

Interview of DARLENE CORNFIELD by Patty Clark, October 9, 2020  
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Patty Clark: The date is October 9, 2020. It's 2:45, and we are in the House chamber of the Kansas State House. I'm Patty Clark, and today I have the privilege of interviewing Darlene Cornfield. Darlene served in the Kansas legislature as a state representative from Valley Center, District 90 from 1991 to 1996. I'll be conducting the interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, Incorporated, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators, particularly those who served from the 1960s to 2000. These interviews will be made accessible to researchers and to educators. The interviews are funded in part by the Kansas Humanities Council. The audio and the video is being operated by David Heinemann. First of all, thank you for taking the time to join us today.

Darlene Cornfield: Thank you, Patty.

PC: Let's talk a little bit first before we get into your time as a state legislator about your personal background. You're from Valley Center. Where were you raised? Educational background, family, etc.

DC: I was born in Wichita. I was raised in Wichita. After I graduated from high school, I went a couple of semesters to Friends [University]. That wasn't my thing. So I left to go travel the world for a while. I traveled around quite a bit for about ten years, and then I met my husband in Hawaii. We got married there in '79, and then moved back to Wichita in 1981.

My father had a small business, a courier business which I still operate today, and in running that, I became involved in taxation, where my money was going. So I became involved in politics because I wanted to know who had control of my money. The more I got involved, the more I got involved.

PC: Did you hold any public office locally before you made the leap to the state legislature?

DC: No, not at all.

PC: What prompted you. What was the true catalyst for deciding to run?

DC: The primary thing was I was living in Valley Center. By this time, I had helped Lee Thompson—that was the first campaign when he ran against Glickman several years back in the eighties. I was involved in the County [Republican] Party. Everybody said, "Get in the County Party, be involved. That's how you find out."

Then we were looking at House races, and they were talking it up. And Ken Francisco was my representative. I was looking at his voting records and the things he voted for, and I realized we were total opposites. I asked the Party, "Who do you have running against this guy because I don't think he's very good." They said, "Well, we don't really have anybody. There's a guy that's run in the last two races, but he's kind of a token Republican. He just puts his name on the ballot so Ken's not running unopposed." I said, "That doesn't sound very smart to me." So they said, "Well, why don't you run?"

Having no political ambition or ever thinking about that, I went home and told my husband. At this time, I had Alex, and he was not quite a year old. I came home to my husband and I said, "You can't believe what these people"—we were chatting it up, and he said, "What did he have to say?" I said, "He said, why don't I run?" And he said, "Well, why don't you?" I said, "Are you kidding me I have Alex. We have our business, and I know nothing about government as an order of making laws and stuff." He said, "Well, if this guy is not good, then you should do it." My husband's Canadian. So he can't run or vote or any of those things. So I was [having] dinner with my mom because my parents live here. They said, "I think that's a great idea." Of course, they do. They're like that.

Anyway, one night at a Republican county meeting, they said, "Darlene, have you thought about running?" and I said, "Well, I've thought about it." I said, "Honestly, I have to look at it more and get more involved." I looked it up. We're here ninety days. I was thinking, "What am I going to do with Alex for ninety days? From January to April and two weeks in"—just calculating all of those things and then running in a campaign. I said, "I don't know how to run a campaign. I don't know any of these things." They said, "It's okay. We'll help you. It will be easy."

So I decided to run. I put my name in. Then I was somewhere, I can't remember, I think at a Republican meeting, and I do a lot of cooking and things. One night at the meeting, I stood up and I said, "Well, I decided to run for the 90th District. I don't know much about fundraising, but I do cook." I said, "I'm going to sell pans of lasagna for \$30 a pan." I sold 1,000 pans. So I was cooking a lot.

PC: A lot of lasagna.

DC: I cannot remember his name, but there was a writer for the Wichita Eagle. He naturally wrote an article about that, how times are changing. Here's the latest fundraising that we've never experienced before. I did that. I didn't solicit any PAC money. One, I didn't even really know much about PACs or anything like that. I just decided I was going to run on my morals, ethical values, and low taxes, and fiscal conservative, and moral conservative, and see what happens.

So I did. It was the tightest race in the state. I won by sixty-seven votes, I think, and actually it's a funny story because, as a Christian, I prayed about it and everything. I believe the Lord told me I was going to win the seat. I said, "I'm not going if you're not going to help me because I don't know what to do." That night, we had three TVs on, [channels] 10, 12, and 3. We have an Ark Valley paper, and then there's the Maize paper because those were in my district, and then the Wichita paper.

The Ark Valley News, who wrote nothing but negative things about me through the whole campaign, wanted to come to my house, which was where my watch party was, and have a photographer there. Hopefully, they thought, to get me losing. I said, "Are you kidding me?"

You're not coming into my house." I said, "You've written nothing but negative things. Why would I let you into my house for my victory party?" I said, "It's not happening." So the paper, the day after I won, was of this woman with a child going to the polls because I wouldn't let them have any of me. It was funny.

Anyway, we were watching all three channels. It's 50-50, 50-50, 50-50. They always—because that's what the media does—instead of waiting to find out, they just award it to the incumbent because that's what they do. So that's what they did. I said, "This can't be right. It just can't be right."

So we're just waiting and waiting. Then the phone rings. Now everybody has gone home, all my friends. My mother's crying, and she goes home. All my other friends—it's late, and the phone rings. It's Channel 3, and they say, "What do you think about upsetting Ken Francisco?" I said, "Well, I don't think I did." So the guy starts doubting himself. He said, "Maybe you didn't. I'll call you back." He hangs up. I tell my husband, "Do you know who that was?" I said, "It was Channel 3, and they said I won." He said, "Well, you can't believe anything the media says."

We're still sitting there, and the phone rings again. It's Ark Valley News. They send poll workers to get the actual tally and stuff. They said, "Well, Darlene, what do you think?" I said, "Now this is getting confusing." They said, "We're pretty sure you won." I said, "Do you mind calling me back?" I called the—most candidates have somebody at the election office. They're like that. I'm just not a political hack. I was just going to wait. If I won, I won. If I didn't, I didn't. I said, "Can you hang on to that thought? I just want to call."

I called down to the Election Commission's office. I said, "Hello, this is Darlene Cornfield. I just want to see, do you have the count of the 90th District?" I know these people are going, "Who is this person?" And they go, "Well, we unofficially have you as the winner." I said, "Okay, thank you."

I hang up the phone, and then the phone rings again, and it's Channel 12. They go, "Can you come down here for an interview? You're one of the few women that have upset" and stuff. "Can you come down?" I go, "Okay, sure." I go down and everything.

By that time, I get back home because we didn't have cellphones like the [inaudible] [00:10:35.10], and I call my best friend. She's in bed. I said, "Becky, guess what? I really did win!" She said, "Gosh, I miss all the good stuff." Then I called my mother, and my dad answers the phone. I said, "Dad, it's okay. I did win." He said, "Oh, thank God. Your mother's in the backyard crying. I sent her outside. I got so tired of listening to her." She's going, "We should have used that stuff" because he had some personal issues that made news and stuff from Topeka, but I didn't use any of that because what good is that to show he's a scoundrel. I could be, for all you know. Anyway, I ended up winning that race.

PC: Let's jump to your first two years. You had a very interesting beginning, a novice who had never run for public office. What did it feel like entering this Chamber for the first time? What were your first two years like?

DC: It was pretty awe-inspiring, and I was anxious to learn what to do and what went on. I didn't want to be uninformed. I didn't want to be a novice for very long. I wanted to know what was going on. The first year I was here was the first time the Democrats took control of the House in, I don't know, a long time. I was kind of singled out as the one because they had all the races picked. They didn't pick out. So I was kind of the one.

The minority sits on this side. Back then, you could still smoke back there. It was the smoking room. I sat right back there on the end. Two weeks after I won the election before we came up here, I found out I was pregnant. That was a shocker. Had I known that, I would have withdrawn and not run because I had Alex who was twelve months old. I'm going, "He'll be fourteen months when we come up in January. How am I going to handle that ninety days?" I'm kind of a hands-on mom and everything.

Then after the election, I found out I was pregnant, which turned out there were actually four of us pregnant—Sheila Hochhauser, myself, and Susan Wagle, which were known, but Donna Whiteman was pregnant, and she didn't tell anybody. So there was actually four of us pregnant, but everybody was due after the session except for Carey came in the four days between the end of regular session—

PC: Your Carey.

DC: Yes, and the start of veto. So he was four days old when we came back. It was rather uncomfortable for me because if that door was open, the smoke would come in. I would have to ask, "Can you close the door? The smoke really bothers me" and stuff. They had seated me between Dr. Alex Scott and—oh, gosh. What was his name? He only served one term. Anyway, they were always concerned because I'm short. So I get really, really big. They kept saying, "Are you sure you're not going to have that baby now?" So that was kind of funny.

Once veto, I did bring Carey up the four days we were here and had him with me the whole time.

PC: Which was novel.

DC: Yes, it was pretty unusual at that time.

PC: Not a normal practice in those days, correct?

DC: No. Right. It was pretty lonely, one, being in the minority, and I was new. I didn't have a lot of close friends or anything I had made yet. Then Alex was fourteen months old. I took him with

me every nice to all of the social engagements and political things that we were invited to attend to find out what's going on in different organizations and stuff like that. That kind of put people off a little bit that I was traveling with this child and stuff.

PC: Do you think it's changed?

DC: Just in the six years I was there, it changed.

PC: Talk about that.

DC: When I had Carey for the four days of the veto—of course, he stayed with me in the back. By the time I had Maile—that's why I retired. In '96, I found out I was pregnant with Maile, and Maile was born February 29th, which left a lot of time left in the session. So I had her back there, and I brought her every day, all day. I had three roommates that were women legislators, and we used to talk about motherhood and babies because you do that as mothers. I would say, "Carey and Maile, they were perfect babies. They never cried." My friends thought I just couldn't remember. They thought I either lied or was making it up. But Maile came, and they never heard her. Nobody here ever heard her. The only time she ever squawked was when all of these legislators were passing her around, and it was time to eat. Then they would bring her back to me.

I can remember some of the lobbyists saying, because they always sit in the gallery, they said, "Darlene, it used to be so boring here. Now we take bets on how many people are going to hold your baby during the session." I rarely ever had her except when it was time to feed her. So that was great.

PC: So let's talk a little bit about the committees that you served on. Tell the audience which committees you served on, and why they were of particular interest to you.

DC: When you're low man on the pole, I don't think you get much choice in that matter when you're first here. But I served on Insurance, which was interesting, which was kind of—I have a small business. That kind of was interesting to learn and stuff, and Labor and Industry and Pensions. I think I had four. Local Government, which is really boring. Nobody likes it because it's all pettiness of the local cities squabbling for what their problems are and stuff like that. They bring it up here when they can't handle it. It was not a really fun committee.

PC: But necessary.

DC: Somebody has to be there, and when you don't have much seniority, that's what you get. Then my first term, Pensions was a big thing because they were trying to pass a big legislative pension. Coming up and arguing and fighting that and learning about that, I found out about the secretarial pension, which was totally a unique device. I ended up proposing a bill to end

that, and I did, but it was hard fought, being a freshman trying to overturn something that was kind of an established—

PC: What was the biggest surprise to you in your first two years, your first four years?

DC: I think my first big awakening, there was a bill that was in committee, in conference, when they go from the House and the Senate, and then they go to conference to reconcile them and then bring them back out. There was a bill in there that I wanted to get voted in, and it wasn't going to go out of committee. I was just going to make a motion to concur with the Senate amendments as it was. That was my mistake, telling them I was going to do that. When they heard that, then they put it in conference. Then I couldn't make the thing, and then they watered it down and brought it out and passed it. I'd have gotten the votes because nobody wanted to vote against it.

PC: So process was a—

DC: There were some legitimate procedures, but I was just unaware of them totally. You can't learn everything your first term.

PC: Your first session. What was your biggest disappointment?

DC: I guess that we had lost the House that first term. That made us all then the minority. For me, I guess, it wasn't new because I had never served. So it just was. But for all my colleagues, it was quite a big change for them. I think we did, I don't know if it was first term of second term, Joan might know. The Corporation for Change came up, and that was something that was in the summer. They study issues and stuff. So they wanted this Corporation for Change. I was totally against it. In the House, you have your Caucus. So the Republicans all caucused. They got up and said all of these great things that were in this bill. I said, "Let me tell you what I think is in this bill." I didn't think they totally represented it. So I kind of did.

Anyway, I persuaded a lot of people to vote against it, and it was actually going down. Barbara Lawrence, who is a Republican and a friend of mine, voted for it, which put it over the top. I was disappointed that that went through. I thought it was really bad legislation. In a couple of years, before I retired in '96, they repealed it and did away with it. So I was right.

PC: What were some of the other issues of the day, '91 to '96?

DC: I think in my second session, when I was re-elected, I think Workers Comp was a big thing. I was on Labor and Industry. So we were handling that. I added a subcommittee on that. I think we did good work. Obviously it's a very difficult issue. It's very hard to change and make it fair for all the parties. I find Workers Compensation kind of a—I wouldn't say an unfair thing. The premise behind it was really good. It protects the worker and the employer. You don't sue them, and they meet your needs. Obviously the employee didn't think they got it right, and the

employer thought he was getting abused. So they end up suing anyway. I find that it's not such a good thing.

PC: Is there anything that you would do differently after having served in the legislature or advice you would give those types of issues where there are very different opinions? There is a lot of compromise that has to take place.

DC: I have found, even after having been out all this time that the same things come back year after year. It's always school finances, the budget, and pensions. Those are probably three things that you can hang your hat on that will probably be in every session for the rest of your life. So on that note, being the conservative I am, I think if they only dealt with those issues and left everything out, the citizens would be much better off. We'd just come up and pass more laws and more laws that only convolute most things instead of simplifying those things.

PC: That's an interesting point that you raised. The interview just previous to yours was with a former colleague, JoAnn Potorff, and she mentioned she never but for one occasion introduced legislation because she felt that there was so much of it anyway. There wasn't any need to add to it. What's your take on that?

DC: I agree. I think I probably signed on to bills. I can't think that I probably had my own bills and introduced—I think the Parental Rights Amendment was probably the only significant thing or important thing that I actually—

PC: Talk about that.

DC: At the time, there was a lot of I guess anti-parent things in the schools going around and stuff. They were taking liberties with children without getting the parents' consent, like giving them birth control, which most parents would think they should be notified if you're going to give your children something like that, considering you can't give them an aspirin, but you can give them birth control. That's kind of controversial in my mind. A lot of parents on the conservative side of the state and in our area said, "Darlene, we think we need something that says we do have those rights, and they can't take them away." Of course, there's always—we wouldn't have legislation if everybody believed that what was already in statute was right and true. Then you wouldn't need to clarify those things. But there never is, and somebody always changes or takes advantages.

So, anyway, we introduced that, and it went through, and it failed twice. Then it finally got amended into the Juvenile Justice Act, and it passed. We had to work hard through conference to get it because—they just want to add nebulous things like guarantee the health of the child, and you're like "What does that mean?" They just add these phrases that do nothing, and they're so nebulous, you can never define them. We ended up getting it through. I think it's still there, although the Juvenile Justice has gone through some stuff. I didn't really track it too much since I've left, but I know they've had some changes in that area.

PC: You mentioned that the issues don't necessarily change or change all that much from one session to another, from one time period to—

DC: Primarily those same things are going to be back.

PC: Talk a little bit about that. What gets in the way of not making more progress or more sustainable progress in your opinion, in your experience?

DC: I think probably the make-up of the members has a lot to do with that. Everybody has their own agenda or priorities. If you want to just break it down in Republican and Democrats, generally the Democratic Party wants more programs and more tax dollars to fund these programs, and I think more Republicans think it should be individual responsibility and taken on by the private sector Right there, you have a—

PC: Philosophical difference.

DC: Yes. So where the money goes becomes an issue and a primary issue that's argued and debated over the budget because they want to increase the budget with more programs. Some are good. Some are not. Some overshadow each other and overlap. Others should just be done away with because they're just taking taxpayer dollars and stuff.

PC: Let's think back to the first time you ran and the last time you ran. What was different about your campaigns? Did you have more of an agenda the last time you ran? If so, how did you express it?

DC: I've always had the same agenda. That's to do good government, to come up and represent my district and do what I feel that they want, which is less taxes and more fiscal conservative. Raising money isn't the problem. It's the spending of the money and spending more than we have and continuing to start new programs and just spend more money and stuff.

Both of my races were very tight because being an outspoken conservative, I was targeted both times. The races were very difficult. The difference between your first race and the subsequent races, your first race, you only run on you and who you are and everything that the other guy is not. Sometimes they paint terrible pictures—I didn't do that. I chose to just run on who I was and the issues I was going to defend or protect.

The second and third races, they had my voting record that they could use against me. You can use that truthfully, or you can color it up a bit and stuff. A lot of times, some votes are not the actually vote. there's like three or four votes before you get to the real vote, and they'll pull something out of a secondary vote and say, "She voted against this," when in fact, by the time the final—I might have supported it or vice versa. So sometimes they color the issue to make you look different than what you really are.



PC: Let's take that for just a second and talk a little bit more about it. How do you explain that to your voters, to your constituents that a particular vote might have been taken out of the true context of the procedures and the protocols that you mentioned earlier?

DC: In a campaign, it's very hard. You have to identify your voters mainly through the mail-in stuff because you can't get all of them one on one and explain that. They can do a one-liner, "She voted no against taxes. She hates pension." Education was the big one. The NEA would send out all kinds of things about how I was anti-education and hated education and stuff like that.

It is hard to let them know the truth because it takes me three paragraphs to explain that one little paragraph. You just have to do the best you can in town meetings, which I always had, and newsletters that I sent out all through the legislative session to everybody. You hope they read them. Most of them do; many do not. And then in the campaign, just try to do your best to explain or tell the truth as I see it.

PC: Talk about how you work those issues with your colleagues in the caucuses and in the Chamber to move things in the direction as you see it should go.

DC: Well, you first try to work it in committee to get the best bill out that you believe you can get with both parties that are in that committee, if it's coming through your committee. Obviously when you only serve on four, and there's twenty-three committees or however many, they are always increasing committees as well. You rarely ever see it decrease. That's government for you. It's always an increase, never a decrease.

Then you try to find people that are likeminded to help you. If it's a bill that's in other committees that I may not know a lot about, I'll try to find somebody on the committee, if I'm not satisfied when they bring the bill up in caucus because, like I said, a lot of times, the person carrying the bill describes it one way, and there's really a lot more stuff in there that may not be exactly to your liking. But if you don't really read it, you may not know that. So you kind of have to do your due diligence, if you really want to vote.

PC: Read the bill.

DC: Yes.

PC: Read the bill and study it. Talk a little bit about how you perceive the legislative work, the legislature itself, how it operates, how it's changed since your time of service.

DC: I don't think it's changed too much. You still introduce bills. They still are assigned to committees. It's still pretty much political in the fact that the party that runs the House has control over the agenda and the bills and stuff. If there's something you really want, you might

have to finagle your way to get that up because if the party in control isn't going to bring it up, you might have to force your hand or do legal procedural moves to get your issue forward.

PC: Thinking about another woman who might be inclined to run for the state legislature or another public office, what advice would you give her if she were in the same position that you were back in your first run at the state legislature?

DC: Then I knew nothing. Today I know a lot more. I guess I would say that they must be interested, or they wouldn't be running. I would just say tell the truth and be who you are, and let the people know where you stand. If they agree, you'll win.

PC: In your service in the state legislature, what was the work with the governor's office during the legislative session? How were those relationships built? How were they cultivated? I'm particularly asking about the first term. Talk a little bit about how the executive branch works with the legislative branch during the session.

DC: Joan Finney was governor when I came in. I really didn't have too much other than there was a big pro-life bill that came through I think that first term because she was a pro-life governor, but it ended up not being a very good bill. I think most of the conservatives voted against it actually because that's what happens when you water everything down. It does nothing. Then why vote for it?

I know that after we became the majority and I sat back there, Sam Brownback at the time was Secretary of Ag and different ones [governor's staff], and they'd come in. I had great rapport with all of those guys. They would come in, and we'd talk about issues and stuff like that. But up until my final two years when I was on Appropriations, which is the big committee and really important, then the others I really didn't have personally a whole lot of personal—

PC: Contact?

DC: Yes, meetings with the governor. I met with Governor Graves a couple of times on different things, but just as groups, never did I just call the office and say, "Hey, I need to get in there." It was done more through the Speaker or those kinds.

PC: What do you miss about being—

DC: Nothing.

PC: That's a pretty straightforward answer. What do you wish you might have done differently during your time as a legislator?

DC: For all the credit, if that's what you want to call it, that I got in the press about being the leader of the Cornfield Caucus, of which—what was that? I was like, "I don't even have a

Cornfield Caucus. What are they talking about?” But they gave me all of this credit of being this conservative leader, of which I really never was and stuff. I think it would have been nice to have sixty-three conservative Republican votes. We always had about fifty. So the more moderates usually sided with the other moderate Democrats, and we'd win. It was kind of tough sometimes.

PC: Before we started this interview, you were sharing with us the story of having your children here, which again was very unusual in those days. Talk a little bit about that. Share that story with the audience that's going to be seeing these videos.

DC: Which one?

PC: About your son and the candy.

DC: My first year, when I came up, I was pregnant with Carey, but Alex was just over a year. After Carey was two—so when the boys were like four and two, my second term, they would come up. They were shorter than the desk. They would run around the floor. They knew all the legislators that had candy. I could never see them because they were shorter than the desk. I would always have to stand up and look for them to see where they were. Occasionally they'd see me standing up back there, and somebody would call me and say, “Oh, he's down here. Don't worry.” Sometimes they'd sit down there and stuff. But they had a great time, and everybody enjoyed them.

When Carey was here, like I said, it was on the Democratic side, and it made it hard because I do nurse my children. It made it difficult because the women's restroom is on this side, and I was on that side. For me to run back there and nurse him and then try to come back when they were doing all of those final actions, it was pretty tricky. But then when I had Maile, I was on this side.

PC: A little closer.

DC: Yes, a lot closer. So I could come back and forth and stuff. By the time Maile came, during veto sessions and stuff, you would see all kinds of grandchildren down here. When I had Carey, there was nobody here that brought any children during the veto or long nights when we were having long things. Whenever we would have long days, I would call my mother. I would say, “Bring the boys because I'm not getting home.” She would bring them, and they would hang out with me because I wanted to be with them.

But from '91 to '96, there was quite a change. Maile was readily accepted. Everybody wanted to hold her. Everybody enjoyed her. There was no—there were only probably a few people that thought that it was inappropriate, which to me I thought was kind of funny. They were people that thought Women's Lib and do what you want, but yet they thought it was strange that I

would bring my daughter, which I would think would be the epitome of being a good mother and working and bringing her child to work.

PC: Talk a little bit about the challenges of juggling all of that, paying attention to floor action, nursing your child, the evening gatherings you attended. What advice would you give to other women?

DC: I would say, "Don't be pregnant when you come in" because you don't know when they're going to be born. I knew Maile obviously would be born in February, but I didn't know about Carey. Everybody else, I don't know if they planned that or not, but they all came after. I would just say that's a decision that you have to make as a mother, knowing, because like I said, I agonized a long time before I decided to run, knowing I only had Alex, not that I was expecting a second one. I didn't want to not be with him. He came with me. A lot of mothers leave their children wherever their home is, but Alex came with me. The whole session, I had him with me on Mondays and Fridays. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, I left him with a nanny, and then I picked him up every afternoon and had him every evening. I was comfortable with that.

Then when Carey came, my mother went to Topeka with me, and she had both of them here with me all week. Then when I couldn't get away, I would say, "Bring them over! I'm going to be here all night." So she would bring them over.

Then on Fridays, we generally just met on the floor. I would bring them on Fridays anyway. When Maile came, she came February 29th. There was still six weeks of session left. Because I am a nursing mother, I just brought her with me every day. Unless you saw that little pink bundle running around, nobody even knew she was even here. So thank you, Jesus, for that. Other babies cry all the time, but mine didn't.

PC: Darlene, I want to talk a little bit about personal identity now, as it relates to your time in the legislature. We're going to loosely define "personal identity" as gender, age, race, class, sexual or gender orientation, marital status, etc. During your time in the legislature, did you experience times where you believe your personal identity influenced your ability to help pass policy, work with your fellow legislators, or provide services back to your constituents? Were you ever given committee assignments or tasks that you believe were functions of your personal identity?

DC: I'll have to think about that. By the time I came up, there were quite a few women. There was like thirty-eight of us. We were a minority, but not a minority like I wasn't the only woman. I think most of my committee assignments and the things I was assigned weren't due to my being a woman per se. I think they were just based on how many people were in the Republicans and your seniority in the pecking order of the leadership. I don't feel like I was put on any committee because I was a woman, that it would help or not help. I don't think so. I think I was just put there—I was looked at as a person, a Republican that needed to serve on committees and stuff. I don't think that played a role.

PC: And with your colleagues? Did it play a role?

DC: Actually I get along better with men than I do with women. I never officed with any woman. I was always in offices with only men, which I didn't have a problem with, and I never even noticed it except for when I would go to some of my colleagues' offices. The women were always with women. I was the only one that always had, that officed with all men. I don't know why, but it's okay because I was happy. So it was good. I did notice that. I don't look for those things. I try to just come up here and do a job. I don't look at, "Well, gee, why did they put me there? Is it because I'm"—I don't look at things like that. I didn't see that. I don't feel like that ever came into play.

PC: IS there anything that we have not asked you that you wish we would have asked? If so, what it is?

DC: I don't know. When you put a person on the spot, they can never think of it, and the minute we're done, I'll think of twenty-two things. I enjoyed my time as a legislator. I learned a lot. I think it's good to be involved and to know your government and know what goes on. I think every person should come up and see something introduced through to the end to see. Now that you can do everything online, you can track and watch and see where it's going, even though you maybe not get to hear all—are the committees on audio now? The House is. So now you can actually see and get the testimony and see exactly what's being said about an issue and stuff like that.

I think that's important that we do that, but I think it's a citizen legislature, and I do not support term limits because I think that defeats the idea of the ballot box. I think you need to make the citizens responsible for their government, and if you take that away, they won't vote. They'll just say, "The guy will be out next year. Let's not worry about it." I think that's wrong. But I think as a citizen legislature, I don't think you should come up and stay for thirty years. I think you ought to do good work and go home. I might have stayed a little longer, had I not had Maile, but maybe not much. Three terms were good, maybe one more.

PC: What's the biggest takeaway from your service as a state legislator?

DC: The biggest takeaway? The issues never go away. They just come back in a different form.

PC: Fair enough. Thank you very much for your time, Darlene.

DC: You're welcome.

PC: This has been a great experience. We really appreciate you making this time for this interview.

Interview of DARLENE CORNFIELD by Patty Clark, October 9, 2020

DC: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

PC: Just stay engaged.

DC: Well, I do, from afar.

PC: The citizen legislature is important. Thank you very, very much.

DC: You're welcome.

PC: I appreciate having you today.

DC: Thank you.

[End of File]