, and that's our job.

JW: That's a great way to finish this interview. Thank you so much.

RLB: You're welcome. Thank you.

JW: On behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, I'm Joan Wagnon, and we thank you for being here today.

[End of File]