

Interview of Nancy Brown by Joan Wagnon, April 26, 2019  
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Joan Wagnon: Good morning. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of Washburn University Political Science Department and the Kansas Oral History Project. Joan Wagnon, former legislator, is the interviewer. David Heinemann, former Speaker Pro Tem of the Kansas House, is our videographer. Humanities Kansas is providing funding to transcribe this interview. The written transcript of this interview and a prior interview completed on February 19, 1991 by Historian Sarah Tucker and Barbara Burgess will be available at the Kansas State Library and Kansas State Historical Society. Materials will also be available at Washburn University. The videotape will be posted on Kansas Memory for public viewing.

The subject of today's interview is Nancy Brown from Stanley, Kansas. Nancy, legislative records indicate that you served five terms in the Kansas House from 1984 to 1994. Is that right?

Nancy Brown: That is correct.

JW: Well, some of the committees that you were assigned to include Economic Development, Taxation, Local Government, and in fact you were the chair of Local Government from 1993 to 1994. I thought you were the ranking minority member from '91 to '92. That must be when the House flipped to the Democrats.

NB: Right.

JW: You were the vice chair in 1989 and 1990.

NB: That's correct.

JW: Very good. We're here today to gather information about the time you spent in government and your perceptions on what happened in politics and governance since then. We're hoping that you will reflect on your tangible policies, those left unresolved, and the way in which your identity shaped your perception of government broadly. We're also interested in what kind of positions you've held since you were in the legislature. I've got a list of twenty questions that we worked out with the organizations that are involved, and this should take about half an hour to ninety minutes. Are you game?

NB: I'm game. I'm ready. If I remember. That's my biggest concern.

JW: It's been a while. In fact, this chamber has changed substantially.

NB: Significantly.

JW: Since we were in here. Let's get started. I'm going to ask you to talk a little bit about your background, just briefly, where you grew up, what brought you to Topeka, why you got interested in politics. Can you just give me kind of a brief summary?

NB: I can. I actually moved to Kansas from Illinois in 1980, and I was elected to office in 1983. I had a three-year span to get to know Kansas, which was a very interesting time for me. But when I moved to Kansas from Illinois, I was leaving a place called Riverwoods, Illinois, and I was on the Village Council at that time, and I was going to run for mayor.

Then my husband's company was sold, and they moved to Kansas, which is what brought us to Kansas. I remember when I pulled into the driveway of my house, I met my next-door neighbor, and he was actively involved in a problem in Stanley. He said to me, "I really want you to get involved with politics in Kansas." I said, "No way. I'm done with that." He said, "Just come to some meetings with me." I said, "I just moved here. I'm not really interested in getting involved in anything right now."

But the Stanley sewer crisis was going on. The Stanley sewer crisis, what that was at the time, was the county commissioners had decided that they were going to put high fees on the residents of Stanley. It didn't affect me. I was not in the sewer district, but they were charging some exorbitant amount per acre for sewer fees, and I just felt that was unjust.

So I jumped in. I was a sewer and water chairman in my old community. I just jumped in and thought, "You know, maybe I should get involved." That's why kind of got me involved in politics in Kansas, and it wasn't partisan politics at all. It was just public service that I was involved in and interested in doing.

Then Bob Bacon, who was the county commissioner at the time, called me and said, "Would you like to get involved in mental health? I'd like to appoint you to something," and I said, "No, I'm really interested in land use and things like that." He said, "How would you like to be Oxford Township Trustee?" and I'm going, "What in the world is that?" I said, "Sure, I'm game for that." That kind of brought me into legislation and coming up to Topeka and doing things for the people in my district. I kind of viewed that as being mayor of the unincorporated area. So that's really how I got involved in Kansas politics.

JW: Well, you were regarded highly in the House as someone who really understood those local government issues.

NB: Right.

JW: And you may have been the only one on the floor of this body who knew what a township was.

NB: I actually started the Kansas Association of Townships, which was kind of funny because here I was, a girl from Illinois who didn't get involved in townships in Illinois. Then I got involved in the National Association of Towns and Townships, which was a wonderful opportunity for me at the time because I got involved in national government, something I had not been involved with before.

I met presidents. I met President Ronald Reagan and George Bush. They appointed me to FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency board. All of a sudden, I'd jumped from this little township trustee to being actively involved in the national level as well as the state level. It was kind of a real interesting time in my life for me.

JW: Did you have an educational background that prepared you to—

NB: Not at all.

JW: Lead forth on sewers and land planning?

NB: No, not at all. Actually my background was in sociology. That was my degree. But I've been interested in the underdog and people and trying to find ways to help people advance their lives. I think that's really what kind of brought me into when things were unjust, I stepped in. Even as a young girl, that was one of my interests.

So my move into politics had nothing to do with a political party. When I moved to Kansas, I mean, I was a Republican, but I had never been involved in party politics before. Many people in my delegation, the Johnson County delegation, really felt that I didn't earn my way because I only lived here three years. When I was running, some people would say, "Who is she? What is she doing here? She's from the North." I'd go, "The North? I'm from the Midwest. What are you talking about, North?"

Anyway, it was a fun time for me and an interesting time. I didn't even know what I was doing.

JW: How did you gain the confidence to work your way through the legislative process? For you to be a committee chair and a vice chair, you had to have developed a certain amount of skill. How did you maneuver in the legislature?

NB: That was interesting. I remember coming up here, and I remember the delegation basically did not support me. In the first place, I was in the only rural district in Johnson County. My interest in government was very different from the rest of the delegation. There was never a mentor for me that came from Johnson County delegation.

It was really learning the ropes by myself. One of the things I decided that I was not interested in power. That was not why I was here. I never really thought about advancing. I knew I wasn't going to advance in the party because I knew I would never vote the party way all the time. In fact, I refused to sign the pledge that we had that you were supposed to sign, and I never did that.

I think I was always considered pretty much of a rebel when I got up here. That was fine with me because I was not really interested in advancing in the party, but I think through hard work and dedication, I think people realized that I had integrity. That was always very important to me, ethics and voting really never with any self-interest involved because I really didn't have

any. I really came up here as a public servant. I guess I just expected that would carry me through in whatever path I needed to take. Party politics was not something—I found myself voting with the Democrats as well as the Republicans, if I felt the thing was right for my district and for the state.

JW: Sometimes local government issues don't have a party label.

NB: Right, they don't. It was more, I think, for the benefit of residents, and sometimes because of the rural/urban interest, there were some battles. But my goal I think as a legislator was to always represent the people and make sure that they had a voice and a vote. I would find myself many, many times saying, "Well, wait a minute. What about the people's interest in this? We're not talking about what's good for government as much as we're talking about good public policy for all state people." That really was, I think, where my interests were.

JW: One of our oral history program volunteers pulled legislative highlights from legislative research for the ten years that you were in office? Do you remember legislative highlights?

NB: I do. In fact, I was just thinking about the fact that I used those—I wrote a newspaper column for ten years. I'm trying to pull that together. I think that's going to be a great history. Every week I wrote a column, and I wrote it actually all year long. It wasn't just during the legislative session. It was during the summer sessions and things like that. For ten years, it would be my legislative history primarily, but it was always talking about emotions and feelings and how I viewed that as impacting my district. It was called "Capitol Comments." I want to put that together in a book because I think it will be interesting for me to go back and read it for those ten years, but I think it will also be interesting for other people to read just what happened during that time.

JW: When we post this interview, it will be transcribed and posted on Kansas Memory, which is an online version for the Kansas State Historical Society. If you want to give us a couple of copies of "Capitol Comments," we can post those with it as well.

NB: Good. I'll try and do that. I'll try and find some.

JW: This is pretty much what I gleaned from Legislative Highlights about the ten years that you were in the legislature. The mid-eighties were dominated by numerous Constitutional amendments: liquor by the drink, paramutual betting. I think there were five of them. We also had statewide reappraisal, multibank holding companies, new economic development strategies, all kinds of new structures for eco-devo [?] [00:11:24.22] water policy and tort reform. By the nineties, school finance was out in front.

NB: Right.

JNH: Reapportionment, highways, domestic violence legislation, and the Children's Initiative. In the local government arena, there were a number of changes to annexation laws, which I think you were right in the middle of.

NB: I was right in the middle.

JW: Tax lids and a new municipal investment pool and changes in the open meeting laws. For you, what were the driving issues? I offer that summary just to kind of help you focus on what you were doing. What were the issues that you were most active in?

NB: Obviously annexation, anything to do with local government. One of the big things for me, looking back at my legislative district, was changing the laws for the recreation commission. As I look back at what I'm most proud of for me personally is the Blue Valley Recreation Commission, which changed the laws with exemptions, etc., and that was a real battle because I had to go in and change legislation to do that.

But now, thirty years later, the recreation commission is central to my district but also central to the whole Blue Valley area and Johnson County. So that was one of the things that I was really most proud of as far as working on that. And it was a battle because it changed just one legislative district, and I had to convince everybody, all my colleagues, to support that. But I am most proud of that.

There's many, many things that happened in those ten years that when you look back at it, that were significant. One of the interesting things, once you get out of the legislature, and you move on to other parts of your life, for me, it was—I haven't gone back to really look at—are those laws still intact? What changes have taken place since then? I've kept up with the political process as much as I can, but I'm no longer influential in that. You move on to other parts of your life.

JW: When you look back at local government issues and particularly the recreation commission and annexation issues were two that you're proudest of.

NB: Right. But I'm also proud of the things that we did for women. I mean, I think as we came in during that time, and you were part of that, the mammogram bill, some of the things that we did for children, and some of the bipartisan things that we did, I think were—the group home laws that Gary Blumenthal and I worked on together, and some of those things that maybe seemed insignificant at the time compared to the entire state were very significant.

I was actively involved in the deaf community. There were some initial bills that I helped pass with the deaf community, autism laws that we helped pass. There were I think some significant mental health kinds of issues that we passed that we really—maybe weren't important to everybody but were certainly important to the people in the state of Kansas long term.

JW: It's a story of someone who feels good about her service in the legislature, isn't it?

NB: Absolutely. I do feel good about my service. I remember leaving the legislature that last time and thinking—I don't remember ever really regretting anything I voted on. I remember some battles that we had. I remember the special education all-night-long sessions that we were involved in. I remember saying, "I'm not going to support the Republican position at that time" because I really felt that there wasn't enough money in special ed, and I remember everybody being mad at me. I was one of those hold-out votes at the end.

But I can't think of any bills that I ever regretted supporting, and I don't know how many people can say that. I never felt that I sold a vote, I traded a vote, I wish I would have voted somewhere different. I think I—and this is how I lived my life. I think that you do the best you can with the information that you have. Not always do you have the correct information, but I left never regretting a vote that I made. I think that's a good thing.

JW: That's remarkable. Did you have any interaction with the governor's office? I think you served with four governors?

NB: I did. I had Hayden, Carlin, Graves.

JW: You did have Graves. Sebelius?

NB: No, she was after.

JW: Maybe three governors.

NB: Yes. It was all interesting. I would like to think that I was friends with all of them. And Finney.

JW: Finney, she's the one. There were four.

NB: Yes, there were four. I chaired the State Emergency Response Commission, which was a state group, and I served under Finney at that point in time. She fired me, by the way, but that's all right.

So I did interact with all of them, with Carlin and I think I had good relationships with all of them. I served in the State Emergency Medical Services Board, the State of Emergency Response Commission I chaired. I felt good about my state service as well as my individual legislative service.

JW: Good.

NB: It was kind of interesting. I became known in some respects as a hazardous materials expert, which is why I got involved in the State Emergency Response Commission, and Jack Walker, I was on a regional Nuclear Response Commission. Then I was on FEMA. Looking back,

you go, "Now, how did all that happen?" But that was part of my public service time. That, too, was something that I was proud of.

JW: Good. I want to switch gears just a little bit and talk about personal identity. Personal identity is loosely defined as gender, age, race, class, sex, or gender orientation, marital status, so forth. How are you personally identified? Did your personal identity influence your ability to pass policy or work with fellow legislators or to provide constituent services?

NB: Yes. My background certainly, I came from a dysfunctional family and was not involved in politics. This was not something that my family pushed. I was the first person in my family that ever went to college. That kind of caused an interesting division in the family. When you're involved in things like sociology and you're involved in people issues and people problems, you end up with an identity as far as working for people and trying to figure out where people are in their lives, and that was part of my identity, I think.

So I think my role as a young person, I was always very actively involved in my church, and so being involved in helping other people and humanity and social justice issues certainly impacted my identity as a person. Even in the legislature, it was interesting because at the time when we were here, women were just starting to really become involved in the legislature, and there were very few of us. I think we were trailblazers. I think that we were people that came in and changed some of the systems, and I remember the only time I really was interested in power was when the women got together, and we felt that we could do something as women, and we did. We worked across party lines.

JW: We did.

NB: I think that was probably an interesting time for all of us because of our gender. I remember every once in a while we would gather in a corner, and the men would get concerned about what we were doing, and we'd go back to our desk, and people would say, "What are you women doing down there?" And we were really doing nothing but making them mad and irritated and wonder what we were doing. I liked that power part of that. It was like, "Ah. You don't know what we're doing," but we did some good things as women.

JW: We did.

NB: I always felt that the children's issues, not that they were women's issues. I wasn't really—I am a feminist, but I wasn't really thinking that at that point in time that "I'm going to change issue for women." I think it was just something that we leaned to and gravitated to as women, as part of our identity.

JW: That was a time when the number of women in the mid-seventies doubled from four to nine.

NB: Right.

JW: Doubled again in the eighties and doubled again in the nineties.

NB: Right.

JW: So people began to notice there were women here.

NB: Actually I didn't realize this until later, but I was the first woman legislator in the House to be elected from Johnson County, one of the most progressive counties in the state.

JW: Really.

NB: When somebody told me that, I thought, "No, that can't be true." I mean, Jan Meyers was from Johnson County, but she was the first state senator to be elected.

JW: Right.

NB: But I was the first House member, and I thought, "Isn't that interesting?" Certainly people should have run before me.

JW: Well, let me just give you a couple of questions to explore this personal identity bit a little bit. Did you ever have a committee assignment or some task that was assigned to you that you thought were functions of your personal identity? In other words, did they put you on something because you were a woman or because you were a churchgoer? Did it ever enter into how you were assigned committees?

NB: I do think that ending up being involved in local government was assigned to me because of my identity as somebody who really was involved in government issues. Some of the early committee assignments I felt I was assigned to because they didn't know what to do with me. They didn't know me. So a government organization or some of those computers, I think I was involved with. And I never really requested any—you could go in and request assignments, and I never really requested major assignments. I just felt I could serve wherever I was appointed, but I did want to be involved in local government, and ultimately I was.

JW: I remember that you and I sponsored a big gathering of women. Talk about that.

NB: Well, I always love working across party lines because I think that was important for us.

JW: Yes, it was.

NB: Whenever we had a chance to do something like that, I took advantage of that. We were talking earlier about relationships and friendships, and we served at a time when, regardless of our party affiliations, we had opportunities as women to gather and get together, and that was important to me, that we reach across party lines, that we bring women together and form kind



of coalitions, and I think those were beneficial because when there were bills that were really important to us, we could reach across the aisles to our friends and say, "We're doing this. Could you help us?" I think that was part of it, but go on and tell me what you remember about that.

JW: I think we rented Heritage Hall.

NB: We did.

JW: Out at the Expocenter and brought a whole group of people in. Didn't we get a bunch of lobbyists to pay for it?

NB: Yes, we did.

JW: That was probably pretty gutsy of us at the time.

NB: It probably was.

JW: And it was a social event.

NB: Right.

JW: We just believed that we needed to know each other as women, as individuals, and I think it led to my co-sponsoring some bills with Rochelle Chronister, who was the head of the Republican Party.

NB: Right. I remember with great fondness those days when we could reach across the aisle and ask for support. I really think we gave it where we could for certain bills. I'm not sure that would happen today.

JW: It's a lot more partisan, I think.

NB: Very much more partisan. It's maybe a lack of respect for the public service and public policy, which really bothers me. I think people are more into politics and power than sometimes public service.

JW: But you moved from just being a rank-and-file legislator representing a fairly rural district in Johnson County to being a leader. You were a vice chair of a committee. You were a ranking member on a committee. You became the chair of a local government committee. Was your leadership in that committee in any way influenced by personal identity?

NB: Not by gender, I don't think at all, but I do think by who I was as a person, yes. I do think that it was. I think people ended up—it was funny because I think in the beginning, like I said, the Johnson County delegation didn't support me and viewed me as kind of being other and an

outsider. I think when you go through a process like that, you have to gain respect and earn respect. I was always relatively outspoken and not too quiet about things. But I think ultimately—in fact, when I left, I remember even the lobbyists would write and say things like, “You were tough sometimes to work with, but we always respected your integrity.”

I think that was something that you earned, and that became part of my identity. People knew I wasn't going to trade votes. People knew I wasn't going to do things for personal gain. I think my personal identity—I became a person of integrity, and as a result, I think people worked with me and viewed me somewhat differently.

Serving in a leadership position, that was never anything that I really aspired to. I just wanted to be in a position and place where I could use my influence to change things. I think that's been my mantra all through life. Being in a leadership position allows you opportunities to help people in ways that the rank and file can't always help. So that was one of my goals.

JW: Do you think that was unusual in the legislators of that time? Was that why people came to the legislature?

NB: I think people came to the legislature to enact good public policy. I think that was a period of time that looking back, the majority of people that I knew in the House and in the Senate were here with all the best intentions. It was not a time where I think people were interested in power as much. Certainly we all know legislators that were interested in power. That's not a bad thing. I think power can be a good thing, if you use it the right way. I think at the time when we were serving, people really were interested in public policy, and they really were interested in the state. They were not interested in things being here for themselves. That was a lesson of the time that I think we served. I don't see that as much now, when the infighting and the struggles about political parties just baffle me sometime and concern me actually.

JW: You had school-age children, I recall.

NB: I did, but I also had a wonderful mother-in-law who moved into my house. That was my support system. My husband was very supportive of what I was doing, but I also had a great mother-in-law who moved in on Mondays and left on Fridays. I don't think I could have done that without having—I don't think I could have left my children without having my mother-in-law part of my life.

JW: The legislature has always met in Topeka.

NB: Right.

JW: So if you want to be part of the legislature, you have to go to Topeka, but that was always given as one of the barriers to women's participation.

NB: Absolutely.

JW: You resolved that how? Well, your mother-in-law for one. What else did you do?

NB: Well, I had a great support system in my community. I had great neighbors. I had great people who would take my kids different places. I made sure because I didn't live that far away, an hour and a half or an hour and fifteen minutes. I could drive back at night if I needed to for football games and activities of the kids. So I resolved it that way as well. And I tried to make my family—it was interesting. I tried to make them part of the legislative process as much as I could and shared things with them. We'd have table discussions about policy matters.

Now my kids, they're both boys, I remember being in the dentist's office one day, and I heard this little kind of muttering off to the side, and this little guy said, "That's Representative Nancy Brown," and my kids go, "Oh, man. We can't even get to the dentist without having somebody know our mother." So there were things like that that you kind of go, "Oh, boy. Am I warping my kids by having a mother that people knew?"

I remember one time I spoke to the KU, and they were at the University of Kansas, and both boys were big. Jason was 6'5, and Derek [?] was 6'8. I said, "You know, you don't really hear me speak very much. Why don't you come over when I'm talking about a political process or whatever?" They said, "We'll come if you don't introduce us."

So I give my talk. At the end of the talk, I go, "Oh, by the way, I'd like you to meet my two bodyguards."

JW: Did you really?

NB: I did. I said, "Derek and Jason Brown, would you please stand up?" Everybody knew they were my sons by that time. I thought they were going to really—they were not happy with me at that time.

JW: Would you have gone on to higher office? Would the family situation have kept you from going into further political effort?

NB: No, they wouldn't have kept me doing that. I just really felt that I was doing what I needed to do at the time. When I left the legislature, you might recall I served for another eight years as the executive director of the Women's Legislative Network or the National Conference of State Legislators. So I continued in being involved in the process. I ended up really enjoying that because I was working with legislators all over the nation and sometimes worldwide. We attended several meetings and did several trips elsewhere, in Germany. We went to South America.

So I continued what I would consider public service. Actually my whole life has been involved in public service, and the legislature was just one of those junctures of service. Then I served as executive director of the National Conference of State Legislators, and then I served my church

globally and traveled all over the world doing mission work. So my whole life has—the things that I learned in the legislature I was able to take and transpose into other parts of my life as well.

JW: You had an interesting exchange in your 1991 interview, where you talked about deciding to take a room in Topeka. You indicated that you were unprepared for the stresses of living part time in Topeka. Was that a common problem that women had?

NB: Oh, I think so. I would think it would be difficult for anybody to leave their family and end up with—I think living in the legislature for like four months out of the year is kind of a slice out of your life for the rest of the time, and I think it sets you apart from other people. I think moving to Topeka, the interesting part of that is you don't really get involved in the community of Topeka. Your community is the legislature.

JW: Right.

NB: And that's what you do. You get up in the morning, and you go to work in the legislature, and then you stay at work in the evening, if you're here because you have all sorts of things that are going on that are part of the process, just getting together with your colleagues and talking informally and talking about bills and talking about what happened during the day.

I think that was another interesting part of legislative life, those conversations informally among Democrats and Republicans that took place outside of the legislature in some respects were as important as what took place in the legislature. It gave you time to get to know other legislators and talk informally about things that were happening during the day.

And it didn't matter than whether you were Republican or Democrat necessarily. You just shared information and shared who you were and could work together better. I think that's an important part of the process. I don't know if that goes on today.

JW: I don't know either.

NB: I don't know if that's still what happens, but it was important in the ten years I was here.

JW: I want to have you look backwards now at your legislative career. What things are you most proud of, serving in the legislature?

NB: I think I shared with you some of the laws that I was involved with, like the Blue Valley Recreation Commission. As part of local government, I think it was important to provide people's rights. It was always important to me for people to have input, and I would encourage that in any law that we passed. I would try to make sure that we did not infringe on people's rights for discussion, people's rights for a vote, or people's rights for participation.

Like I said, I think some of the things we did around group homes, some of the things that we did for special education, some of the things that we did for mental health and social services for people were very important to me. Those things are more important to me than some of the things that we did on redistricting, which would happen with or without me. But some of the things that I'm most proud of are the things that I feel that I helped initiate and push forward that maybe no one else was thinking of or would be doing. So those are important things to me.

JW: I think as you get to the end of a career, too, you start thinking about legacy.

NB: Right.

JW: Those things that you just enumerated represent a pretty fine legacy of legislative accomplishments.

NB: I hope so. You hope that the years that you served, you were able to leave some imprints.

JW: Did you leave to take the job at NCSL? Or did you leave because you would have left anyway?

NB: I left because at that point in time, things were happening in the party that were very difficult that I didn't feel that voices could be heard in the same way that they could be heard in the past. What I viewed as the Religious Right, and you will recall, I was very actively involved and started an organization as the result of things that happened to me personally in the legislative process, in the political process. It wasn't the legislative process, around abortion and some of the other things. My house was picketed. I remember Nancy Kassebaum, when she told me she was retiring, she said, "The party has basically left us. It's not the party that we were involved with in the past."

It was that that really made me decide to leave. I really felt that I did not want to be part of the negative process. I did not want to be fighting all the time for what I believed were the rights of people. They became so focused and so self-centered around what I viewed as the Religious Right, which was interesting to me because I was always a religious person, and all of a sudden, to be maligned for votes that really I felt were not necessarily around religion as much as they were around good policies for people.

I just didn't want to fight those battles any longer. It became very difficult, I think. The campaigns got uglier and uglier. That was not why I was in. It just felt I'm going to spend all my time fighting with people about the legislative process. How could I get anything done? So it just seemed a time to me that my personal interests would be better served outside the legislature than it would inside the legislature. That's when I decided it was time to leave.

Need to indicate that she is present and who she is in the intro. Dr. Annie Miller: Can you comment on the party as being the party of the state, or is it a national influence that you felt

like in terms of the explanation of the shifting party dynamics? Was that from a local level here in Kansas, or do you think that was a broader political movement across the country?

NB: I do think it was a political movement across the country, but I think Kansas, to me, it was so out of character for Kansas because I viewed Kansas as a place where people could talk with one another and cared about one another, and life was good in Kansas, and to all of a sudden, have these factions were—it just seemed out of character for me for the state of Kansas. It's interesting because right now it's not out of character. Kansas is known nationally for having all these little factions and people, but at the time we were here, that was not how it was.

And it did become a national movement. Of course, it did. It became a Religious Right national movement.

JW: The whole country was changing at that point.

NB: Absolutely.

JW: 1994 was a time when we saw the election of a speaker (add name) to the US Congress House, who championed those things. People just fell in line with that thinking.

NB: It was strange to me. It was not where I wanted to focus my energies any longer.

JW: I've only got two or three more questions, and then Dr. Miller may have a question that she still wants to ask you.

NB: Sure.

JW: Do you think the policies that you worked on during your time have changed? Are those changes lasting?

NB: I think some of them lasted. Certainly some of the social justice issues and some of the things around children and families have lasted. We also now see what I consider some retro movements that some of the things that I think we fought for have come back again.

JW: Twenty years later, we're still—

NB: Right, we're still fighting them. It's just amazing to me that—but it's not just Kansas. It's the whole country that I think is having some things that, changes.

JW: Did you ever work for the state of Kansas?

NB: No.

JW: Did you ever work for the federal government?

NB: No.

JW: Did you ever work for a bureaucracy of any kind?

NB: No.

JW: Did your personal identity influence how you served constituents? Did it influence the policies you worked on or the preferences you had? I think where Dr. Miller wants to go is what's the difference between working for issues you cared about and the party? How much was your identity a part of your work, and how much of it was the party? I think I know the answer.

NB: I think it's very interesting. My religious background has influenced my whole life, as it does a lot of people. Things that we don't even think about influence our lives. What's kind of funny is I was raised in a kind of a Fundamentalist Baptist background, which was part of the Religious Right later. As I aged and maybe matured and became more educated, I was able to look at things in a different way, in a different perspective.

But the premise of religion and the premise among all religions in my opinion is to serve the people and to follow Christ's example of service. So that has been kind of my theme throughout my life. You do that in different ways. You don't always do it in the name of Christ. You don't always do it in the name of religion. You do it as part of your soul and who you are as a person. That's the kind of person I hope I have always been is to look at people and say, "What can I do to make their lives better? What can I do to help them in their struggles?"

So I think I brought that to the legislature, not in a way that I talked about it all the time, but in a way that I voted, and the way I tried to live my life and conduct my life. So I think that's part of my identity as a human being, not necessarily the identity I think of people outside of me, looking at me, say that about me, but part of what I say about myself, that it's important to me to provide a better life for the people around me and in the world. That's why I do mission work. That's why I work for the Women's Legislative Network because I felt that there were ways that maybe I could help people outside of Kansas as well as help people in other states. So my identity as a person certainly has influenced my role as a legislator much more than a political party has ever influenced me.

JW: I think you've explained that well. We are kind of at the end of the interview. Do you have anything else that you want to add to people that might read this on Kansas Memory?

NB: I think the one thing I would like to add is that public service is the way I like to think of my time in the legislature, not serving as part of a political party of any sort. I think that's where people are going these days, that the party has become more important than good public policy and relationships with people, and I think that's doing a complete injustice to our democracy and who we are as a nation. It really saddens me because I think that the time that we served

was such a different time, a time when you could be proud of your service, and you could be proud of who you were as a legislator, and the party itself was very important to some people, and I don't want to diminish that because a lot of people really came to the legislature because of their time in the party.

That was not my experience at all. I would say at that point in time I was a proud Republican, but it wasn't my identity. I just wish this nation at this point in time could look back at democracy in an earlier time and realize that really why we're here is to enact good public policy for the good of all people, Democrats, Republicans, old, young, poor, wealthy, and that's not what I see happening in the nation right now.

JW: Yes. Well, it's been a fun experience to sit here and talk with you about this. Dr. Annie Miller is at Washburn University. I think you met her a few minutes ago.

NB: I did.

JW: Do you have any further questions?

AM: I sure do. I'm going to maybe lean into your mic, Joan, if that's okay.

JW: That's fine.

AM: So a question that I have, just as you were talking and describing about the changes you felt like you witnessed around partisan politics versus public service, I love the framing and the language you're using. I'm curious if you could tell us what you think has caused those changes. Can you attribute those changes to something and then can you give us young women an agenda for the future of how we could go back to thinking about politics as public service? Or maybe you could frame some of that for us.

NB: It's interesting. I think that the women that are coming into office today in many respects are—times have changed. Times have changed just in how women are viewed. It's interesting. There's a lot of change that has taken place forward, but there is some that have taken place backward as well. But women have a greater opportunity to be more educated right now. They have a greater opportunity in the work force. So they bring different skill sets with them than thirty years ago when we were new and new trailblazers. Even in Kansas, you look at some of the colleagues that are now here and serving as women. But they're not finding it any easier to serve, which is interesting to me. They might be respected in ways that we were not, but you see people shifting from the Republican Party to the Democrat Party because they're not getting along in the Republican Party any longer.

And the party has shifted, in my opinion, not where we were at the time when we were running. We really were struggling to find our identity as women. So now women are in this new place, but the nation has shifted. I really don't know all the reasons why.



JW: Don't you think the battles that we had over abortion in the nineties had a significant impact?

NB: Absolutely. No question about that. But now I see those laws being changed all across the nation. The power has shifted in ways that I think are demeaning to women, not helpful. It just blows my mind that leaders are not standing up and saying, "What's happening here? Why are we letting this happen in our country and our nation and our legislature and our city governments?"

Instead we see this strong group of people who have risen that we never thought would have happened, I don't think. I think we thought that things were becoming better. Instead we've got these factions. And part of it, you don't want to say that it's all because people don't vote, but a lot of it really is. People are not out there voting when they should be voting. There's a complacency I think about voting that the younger people—we're seeing a rise, thank goodness. We're seeing a rise in the younger people, I think, finally getting up and saying—the Me, Too movement and some of the movements that are coming up, and thank God that we've got some young people that are saying, "We have a voice, and we're going to use it." I hope they continue that, and they don't get discouraged because I don't see the middle class and some of the people voting when they should be. So we've got a whole shift now in who's running the nation, who's running the governments, and it actually frightens me. It's really pretty scary.

JW: Nancy, this has been a lot of fun.

NB: It has been great. I've really enjoyed it.

JW: We have enjoyed one another's company over the last—

NB: Decades.

JW: Yes, decades, and I'm just glad that you were willing to come in and do this. As you look around and see, these chambers don't look the same as they did when we were here.

NB: They don't, but there's some good ghosts in here, too.

JW: There's some very good ghosts. Thank you very much.

NB: Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it. I've enjoyed this immensely.

[End of File]