

Mark Tallman: My name is Mark Tallman, and I've worked for the Kansas Association of School Boards since 1990, doing advocacy work, research, and writing for the Association. But I'm conducting this interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators and significant state leaders in government, particularly those who served from the 1960s through 2010. These interviews will be accessible to researchers, educators, and the public through the KOHP website, ksoralhistory.org, and also the Kansas Historical Society and the State Library. Transcriptions are made possible by generous donors. David Heinemann is the videographer today.

And our guest today, I'm delighted to talk with, is Dr. Ed Hammond, former president of Fort Hays State University. We're going to explore all his background, maybe start by saying the longest-serving president of Fort Hays, my alma mater by the way—

Ed Hammond: Welcome home!

MT: I'm delighted to be here. And one of the longest-serving presidents of any institution in Kansas history, certainly recently. So, you've been able to observe exactly the period that we're talking about. Of course, what we want to unpack today is a little bit of what you saw, what you've learned so that viewers now and in the future can historically look back and learn something from that. So, maybe begin by just a little bit about yourself, where you grew up, your experience in Kansas and otherwise, what happened before you became president here at Fort Hays that kind of set you on that path.

EH: Well, first of all, let me clear up one thing quickly first. I haven't grown up yet. Every day, I'm still learning and still trying to grow. But I was born in McAllen, Texas, and I then lived in different states. I didn't go to grade school two years in a row in the same state. So, I lived in New York, Boston, Toledo, Cincinnati, Dallas, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and then went to Kansas City. Being the oldest of three boys, when we moved there, we had a surprise brother who came along quite a bit later. But Dad felt I had the right to go to high school all in one place. So, I went to Bishop Miege High School in Roland Park, close by one of the first capitols in the state of Kansas, the Shawnee Mission Indian Reservation facility, and from there went to Emporia State on a debate scholarship.

A gentleman by the name of [Gary Sherrer](#), a former lieutenant governor and also vice president of one of Kansas's largest and more influential banks before that, was a national championship debater at Emporia the year before, and he and his partner were leaving, and Emporia was looking to give scholarships to some people to come in to kind of rebuild the team that was there that was leaving. So, the first time I met Gary was when he was recruiting me to go to Emporia along with John DeBrosse, the debate coach there.

I was there four years, and I was involved in student government to some degree. I was involved heavily in my fraternity, but debate had me traveling all over the country. We were gone probably ten or eleven weekends in the fall and another eight or ten in the spring. So, I wasn't on

campus a lot of times on the weekends. But that situation really provided me a good education, and I got to know our president because I burned him in effigy.

The president at Emporia State at the time was a gentleman by the name of John King, and he was a retired Naval officer and had the nerve at the end of, I think, our eighth consecutive loss in football, and our 28th, I think, consecutive loss all over in terms of the number of years, at a public meeting with students to say, "Winning and losing wasn't important. We're building gentlemen and coaches for the future."

There were a number of us who felt that that wasn't the main purpose of intercollegiate athletics, that we wanted a school that won, and so somehow I was on the stage at Renfroze Hall with a microphone in my hand, organizing students. We marched on the administration building and hung him in effigy and lit him on fire. I then went back to the fraternity house and knew that security was there, and they were taking pictures. He was going to get some review of the story. So, I called him.

This was probably 1:00 in the morning. He answered the phone. I said, "I just wanted you to know that we burned you in effigy tonight, and this is the reason why. We feel strongly that in addition to have a program that develops gentlemen and good coaches, we'd like to win." And he said, "Who is this?" and I told him, "Ed Hammond." And he said, "Well, Ed, we've met." I said, "Yes, I just wanted you to know because it's important that that message gets delivered." He said thank you, and he hung up.

About four hours later, probably about 5:30, a fellow member of my fraternity is shaking me in my bed, waking me up, telling me the president is on the phone and wants to talk to me. Well, later on, he told me, "If you wake me up at 1:00, I'm going to wake you up at 5:30 in the morning."

MT: Fair enough.

EH: The end of the story really is that he invited me to breakfast. Of course, he asked, "Are you going to church today?" because it's Sunday now, and I said, "Oh, yes, sir." I said, "I'm going to go to 9:00 Mass on campus." He said, "Why don't you come by the office at 8:00, and we'll have breakfast?"

I went there thinking I didn't know if I was going to be kicked out of school or suspended, whatever.

MT: It might have been the last breakfast.

EH: It could have been the last breakfast, but instead he was trying to get more information why we felt so strongly. And then he asked me if I would chair a—which is a great administrative tool to try and bring the person in to provide leadership, he said, "I want you to co-chair with our Assistant Dean of Students a task force to let us know what students really want in intercollegiate athletic programming."

So, how do you say no? So, that was my relationship with John. It went very well. When I was getting ready to graduate, I was going to go to law school at KU, and he called me in the office. He said, "I've heard you were kind of interested in being a president."

Well, he had heard about—there were five of us in a bar in downtown Emporia called The Ship's Lounge. We were sitting there. We were planning our lives on napkins. We said when we're thirty or thereabouts, we drew a line, when we're forty or thereabouts, we drew a line, fifty or thereabouts, sixty or thereabouts, and we filled in the blanks. So, I said when I was thirty or thereabouts, I wanted to be vice president of a university. When I was forty or thereabouts, I wanted to be president of a university. When I was fifty or thereabouts, I was wanting to play on the senior golf circuit, which didn't exist at the time, but I just believed that with Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus and everything, they'd want to keep those old guys around, and I was also playing on the golf team at Emporia. So, I had that interest. I said, "When I'm sixty or thereabouts, I think I'll run for political office."

That kind of got out and got back to John who was from that point on when I burned him in effigy, he became a very good friend of mine. So my career then took me to his office. He said, "Don't go to law school. Come here and see what it's like, and then you'll decide whether you really want to do it or not."

I called the dean of the law school at KU and said, "Can I get a delayed admission?" and they said yes. So, I went to work for John. That summer, he went to Wyoming as president and offered to take me with him, and I said no and I stayed. I got a master's degree. From there, I went to Purdue University and had the opportunity to be part of a team of people that built the north central campus of Purdue up in Westville, Indiana. They have regional campuses instead of community colleges in Indiana, and I did that because it was a great opportunity to practice in student affairs from building buildings, building programs, setting up financial aid programs, all that kind of thing. But I had all that support at West Lafayette. I didn't feel like I was out there on my own doing it.

While there, I got a federal fellowship, an NDA fellowship that paid all my educational expenses to get my doctorate. It was offered from Michigan State, Missouri, and Maryland were the three schools that I could pick from. I chose Missouri because they said I could apply to law school. While at Missouri, the doctorate programs were all in the late afternoon and at night. I didn't have to work because I had this fellowship that paid all my expenses.

So, I went to law school and said, "Can I apply? I want to take some courses. I don't want to be a lawyer. I want to know enough law to be dangerous." They said, "Well, we don't admit students that way. But if the faculty agrees, they'll let you come in."

So, I had to go to the faculty meeting of the School of Law and make a presentation. Somehow, I was persuasive enough that they let me in.

MT: All that debate background.

EH: Yes. I took con law, civil liberties courses, Con Law 1 and 2, Civil Liberties 1 and 2, all that kind of general stuff that I needed to be a president of a university which is what I wanted to do. At that time, it was 1970, and the riots were breaking out all over the country. At Southern Illinois University, they had burned down the administration building on Old Main. The president of Southern Illinois knew the president of Missouri, and he said, "I need somebody to come over and deal with this issue." And he said, "Well, I've got this crazy guy that's getting his doctorate and going to law school who want to be a president."

So, Delyte Morris flew over and interviewed me, and I got the job. I started at Southern Illinois University in June as an Assistant Dean of Students with the primary task of adjudicating almost 500 students that were arrested during the riots from a university standpoint, whether they are dismissed or whether they can come back and under what terms.

The Board of Trustees at the university were very concerned. They hired a law firm, Jenner & Block from Chicago, to oversee my work. Well, a month later, July 1st, they reported back to the president that Ed was doing a really good job, I guess. They thought that things were moving along pretty well. The ACLU lawsuits were all being withdrawn because we were providing due process and all the things that [were] needed.

They promoted me a month later. I was there a month, thirty days, promoted me to an Associate Dean of Students. Then in August, I was promoted to Assistant to the President. And then the rest is history. I was there three years as their Chief Student Affairs Officer. I went to Seton Hall as Vice President for Student Affairs for three years. I then went to Louisville as Vice President of Student Affairs, their first Chief Student Affairs Officer in that history in that institution, and I was there ten years. Then I was sitting and saying, "You know, I'm almost forty. I think I can do this presidency thing. I think I may be old enough."

MT: Do you still have that napkin?

EH: Yes. It's framed. I said, "You know, I think I'm old enough." I looked around and I said, "You know, I'm interested in a particular school that has a clear geographical constituency." I wasn't interested in a major research institution. I applied for two presidencies, one at East Carolina and one at Fort Hays. I was offered both of those presidencies but decided to come back to Kansas because I knew so many people that were active in either the collegian Democrats or Republicans or when I was in school or student leaders on campuses in Kansas that were in the legislature or in—like Gary Sherrer who was beginning his political career and Bill Graves and those kind of people. Jim Rhatigan was the Chief Student Affairs Officer/Dean of Students at Wichita State when I was a student, and he was still there, and he served there for many, many years in that role.

So, it just felt coming back here, I had a lot of contacts I could use to maybe help the institution. So, in '87, I came.

MT: Before I go into that, I don't know when people will be viewing it [this interview] but in 2025, the time of a lot of division and polarization in the country. Some of us kind of remember 1970, the end of the sixties, the riots and things that were going on at that level, too. That was a very striking time as well. I was a little younger than you. I didn't directly see a lot of that. But just growing up here in Fort Hays, Kansas, we saw demonstrations and marches and some of those things. But by the time I reached the university, a lot of that had passed. The war was over by that point for the most part. So, it was a very different experience.

You explained a little bit about why you were interested in Fort Hays as opposed to maybe some other option. I kind of wanted to do two things. I'd be interested in knowing—you achieved this goal of becoming a university president. You're in a place you're kind of comfortable.

EH: I was late though. I got here when I was forty-one.

MT: We can round that probably. I'm curious about both what perhaps you found here and how that led to some of the changes that you either began or maybe followed through over your period of time here. I'll let you tell the story. I may interject, and how that fit into sort of the larger issues that were going on, the priorities of the Board of Regents or other political developments. So, both kind of the unique story of this institution, but put that into the context of what was happening to higher education in Kansas.

EH: When I got here, we had our six Regents universities. They were all well established. We had leadership from the board at that time. We had a very strong president of the Board of Regents, Stan Koplik. He had worked with the board through the late eighties, starting in about 1985 to develop a sense of urgency to pursue different missions for each of the schools. He felt it was very important that each of the six Regents universities played a significant different role in Kansas.

At the same time, he wanted us to meet the regional needs. So, the state was divided up into three quadrants. The western half of the state basically was one quadrant, and then there was Wichita and surrounding areas was another quadrant. Then there was the eastern counties was the third quadrant, kind of almost legislatively the big First [Congressional] District kind of approach.

MT: Yes.

EH: But he assigned a research school and a regional school to each of those quadrants. So K-State and Fort Hays' primary service area was defined as basically the western half of the state of Kansas. It was by far the largest land mass of the three. And then KU and Pittsburg and Emporia and Wichita State were the other two combinations.

So, you had a regional emphasis that you had to have within your mission statement, and you had to have a distinct difference that would separate you and differentiate you from the other region schools. During that time, for example, my first master plan, I developed three ten-year master plans. The first master plan was in that era of where the Board of Regents was interested in differentiation. So, we came in and we talked about high tech high touch, creating a very

special kind of learning environment that was significantly different than any of the other five universities. We took computer technology and integrated it into the classroom starting at about 1988, '89. All of our dorms were totally computerized by 1988.

MT: Which too many people today probably have no idea of what it was like before that.

EH: That's right.

MT: So, that was the beginning of moving in the computer age as we now know it. When I was here, we still taught programming.

EH: With punch cards.

MT: Right.

EH: And your registration was you picked out a card for your class, and you stood in line at the old gymnasium, and you went through and dropped them in. The first thing we did here was we moved to a major IBM mainframe basis for our computing. We also spread the computing throughout the curriculum. So, for example, in chemistry and physics, instead of having a class where you would do maybe ten live experiments during the class during that period of time, eighteen weeks, maybe ten or eleven, we would do the ten or eleven live experiments, but then we would do computer simulations that would double the amount of learning that could take place in the class. So, that's how we were building value into the curriculum by integrating technology into the curriculum.

In art, for example, we had a very brilliant young faculty member at that time, Chalwat, who's fortunately still here, running one of the US's best graphic design programs, and took graphic design which was being taught by drawing and line and free drawing and all that kind of stuff into the computer world and was one of the first ones to do it.

So, we had to get major high-end computing. At that time, Sun Corporation, which now is no longer in existence, had the best computer for that graphic design, and we were one of the leaders in the nation in moving our art students with good art skills. They still had to know all the art. But being able to take that and to translate that into the technology made them then a lot more valuable to employers.

We spent that first ten-year period differentiating us from the other institutions two ways: one was integrating technology into our curriculum that adds significant value. No one graduated from Fort Hays after 1990 that wasn't computer literate and computer flexible in addition to having a degree. We tested for that and all students had to be able.

Now, today, everybody coming in has some degree of all of that in hand, but in 1990, students didn't have computers they were bringing to campus. They couldn't afford them. And very few of them had them in their home or maybe in their parents' offices.

MT: Right.

EH: So, to deal with that, we took a room out of each wing of our dormitories and turned them into computer labs for the students on that floor. It was kind of interesting. We had an alum by the name of Chuck Como. He's still alive, thank god. He had a building he had built in Denver as a corporate headquarters for Mr. Gatti's Pizza when they were building out their empire, which never really developed, but their idea was that they would create a central location where anywhere in the country, if you wanted pizza, their mission was you could call this 1-800 number and place your order, and they would have the pizza delivered to you no matter where you were. That was their goal.

Well, very quickly they found out that wasn't sustainable in 1988-'89. So, they decided—they went bankrupt and went into restructuring. So, this building was there with all these computers and all the information, and Dave had a buyer for it, rather Chuck Como had a buyer for it, and he decided that—he came to me and he said, "I really like what you're talking about. I've got this building out here with lots of equipment. I'll give it all to you if you'll just get it out of there because I've got a buyer who wants it, but they don't want any of the junk in there."

MT: They want the building but not that.

EH: So, we rented two semi-trucks. We drove out to Denver. We took all the computing equipment out of this corporate headquarters, and that's what we used to put in all of the dormitories. So, instantaneously, we were able to computerize and affect our living and learning environment.

MT: Was there a particular reason you or—I don't know what planning had gone into this—why did you decide at that point to make this emphasis on computing, computing skills? You had an insight into the future that others didn't have? I'm curious—there were several other institutions that could have done that as well.

EH: Right. I actually interviewed for the presidency with this vision. I talked to the Board of Regents when I interviewed. Interestingly enough, they interviewed me in Roland and Overland Park, probably a mile and a half from where I grew up, which I thought was interesting they didn't interview me on campus. I had done on-campus interviews, but they interviewed me there.

But when I interviewed, I said I knew about Stan Koplik's desire and I knew about the Board of Regents at that time wanting differentiation. I was trying to present to them where I thought this institution could go. That was the same dream I had for East Carolina. And the way I came up with that concept of *high tech, high touch* is I attended—at Indiana University, there was a yearly meeting of futurists, and one of the things I did at Louisville was I convinced the president we needed to have a better understanding of where the future was. I'd like to go to that conference. So, they sent me to this conference.

Bill Gates and all of the futurists were talking about Internet and being able to touch your phone and make a phone call, which was Dick Tracy stuff at the time. You saw it in the comics; you

didn't see it in reality. A lot of that stuff was being presented during those. So, I sat there and took all of that and I tried to think, "How can we use this technology to make higher education better, to provide more value? If a student's in class for an hour, how do we make that hour more successful in terms of the learning? And how do we make it more interesting?" The students at that time like today, they need to be almost entertained as well as being taught. So, by integrating technology in an effective way, we were able to add a new level of excitement.

When I got here, we had declining enrollments for eleven straight years. We turned that around, and we started to grow. On the high touch side, Fort Hays was always very good with its personal attention to students. I knew that if you were going to move into an organization and make a drastic change, you can't change everything. So, I wanted the first master plan to be built upon something that we're already doing very, very well, which is the high touch. We didn't have large classes, and when I came here, we got rid of the classrooms that are big. Our student teacher classroom size dropped to about an average of 18:1, which was the lowest in the Regent's system, and all of the research shows that the smaller the class, the better the learning. So, I used that as a documentation for why—it's a little more costly to do it that way, but it's also a better learning environment.

So we add that high touch side to the high tech side, and that created the differentiation between us and say Pittsburg, which was using this as an opportunity to move into higher education technical learning. And Emporia was more the educational learning, Teachers College, which was more their original mission. K State was land grant, was primarily ag and vet and that kind of thing. KU had all the medical and research side. And Wichita had a very creative president that was there that moved there. They got doctorate programs but put them into aviation engineering and more in that area. So, the six Regent schools, when the public and the legislature would look at it would see that there are six Kansas schools, but they all are providing a different kind of educational environment, a different kind of education.

MT: As someone observing this, you can still sense all of that today in those institutions, but you indicated this was really the focus of the nineties. So, maybe to transition a little bit, you talked about enrollment growing here. I guess I would be interested in any other thoughts, I mean, a little bit—you did this. How did it go? How successful were you? Both in terms of the university here, observations you might have had on what that meant for the system and then what comes next as we move into this century, I guess.

EH: That's really a good question. The nineties also was the last years of the formula funding budgeting of higher education in Kansas. What that means is that each of the six schools got a certain amount of money for each credit hour that they produced. And the Regents got less per credit hour than the research schools because their costs of operations was a little bit higher.

But tuition was in the state of Kansas at that time throughout the nineties was part of the State General Fund. So, all of the tuition dollars that were raised on our campuses went to Topeka, and then we had to go, if you remember, I had to go hat in hand to Topeka and make the case why we should get so much money back from the state from the General Fund, but we were contributing large amounts of money to the General Fund.

In the nineties because of my interest in politics and everything, I decided as president to be the face of the university in Topeka. A lot of the institutions were using lobbyists, very capable people.

MT: Not that there's anything wrong with lobbyists.

EH: No. Very capable people, people that did the job extremely well that I learned a lot from, like Eric Sexton at Wichita State, and of course, you already talked about a certain woman, Sue.

MT: Sue Peterson.

EH: Sue Peterson at K-State who were there for a long time in that role and knew the avenue. I was a new rookie coming in. But in the nineties, if you go back and look, Fort Hays actually got more money than we were putting into the General Fund out of the General Fund, and our growth in State General Fund percentage over that period of time was the greatest, even though our enrollments didn't grow that much. It was about a thousand students or about eight, nine hundred students.

And the reason for it was the formula that the Board of Regents had in place said that if you grew a half percent, you got this bonus. If you grew another half percent, the bonus was a little less. If you grew another half percent, it was a little less, and then it got so miniscule. It didn't pay to grow more than about 1-1/2 percent.

So, mysteriously at Fort Hays, we were able to manage our financial aid program in such a way that we were growing right about 1-1/2, 2 percent a year. K State, for example, Jon Wefald, who was a good friend of mine, he did a fantastic job at K State, was under so much pressure to get the state back up to where it was, they grew really fast during this time, and it really disadvantaged them because they were growing 8 percent a year at some point, and it didn't pay. If your enrollments dropped, you lost some resources, which is one of the things that started Emporia's financial issues that have still existed to this day. So that was going on in the political side of the arena at the same time the Board of Regents was pushing for differentiation.

MT: I think we talked about the nineties were really kind of defined by that differentiation.

EH: Right.

MT: But then moving into the 2000s.

EH: That switched.

MT: What were the things that were going on there?

EH: In 2000, driven by tuition ownership, which was part of the legislative package, which changed the formula. The money now doesn't go back to the State General Fund. Each

institution gets to keep whatever tuition that you can bring in. So, K State and KU and Wichita were concerned because they weren't getting back what they were contributing, and we were getting more. So, they were behind getting tuition ownership, which I thought was only fair. I didn't object to it.

So the Board of Regents kind of ended that formula funding that existed and went to tuition ownership. And their shift then because that piece of legislation also brought the community colleges and the technical schools over from the Board of Ed. So now the Board of Regents is not only governing the six Regents schools, they've got an affiliated relationship with Washburn [University of Topeka].

MT: And Topeka. [state government]

EH: And Topeka. They've got nineteen community colleges and twelve technical schools or whatever the number was at that time. So, their emphasis changed, and the governor at that time, it was the end of Gary Sherrer being there with Bill Graves.

MT: Right.

EH: They were behind this move to go to tuition ownership, too. They started saying the role of the Regents needs to be, especially with their new broader responsibilities, needs to change, and we need to emphasize educating Kansas. So, access and serving the largest population of Kansans we could become the emphasis for that next ten-year period. That meant—for me, it meant we needed to grow.

MT: I'm assuming—correct me if I'm wrong—that's fitting into this trend that really now there's more discussion, focus on the K-12 level that the work force is going to need more people with higher levels of education or credentials, whatever you want to call it. We've had this decades-long shift where jobs that require a high school diploma or less have been shrinking, and the economic need I guess both for the economy in general and translating to an individual is you're going to—so how do we put in place a system which does continue to increase the number of people that have first completed high school and then moved on to earn something else to give them a credential for the work force?

EH: And what you just articulated was really at the end of the emphasis on access—bringing in the corporate employment needs of the state and trying to tie them into the institutions. That really occurred in the latter part of the 2000-2010 period. But in 2000, when we moved into this access issue and I looked at the funding—we did away with the funding formula—and the Board of Regents was supposed to develop a new formula, but they never could. As we sit here today in 2025, twenty-five years later, the Board of Regents still doesn't have a funding formula in place.

MT: To replace what you got rid of.

EH: To replace what was gotten rid of by the legislature in 2000. So, what that meant was that enrollments that you had in 1999- 2000 were the base for funding. Everything since then has been on an equal percentage basis of growth. To give you an idea of how that plays into Fort Hays and the other schools, at that time, KU and K-State were at enrollment levels that were some of their highest in the early part of that part. They then dropped. Emporia dropped a lot. Wichita State dropped. We doubled our enrollments in that ten-year period.

The problem that created for us was we weren't getting any additional money for growth even though we were meeting the Board of Regents' desire to serve more people and especially more Kansans. So, we had to look at how we developed a strategy to do that. And we decided that we would emphasize low tuition and also distance learning.

Low tuition up until tuition ownership died in 1999-2000, rather when it started, up until that point, the Board of Regents controlled tuition, and they held it down. The schools all agreed, "Let's hold it down" because we didn't get the money anyway. It went to the State General Fund. So, we didn't care.

Throughout that last century, the latter part of that century, Kansas tuition was some of the lowest in the country because it was State General Fund funding the schools and not tuition funding the schools. Starting in 2000, tuition now was funding a big block of the schools.

So, we had to grow. Emporia, Pittsburg, and Hays were all the same. We all got the same tuition up until 1990-2000. KU, K-State were all basically the same. But then each school could come in and ask for their own tuition.

Since tuition was so depressed by that environment that existed, KU came in and said, "We're going to go at this tuition rate." They jumped tuition dramatically. If you look at 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004, KU tuition went way up. K-State tried to run with them for at least the first six years until they saw that it was really detrimentally hurting their enrollments, and then they kind of backed off. But KU believed that if you charged somebody a high price, they perceived that the value was going to be greater than the lower price.

Well, my philosophy is simple. In a marketplace, there's only two places you want to be. You want to be at the low end with the high-quality product, or you want to be at the high end with the high-quality product. There's no way that we were going to be at the high end and compete with KU for quality and for price.

So, that first year, when they all came in including Emporia and Pittsburg came in because now all of a sudden, here's new revenue you can get by raising tuition. They all raised tuition. I said, "We're not raising tuition." They looked at me like I was crazy. I said, "No. You have two choices, the same choices you have in business. You can either serve more customers, or you can charge more, and we're going to double our enrollments."

So, at that point, we were about a little over 5,000 students, probably not quite 6,000, with on-campus and our virtual college, which we had started at that time, which was our online program. And we were the only player in the online environment.

MT: I was going to say, and again, for people now and in the future, I'm not sure if any people cannot remember a time when the only way you could go to college was to go to college. In Kansas at least, you were one of the real leaders.

EH: Well, KU, to give them credit, they had an extension effort where they did a mail-order kind of little degree programs that they did, but it wasn't very popular. We were doing distance learning here from almost the beginning of our existence back in 1992 because we were the western branch of the Kansas State Normal School. Our mission at that time was to certify as many of these people that are teaching in these one-room schoolhouses all over the western half of the state. So, we started with a two-year teacher's certification program and then a four-year degree program and then the university grew to what it is today. But even then, we had faculty in buckboards, horse-drawn buckboards that were going out and teaching because the schoolteacher couldn't leave that community except in the summer to come back to Hays to take courses. So, we had to go out and help them get their degrees in all of these various different communities. When I got here, that had translated into faculty jumping in cars and driving to Goodland, Garden [City], Dodge [City], and Colby Community Colleges where they gave us space, and we would teach courses that way.

In 1989-'90, we made the move as part of this, what we called our—we moved from high tech, high touch to affordable success and our growth model. That was a different strategic plan, but part of that strategic plan was to take our distance learning, which was basically being done in most of the nineties on two-way interactive video to the community college sites. So, the fact that we didn't have to drive, we used technology.

But in the end, the secret to the success was to get online. And of course, we were the first institution to take classes online in Kansas, and one of the first ones in the country, and that's an interesting story in itself. In the early nineties, late eighties and nineties, when we were moving in that direction and building that foundation, one of the things I learned about in Indiana, when I was at Louisville going to those futurist conferences was something about the LATA boundary pricing model that existed for transmitting courses over telecommunications. When the federal government decided to break up the big monopolies in telecommunications, they did it, but they set up a LATA boundary.

So, the state of Kansas, which is a long and narrow rectangle, had a LATA boundary joining the western border all the way to the eastern border of the state, dividing Kansas City from Wichita. So, telecommunication providers delivering phone calls and data back and forth between those two hubs had to pay what they called an inter-LATA carrier. There was only one. It was A T & T. And the court did that to get money for A T & T for splitting it up.

Here we're serving western Kansas, and we've got this LATA boundary dividing north and south, which would increase our costs if we went into telecommunications and Internet sources. I

made a deal with the rural telephone companies. At that time, there was some really good leadership in rural telephones in western Kansas. The federal government was coming out with what they called "rural service areas," and they divided the state up into rural service areas, and they were long rectangles that didn't make any sense in Kansas, but they were long rectangles, and they were going to have a drawing in each of these rural service areas. I think there were eighteen, and that didn't include Wichita, which was a Tier 2 city under the FCC. They took Kansas City, Kansas, Lawrence, and Topeka and made them a Tier 2 city. So the rural service areas was everything else.

They were going to have a drawing. Under the FCC rules, there had to be a winner in the wire carrier hat and a winner if you didn't own wire. If you were in a business and you wanted to get into cellular transmission or data transmission and you didn't own wire, you were in the wire hat. If you were a teleco, then you were in the wire hat.

So, they were going to form a company to compete against Southwestern Bell and a little bit of A T & T and United at that time, which then became Sprint. It was in that transition I was in a meeting with them, and they were planning to form this group of probably twelve or fifteen rural telephone companies to come up with a company that could compete with the big boys. I said, "You're crazy." They said, "What?" I said, "No. You guys should enter each of these drawings as individual corporate entities as you exist now. Then you're going to have fifteen pieces of paper in the hat. There's only going to be one in there that's Southwestern Bell, one in there that is A T & T or Sprint or whatever, and your chances of getting the arrangement." I was telling them, "Think about how much you're going to save." In serving these rectangles the way the FCC designed it, you had to build a tower in the north part of the territory, another tower in the south and control the wattage so it didn't spill over to the next rural area.

So, they did that, and we got I think fifteen of the eighteen out of the draw. They bought the other three. Then they formed KIN, which is the Kansas Independent Network based out of Salina, which was a separate corporation that really pushed a lot of fiber out. But in return, they gave Fort Hays State free access to the back side of the fiber cables throughout the western part of the state.

So, we were able to deliver courses from Hays, Kansas to anywhere in the western half of the state of Kansas at hardly any cost whereas any other institution trying to compete in that marketplace had these inter-LATA charges that they had to deal with. So, we had a competitive advantage there, and that's how we were able to really begin to grow. By the end of that ten-year period, 2000-2010, we were—you could take the distance learning enrollments at all the other five Regent schools, add them together, and they didn't even come to half of what we were doing in the state.

A lot of our growth was during that period of time, and that was growth that was not costing. We didn't have buildings. We didn't have other things like that. So, the growth of the virtual college at a time when we were being disadvantaged by the lack of a funding formula by the Board of Regents, we were able to neutralize that.

And then during that same period, we moved into China, starting in 2000 as well. That is another story. If you want to get into that or not, we can get into that. But that produced—when I retired, we were about 15,000 students. So, we went from 5,000 students basically in 1999 to over 11,000 by 2010. The Board of Regents over time realized—they thought I was crazy, and then they thought I was smart. As a result, even today, now years—I’ve been retired for ten years—Fort Hays’s tuition and fee structure is such that we’re less than half of what KU and K State and the other schools in the state are, and it’s because we have a large virtual college—now it’s called Fort Hays online—and we have the China program that produces revenue that lets us then service Kansans at a lower cost.

MT: A dramatic story, but as you’re indicating, somewhat unique. You were able to do some things a little bit differently. What are your observations over the same period of time of I guess either how other institutions were either trying something different or reacting, and what was happening sort of to kind of the political climate at the time, maybe how the legislature and others view higher education, support higher education, or changing expectations. Again, as a leader among the institutions over that period of time, what were some of the other things going on either statewide or in other institutions, and how they might fit back into that?

EH: Well, if you look at the nineties when the Board of Regents was stressing differentiation between the institutions, you saw Pittsburg under Don Wilson and other presidents there really develop a significant emphasis on technology, construction, manufacturing, that kind of thing. You saw Emporia, the Jones gift to Emporia State really emphasized their teacher ed role.

You saw Wichita State with their new doctorate programs in aviation and engineering, and their partnerships with the aviation community in Wichita, which is substantial and is a major economic player in the state of Kansas. So, meeting that need at Wichita State made a lot of sense, but it differentiated them even though KU has a little aviation engineering in their engineering program, but Wichita is more of what I call hands-on aviation engineering where they’re dealing with tail design, seat construction, constructing safe seats, and all kinds of stuff.

At K-State, Jon really emphasized the ag side and the vet side and met a real need there. If you look at K State, they’re probably responsible for most of the wheat seed that’s planted in Kansas, the kind of wheat, the seed that they used was developed a lot by the researchers at K State over the time I’ve been around Kansas. Agriculture is a big part of the state.

So, each of the schools really worked very successfully with leadership of their institutions and the Board of Regents’ support. The Board of Regents was supportive of anything that would make us different. When I would come into the board with a plan of moving distance learning forward, they thought they didn’t understand it, but they were willing to let me try to do it.

It’s like the China program. When we first went to China and we signed our contract with our first China partner in 1999, we had students starting in 2000, I went over in 2001 for the first time. It was two weeks after 9/11, and it was the first US delegation to visit China in quite some time. We just developed relationships that to this day, they’ve treated us very well.

So, I didn't trust the Chinese. They didn't trust me. I believe that partnerships that are win/win relationships will last the test of time. So, our partnership in China was financially beneficial to us. The last year I was president, I think the Chinese government paid us about 9.5 million, and it probably cost us \$4.2 or \$4.3 [million], and those were the resources that we used to keep tuition down for Kansans.

So, when legislators would get upset about China and say, "Ed, why are you helping China?" well, China is paying for our kids to go to school at a really good rate, and that was the end of the discussion because the benefits to Kansas of that partnership over the years, over the last twenty-some years has been just phenomenal in terms of helping us have the resources to meet the needs of Kansans.

MT: One of the things you mentioned a little earlier was in addition to some of the funding changes was the change in governance, bringing in the community colleges and technical. I'm wondering if you have any—#1, that wasn't inevitable. What changes have you seen, good or bad I guess in that different relationship? I guess the intent was to have a greater degree of coordination and articulation and all of those terms across all of those post-secondary institutions which before—again, people watching this now may not remember that until that happened, those community college, technical college were really more seen as local. They had local boards in the case of community colleges. So they were under the Board of Education. Now, they've moved to higher ed. What are some of your thoughts on the consequence of that change?

EH: I think it brought about the first statewide kind of planning for all of post-secondary education after high school, and it led to a lot more cooperation. You talked about curriculum development. It's now in Kansas—it started in the 2000 to 2010 period, they started really emphasizing making sure that the curriculum at the community colleges could transfer to the Regent's schools. If you did two years here, you only needed two years.

Up until that time, there was a general feeling—I'm not sure it was always true—I think a lot of times it was true, if you transferred, you probably had three more years after you transferred from a community college at a Regent school. So, that changed. And that took curriculum changes at the community college level because they had to raise their standard to teach—a college Algebra 1 class at the community college had to be basically the same as the Algebra 1 class at the college. When the student transfers, we're going to assume they know the college algebra, and we're going to put them in college Algebra 2. But if the College Algebra 1 was only half of what it is at the four-year schools—I think it encouraged and it raised the standards and the curriculum material at the community college level, and it made transferability a lot easier.

After the period of 2000 to 2010 where the board was really pushing that, the board then shifted because of the way the legislature shifted to really stressing efficiency. It was during those times that we began doing a lot more cooperative kinds of things that would save money. I then proposed a merger of Barton County Community College with Fort Hays. At that time, the Board of Ed was still controlling the community colleges, and they voted against it because they didn't want to see—the community colleges argued that if you let one of these happen, it would happen a lot of times.

I then tried Pratt. In Pratt, we had a community countywide vote in favor of it. We had the trustees' support, which we did at Barton County, but the Board of Regents at that time voted 5-4 not to do it for the same reason. We almost got it done.

And then as I was retiring, we were in discussions with Dodge City about doing something. Dr. Mason, the new president now, has been successful in taking Goodland and Beloit, [Northwest Kansas Technical College in Goodland, and the North Central Technical College in Beloit.] and merging that with Fort Hays in a way in which there's tremendous savings because it's just like the banks that merged or any other mergers. The back office functions can be done somewhere else, and you don't need to duplicate all of that. You would only need one admission system, one registration system, one financial aid system, and there's tremendous savings that the community college or technical school would have that they could then invest in curriculum development to meet the needs of the citizens of their area. I tried it as part of our efficiency effort. I wasn't successful, but it's been successful since I retired.

MT: And again, a little context. It strikes me when you talk about that change happening around 2010, part of that I assume was the legislature in Kansas and all over the country was dealing with the—at the time, I guess we called it the Great Recession after 2008, 2009.

EH: You're right.

MT: That impact and then further as we got into state tax policy, the income tax cuts and all that put Kansas in a position of limited resources. I assume that was part of what was driving the focus at least to—efficient is kind of—not that it's a bad thing, but it's a bit of a euphemism. How do you manage a time of constrained resources? And, of course, K-12 also faced those cuts ultimately in that case, leading back to again school finance, litigation, and continuing challenges with the legislature to prioritize where dollars go, both within the system, and how high should taxes be, and all of that. I guess in some ways, we're still living in that era.

EH: I think the efficiency era, the Board of Regents which was driven by the legislature interests started in 2010 and has run to 2020. I don't know what you call what's going on now. It's above my pay grade now, and I'm not involved. But during the efficiency time, that ten years where we were stressing efficiencies, we were constantly being asked by the legislature, "What are you doing to be efficient? What are doing to either generate revenue or save money?" So, the China program, the virtual college, we got a lot of legislative support behind that. The legislators at the time saw China as a threat, but they liked the fact that they were paying for Kansans to go to school.

The things we did here that were different in that period than the earlier period was we looked at internal things. For example, we developed our own construction company at Fort Hays. We were the only Regent school that did that. The reason was, when we had a building project of some nature, not a gigantic one because we couldn't do that, but a reasonable-sized project, and we would bid it, the firms out of Kansas City and Wichita would bid a lot higher because they

have all the transportation and site set-up here and stuff like that, and we didn't have the hard-core programs or the businesses here that could really do it.

So, we developed our own construction company. We'd say, "What would it cost us if we did it?" I just took positions that existed here, and we created a couple of plumbers, and we created electricians, and we had to put together a whole company that we could put in on a major renovation project that would if we bid it out would have cost a lot more than doing it ourselves. So, we were more efficient that way.

The other thing we did was we drastically—I looked at what our major costs were. One of them is electricity because our emphasis on technology starting back—we were using on a per student basis a lot more electricity than other schools were. We looked at "How can we reduce our demand?"

I found out there were some generators that were available from Fort Riley. So, we got those, and we moved them here. We got some big oil tanks, 5,000-gallon tanks that we buried. We would buy surplus and older diesel fuel from the military at Fort Riley and fill up our tanks. And then we did something called "peak shaving." People don't understand that your electrical bill, if you look at it, is driven by two things: how much electricity you use and then there is a second cost that is constant across all twelve months that is based upon—it's called "demand charge." Your demand charge on your home bill or your business bill or your farm has a demand charge and a usage charge.

The demand charge is set by the maximum amount of electricity that you use in any fifteen-minute period throughout the year. So, guess what? Our demand charge on our bill was established because we turn all the air conditioning on in August when students come back. Usually in August/early September, we hit our peak because we've got all of our technology, all of our computers working. We've got all of our residence halls, and we were full. So, we'd fire up our generators, and we would shave off—we'd generate power and shave off that peak, reducing our demand charge and saving us money. We'd save about \$350,000 a year on our bill, which at that point was about 1.5 million dollars.

Then the next phase was to put in wind generation. We're the only state agency that I know in Kansas, which I still don't understand why—I've talked to legislators about it, and I've talked to others about it, why we don't do it—we've got wind all over Kansas.

MT: We certainly do.

EH: We put in two wind generators, and we generate enough power that we can reduce—we don't even need to take anything off the grid. Now, Midwest Energy, our local utility company, wasn't real excited about losing their biggest company, but we were able to save money. So, we saved money from peak shaving until we could get the wind generation capability to meet all of our needs. In fact, in the summertime now because we don't have as many on-campus classes in the summer, a lot of that's mostly all virtual, we don't have to keep all the buildings cooled to the same degree. One generator will run the whole entire Fort Hays campus now.

MT: It's interesting that you talk about the wind generation. I'm probably not going to remember this correctly. It strikes me when I was a student here in the early eighties when the remodel rare call I believe opened with solar generation was at the time—I can't remember if they said it was the largest public building in the state of Kansas to be solar powered at the time.

EH: Right.

MT: It was a long time ago, certainly before wind was where it is now. We could probably talk another hour, but in the interest of our viewers, we probably ought to look at wrapping up a little bit. Let me give you a chance to just see—of the things we've gone through, are there any other things in terms of accomplishments or issues or lessons that we haven't talked about that you think you would like to impart as you kind of look back on the career you've had here, both as a leader and the last ten years not as president but still being affiliated with the university, still being a part of this community?

EH: I think our accomplishments really has been in the success of the great team that we've had here at Fort Hays. I was able to assemble an outstanding team of individuals to help lead us through the affordable success years, prior to that, high tech high touch, and then in the next period of time when we were dealing with all of the issues regarding budget and how efficient we are.

I'm very proud of the fact that we've taken an institution in western Kansas that when I got here was serving 50 percent of the high school graduates in the western half of the state, and today we still are serving more than 50 percent of the western Kansas, but it's less than a third of what that number was at the time. The population of western Kansas has dropped dramatically.

MT: That's not completely unique, but certainly that change in enrollment and demographics.

EH: When you look at national data, most college students want to go to an institution that's anywhere from 200 to 400 miles from their home. If you draw a 200-mile circle around Hays, Kansas, you don't have that population. I think one of the things that we did was position Fort Hays to be successful statewide because of our uniqueness that we developed in the nineties, we were able to differentiate ourself. The low tuition rate, the best buy in effect for a family trying to invest in their kids' education and getting a high-quality education that integrates technology into the curriculum.

And then in recent years, we've been able to develop a very strong presence in Colorado, and with what the legislature has given—Dr. Mason went to the legislature and got the board and the legislature to agree to let us charge in-state tuition for Colorado and the surrounding states. But if you stop and think about it between Fort Collins and Colorado Springs are more people than in the whole state of Kansas. So, we are developing a very strong presence there that's keeping our on-campus enrollments—my goal for 2010 to 2020, the goal was to grow the university 20,000 students. Well, we made it to 2015, '16. We got to 2016 after I retired, and then COVID hit, and we dropped down, but not we're getting back to 2015.

The key there was to continue to grow the institution in ways in which we add value. We don't lose the personal touch, and we provide it at a cost point at the lower end of the scale that makes us very affordable for people all over. As a result, you can go to Fort Hays cheaper than you can go to Colorado schools. So, we're a very attractive option. It's the same driving time from Kansas City to Hays as it is from Denver to Hays.

MT: I'm experiencing that this very trip, as a matter of fact.

EH: I think that's what I'm most proud of is we've been able to position the institution for a long-term success. I'm very proud of the fact that when I got here, we didn't have any reserves. I mean, you didn't need reserves because of the way the schools were funded under the funding formula. In fact, you got disadvantaged in some way if you had reserves then. So, I took the institution from that whereas today, when I retired in '14, we had about 45 million dollars in reserves, which was one of the highest reserve rates to budget because our total budget was maybe—it was 102 million, something like that at that time.

And the legislators would always say, "You don't need money. You're making money," and I said, "Well, we're building our own buildings. We don't come to you asking for money for buildings like the other schools do. We're constantly upgrading our technology, and there's costs in that." But I tell them, "What do you want? Do you want a school that is out there trying to position itself financially stable and independent, or do you want one that's dependent upon the tax dollars?" And they would always say, "No, Ed, we're very happy."

MT: "Now that we've thought about it."

EH: Now that we've thought about it, we kind of like what you're doing." Even though we did things sometimes that politically you would think would be difficult in Kansas, we're very easy in Kansas.

MT: Well, that's probably a good place to leave it. I think probably people continue to want to think about—political choices are always difficult. What are the things you can do to be maybe more successful in the area? I think public education on any side is going to have to be dealing with a political environment and a public environment and often a legislature. I think you've offered us some insights over the years of things you've been able to do somewhat unique to help this institution while still fitting in to some of the long-range goals of the Regents and the state had.

I very much appreciate your time. We certainly also appreciate our viewers. I hope you've learned something. I know I have. Thank you very much and thanks again to the Oral History Project.

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