

Interview of Senator TIM EMERT by Jim McLean, October 4, 2019
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Jim McLean: The date is October 4, 2019. It's roughly 1:00. We're in the Senate Chambers of the Kansas State House in Topeka, Kansas. I'm Jim McLean, a reporter and editor with the Kansas News Service. I've covered the legislature and Kansas politics for more than thirty years. I'll be interviewing Tim Emert, a former Kansas State senator, who served as Majority Leader in the Senate and then also did a term on the Board of Regents after he left the legislature. I'll be conducting the interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, the Kansas Oral History Project, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators, particularly those who served from the 1960s to 2000. The interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators. These interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council. The audio and video equipment is being operated by David Heinemann, a former legislator himself.

Tim Emert is a native of Independence. He earned his bachelor of science in 1962 from the School of Journalism at the University of Kansas, I didn't know that, and in 1965, a juris doctor degree also from KU. Emert's first elected office was on his local school board where he served in 1972 to 1987, when he was elected to the Kansas State Board of Education, serving there from 1987 to 1992. He served two years as board chair. In 1992, Emert was elected to represent the 15th Senatorial district, where he served as majority leader four years and chaired numerous legislative committees including a long stint as the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. In 2010, Governor Mark Parkinson appointed Emert to the Kansas Board of Regents, where he served as chair for one year. Emert continues to practice law in Independence, in Southeast Kansas, where he's from. Tim, welcome. Nice to see you again.

Tim Emert: Thank you, Jim.

JM: We're both KU graduates, but we'll refrain from talking about KU football. How about that?

TE: Please do.

JM: We'll go on to more substantial topics. The way we like to ease into these conversations here is just to talk to you a little bit about what prompted you to run for public office in the first place. Do you remember?

TE: It was a long time ago. Actually the first time I ran for public office was, as you said, was to our local school board, and it was just a matter of I had a daughter at that time that was just going into kindergarten, and I was young, and quite frankly, I was a new attorney in town, and it didn't hurt to get that exposure, but I've always had an interest in education in particular, and I guess public service.

JM: Remind me, you served on the local school board in Independence for roughly how long?

TE: Like thirteen years.

JM: A long time.

TE: It was an odd number of years because it was from there that I was elected to the State Board of Education.

JM: How did that service at the local level prepare you for what you ultimately did here at the State House?

TE: I mean, if you want to get down and dirty and in the weeds, you serve on a local school board, I think. It was a great experience. In fact, I served the entire time I had children in school. I have twin daughters. The year they graduated was the year I went on the state board.

JM: Then when you went to the State Board of Education, a lot of people don't really understand—I still remember early in my career doing a story. There was an on-again and off-again fight on whether or not members of the state board should be elected or appointed.

TE: Right.

JM: I remember doing a story where I went to downtown Topeka and asked maybe thirty people at random if they could tell me who their State Board of Education representative was. I think one could.

TE: I'm surprised.

JM: What prompted you then to move from the local level to run for that office in particular?

TE: I honestly don't remember, Jim. I remember being approached about it and being very honest. We had a member at that time, and this is getting kind of petty here, but we had a state board member that was going to retire. He was going to retire and then immediately file. Then he could draw his state pension, and then he could go back on the State Board. I just didn't think that was right. It wasn't that I didn't have an interest because I loved being on the State Board.

JM: Apparently, other people didn't think it was right either and approached you about running.

TE: And I was actually appointed at that time by Republican precinct committee people.

JM: When the person ended up resigning with the intention of then running again, thinking the way was clear. Did you face that person in a primary?

TE: We sat next to each other when the precinct people made the decision. No, then he did not run.

JM: So you served on the State Board of Education at a pretty pivotal time.

TE: Yes.

JM: It's when school finance was really emerging as a huge issue here in the State House. You got here to the State House about a year after that pretty momentous school finance decision in 1992. You arrived, what, the next year?

TE: Yes.

JM: They all kind of blend together.

TE: They do all kind of blend together. Actually the significant part about the state board when I was on there wasn't so much—we couldn't do anything about the finance thing.

JM: You could make a recommendation that you would hope the legislature would pay attention to.

TE: Yes, and back then it was kind of interesting. This is before the State Board got so political. I remember finding out after I went on the board and had been on for about a year maybe, there were ten members, and nine of us were Republicans, and there was one Democrat, and I didn't even know that because it was very congenial. Everybody was there for all the right reasons. I still love that Democrat a lot. She's a sweetheart. [Mildred McMillon from Tonganoxie]

JM: Do you remember who that was? All right. I remember covering the State Board of Education off and on, and maybe it wasn't political when you were there, but it got political.

TE: It got really bad.

JM: I'm trying to remember exactly the time frame. It got political around the financing issues, but also around things like the teaching of evolution in Kansas schools.

TE: While I was there, while I was chairman, we developed what became known as quality performance accreditation, and the schools were accredited differently, and the curriculum was established differently. A lot of the ultra-conservatives thought the evils of public education.

JM: That's been a debate throughout Kansas history, starting with the Constitution, when it was given a very high priority Constitutionally, public education was, but there's been a lot of debate about that. What prompted you then if you liked that job, it was nonpartisan, collegial, you felt like you were doing some good work, what made you decide to come over here and run for the legislature?

TE: I may be telling too many secrets.

JM: I think secrets, that's what we're after here. It's high time to disclose them twenty years later.

TE: Because my wife is in the room, I'm going to have to tell the truth. Actually my family knew that for a long time, I was interested in running for the legislature, whether it was the Senate or the House. First of all, we had three young daughters, and it was decided we're not going to do anything until they get out of high school. We had a string of a couple of senators that philosophically I did not agree with their position, and I thought, "I'll run." Then one of the senators said, "If you won't run against me this time, I won't file next time." [Senator Dan Thiessen] That's when I filed.

JM: That time table was set then.

TE: I agreed to wait it out four more years.

JM: Do you remember what it was, the political differences weren't quite as pronounced then as they are now.

TE: That is true.

JM: Do you remember what it was about the people who occupied that seat before you decided to run that made you think that you needed to get here yourself?

TE: The gentleman that had this seat was ultra-conservative. He was kind of anti-public education. He was just kind of against everything I believed was important. Maybe it wasn't that public, the differences, but it was certainly—

JM: Apparent to you.

TE: Yes.

JM: As somebody who was paying attention to what was going on over your relative education because you were on the State Board.

TE: And because of sitting in a local School Board and watching what the legislators are doing to public education.

JM: You arrive at the Capitol here and take your seat here in the Senate Chambers.

TE: Actually I sat one row behind us.

JM: When you first got here?

TE: Yes.

JM: But you were a fairly prominent member from the get-go. I don't recall from looking, but you chaired the Judiciary Committee for seven years here, right?

TE: The reason for that was usually a first-year person would not have that job, but there were two factors. #1, Jerry Moran was chairman, and he was running for Congress at that time from the Big First, and the other thing, there's a dearth of lawyers in the legislature. Not that I wouldn't rise head and shoulders above any number—

JM: That goes without saying.

TE: Good, but there were not many lawyers. I think at the time I thought there were four lawyers, maybe five, and three of those weren't practicing. One was a banker.

JM: That's interesting. I'm trying to remember, when I first came and started covering the legislature in the early eighties, it seemed like there were a lot of lawyers around. Maybe the Judiciary Committee itself, virtually every member was an attorney at some point. That clearly changed or had started to change when you got here. There was a dearth of lawyers in the legislature. What impact does that have on policy-making?

TE: I know it's easy to badmouth lawyers, but if you're going to pass laws, you ought to have—

JM: Remember, you're talking to a journalist.

TE: I know that. Remember you're talking to one, too. I have that degree. Where was I going?

JM: You were saying it's easy to badmouth lawyers, but—

TE: But there's a certain technique to reading. If you're going to read the bills just because some lobbyist tells you it's this way doesn't mean it's that way. A lot of times, a lot of laws are just limited technically to things that are not of public interest. There's just a lot of laws that the public couldn't care one way or other about it, but you've got to keep it right to make it apply to where you want it to apply.

JM: You want to make sure that whatever legislation you're working on does what it's intended to do. Often there are unintended consequences, and that can result from a bill that isn't precisely written, that kind of thing.

I remember Dave Heinemann, who's running the camera here, who again served in the legislature for a long time, remembers that when former Governor John Carlin, who also served as Speaker of the House, was being interviewed. He's a farmer, a dairy farmer, but he talked

about how important it was from his point of view to have lawyers in the legislative process for just the reason you cited.

TE: And people believe that now there's too many. Well, it's not popular to say there's not enough, but there weren't enough then. That's one reason I think I became Chairman of Judiciary so quickly.

JM: We were talking before we started the interview about some of the things that you had to deal with as Chair of the Judiciary Committee. One of those was the reinstatement of the death penalty in Kansas. When Governor Mike Hayden was first elected, one of his campaign planks was to restore the death penalty.

TE: Yes.

JM: He didn't get it done.

TE: Right.

JM: But the person who followed him in that office, former Governor, the late Joan Finney, didn't push for it.

TE: No, she did not.

JM: But there was a push in the legislature to restore it, and she ended up, as I recall, allowing it to become law without her signature.

TE: That is correct.

JM: You were also opposed to the death penalty philosophically.

TE: That's correct.

JM: But, as chairman of the committee, you felt you had a responsibility to give it a fair hearing.

TE: Right. The way that evolved was a death penalty was going to pass. That's just a known fact. The legislature was more aligned with Mike Hayden than they were with Joan Finney in general or with their positions on that. It was going to pass, and some what I consider very good friends of mine, and I respected their opinion, they said, "Tim, we've got to pass something." That's what we did. We passed a—I let come before the committee because I knew on the committee that it would be a very narrow death penalty, and it was very limited in the—

JM: Circumstances under which it could be applied.

TE: Yes. That's why it got out of committee.

JM: The reason why I ask you about that, I do think that's an interesting thing to discuss, which is the difference between being a rank and file member who simply has to study the issues and then vote your conscience versus the responsibilities that come with leading a committee. We see it time and time again in modern politics where somebody who is in a position like that and has the prerogative to not hear something or to bury something will do it because they're personally opposed.

TE: And I might have done it completely different, but you have to keep in mind that at the time we were doing that, I was also Majority Leader.

JM: Right. So you had a big responsibility to make the place function.

TE: I allowed it to happen, and they couldn't have gotten it out of committee without me agreeing to it.

JM: That was a long time ago. I think we're still waiting, are we not, for the first person to be executed under the law as it was reinstated?

TE: Right. I'm not sure, but I think maybe they expanded it a little bit, but they still haven't executed anyone.

JM: So that was an issue that you had to tackle as Chair. Then, of course, in that position you also had to deal with other controversial issues, abortion being one of them.

TE: Yes, abortion was another one.

JM: That was an issue off and on during your tenure as the Chair, right?

TE: That's correct.

JM: You actually wanted to make some, from your point of view, make some progress on that issue in the all-out fight over it and try to find some in-between ground. Tell me about that. What was the impetus for that and how did that turn out? Do you recall?

TE: Yes, I recall. It was quite a battle. With the help of the Revisor's Office, I developed a bill that would have narrowed abortions. The long story short was it was kind of a middle-of-the-ground—it saved babies, let me just say that. It didn't save them all, but it saved babies. The Far Right and the Kansans for Life folks were absolutely opposed to it. The Far Left were absolutely opposed to it, but we got it passed. Unfortunately, I think it was the next year or the year after, the legislature repealed it and did some crazy thing.

JM: And the idea was to impose additional restrictions on late-term abortions.

TE: Late-term abortions, yes.

JM: And you thought by doing that, that you could make some progress.

TE: I thought we were making progress, and it was constitutional. I don't know what the present United States Supreme Court, what is unconstitutional anymore, but up until then, we knew pretty well what would be constitutional and what wouldn't. Most of the things they were trying to pass were not constitutional.

JM: When you served here, it was a very interesting time. Things were changing in this building dynamically, politically.

TE: That is correct.

JM: So rather than put a label on you, how would you characterize your politics? Are you a moderate Republican, a conservative, somewhere in between?

TE: How about a realistic Republican?

JM: I'll accept that, if you tell me what it means.

TE: It means let's do what we can do, and let's don't grandstand. Let's don't play to the press. Let's just try to govern what's best for my wife and family and law and order. I tell you, it's kind of interesting. I don't know if you want to cover this. When I ran for Majority Leader, this was 1996. In my belief, that was the turning point of the ultra-conservatives, the Religious Right coming to power. When I ran, we had twenty-seven Republicans and thirteen Democrats in the Senate. As you know, when you run for Majority Leaders, just the Republicans vote. When I ran, the vote—when I say I ran, I won overwhelmingly. The vote was 14-13. I guess I've never said it publicly. I don't know if anyone knows this. The person that saved me and got me elected was a very conservative legislator. She was a woman that I had known. Actually she had come to Independence and worked for Sheila Bair's election to Congress. [That was Senator Janice Hardenburger from Washington County.] I chaired her committee.

JM: Sheila Bair was a longtime aide to US Senator Bob Dole, right?

TE: Before she ran, she was with Bob Dole. Then she became chairman of the FCC.

JM: A regulatory agency.

TE: She was very big. One time, I think it was Forbes magazine said she was the second most powerful woman in the world behind Merkel in Germany. Anyway, the lady that had run her

campaign, and I'd been her campaign chairman. When I was going to run for Majority Leader, I went to her first and said, "Would you support me?" and she said yes, and she held by that through the entire election, or I could not have been the Majority Leader because it was that close.

JM: For people who are interested in the legislative process, that's a really rich story, an interesting story, I think. One, because it occurred at the time things were changing here.

TE: Yes, it was.

JM: You were elected Majority Leader by one vote, 14-13, and the deciding vote was somebody who may not have been aligned with you down the line philosophically, but you had a personal relationship with that person, and she knew that you were fair, and you would run the Senate that way.

TE: I think so. I think that's what it's about, yes. She'd be the first to tell me no, if she wasn't going to be there.

JM: If you won that position by one vote, and the Majority Leader position is really important. There's a President of the Senate, but the Majority Leader has to keep this place running day to day, has to be able to whip votes, understand who's where on what issue. You really do need the full faith and confidence of your caucus at least, right? But how do you achieve that when you win by such a close margin?

TE: First of all, you try to be fair with everybody. I tried—I was kind of a no surprises kind of a guy. I hate to say not everybody in the Senate was a no surprises. I think if you be open and honest—we had three parties in the Senate. There was no doubt about it. We had thirteen Democrats, thirteen conservative Republicans, and we had thirteen moderate Republicans, and we had that one person. Consequently, on many issues, I had more in common with Anthony Hensley than I had with many of my caucus. That's how you got things done.

JM: That's how you got things done. If you had to rely on the Democrats sometimes to get things done, that can create more division in your caucus.

TE: Let me tell you something that might have saved me from that. The very first thing out of the box, Dick Bond became President of the Senate. I became Majority Leader, and we had this division of people and policy. The very first vote in the Senate was one in which the Democrats sided with our opposition, the ultra-conservatives and put it to us, a total surprise.

JM: Do you remember what that issue was?

TE: Sure I do. It was changing the rules of the Senate so that a two-thirds vote of the Senate could pull any bill out of committee. They changed it to a majority could pull any bill out of the Senate.

JM: So they could force something to the floor.

TE: Yes. It really didn't settle very well with many of us, probably mostly because we weren't told it was going to happen, and then you just come in, and you're slapped in the face. Interestingly, I don't recall one time when it was ever used, but it got changed, and it showed everybody's stripes.

JM: What's interesting, too, you said that the Senate was equally divided into—

TE: Three parts.

JM: So when you had to get something done, that deciding vote could be a different person each time, depending on what the issue was.

TE: That's very true.

JM: That really did complicate trying to get something done, right?

TE: That's very true.

JM: So at the same time that you were the Majority Leader here, the leadership in the House was changing.

TE: Yes. It had pretty much changed

JM: Tim Shallenburger had been elected Speaker prior and the first Social Conservative to serve in that role. Then Robin Jennison followed him.

TE: That's right.

JM: What was it like with the Senate leadership and the House leadership in terms of dealing with one another?

TE: It was a juggling act because he's got to take care of his people. We ran a lot of races across the rotunda to visit with each other. Sometimes it was very frustrating because—sometimes we felt like we went over and had our conversations, and we agreed on something. By the time we got back to our side, it had changed. And maybe it's good because then you meet some place in the middle. Maybe we were too radical on some things. We wanted to do things like maybe

spend some money that they didn't want to spend and wanted to support education more. Education was always something that we argued about.

JM: Let's talk about that. That is something, again as we mentioned earlier, that has been an important conversation and often an important debate throughout the history of the state, public education whether it's elementary, secondary education, or university funding and so forth. I'm trying to think of when the university system was reorganized. You went to serve on the Board of Regents. I think that was later under Governor Graves, wasn't it?

TE: Yes. Here was let's get along. Christine Downey and I—

JM: A Democrat near Inman.

TE: Wrote Senate Bill 123.

JM: You can remember the number?

TE: That one you heard so many times. It was the bill that reorganized higher ed because the thorn in everybody's side at that time was, not a thorn, but the problem was community colleges. What do you do with community colleges?

Even when I was on the State Board, community colleges were with the State Board then. They didn't like being there. The State Board didn't really have time or staff to do much with them.

JM: Properly. As I recall, the rationale for doing that reorganization, particularly with the community colleges, was people wanted to have a comprehensive higher education system that aligned better. They thought there was duplication in the system. The Board of Regents wanted some authority to help universities eliminate that duplication and to get community college working better with the four-year schools.

TE: That may be true. I don't know how anxious all the four-year schools were to have them or even how anxious the Board of Regents were to have them, but we thought it was right. I think it's been advantageous.

JM: A little side discussion here. You come from part of the state, Southeast Kansas.

TE: We have a few community colleges.

JM: There's a proliferation of community colleges. Independence, Coffeyville is how far from Independence?

TE: Sixteen miles.

JM: And there's a community college there. There's one in Parsons. There's one in Chanute. There's one in Iola. With the resources of this state, can all of those be sustained at a high level?

TE: I don't know that that's a problem. So much of them are funded locally.

JM: Yes, local taxes.

TE: We have the only county that has two community colleges. That is a constant thorn in some people's side. But it's been proven that we're not paying any more in taxes than Cowley County is or Allen County is for those two community colleges. In fact, there's arguments to be made that it's cheaper to have two than combine them into one. Then you'd have another level of bureaucracy to support, but that has always been a problem.

The problem, and community colleges, I think it probably has continued had problems, they want it in the Board of Regents, by and large. The only one that did not want to be a part of the Board of Regents was the biggest one in the state, and that's not hard to guess which one is that.

JM: Johnson County, right.

TE: We always said there's eighteen community colleges and Johnson County.

JM: It's big. It's bigger now than it was then.

TE: It's like the third largest higher education institution in the state or something like that. They were happy. Most community colleges were unhappy. They felt like they were ignored by the State Board. Johnson County kind of liked it that way. But luckily the President over there was a great guy, just a super guy. He said, "I'm staying out of it. We're not going to lobby our legislators. We're not going to get in the middle of this. If it's best for the system, then we're for it, but we're not going to talk about it."

JM: Back to the bigger topic of just education generally. As long as I covered the legislature, that issue is always at the top of the list in terms of priorities and what's important. As we mentioned before, you got here the year after significant reform legislation was passed that created a statewide mill levy.

TE: Yes.

JM: The issue was because of property valuation, there was a lot of variation. If you wanted to fund your schools, it required this many mills in one place and a lot fewer mills someplace else with a power plant or some mineral wealth or something like that. This was an attempt to try—

the battle we're still fighting in Kansas to put everybody on kind of an even footing in terms of funding, right?

TE: Right.

JM: You got here the next year, but that wasn't—just because that legislation had passed, that debate was not over.

TE: It was major. I suffered from it because I represented in the state Senate the richest county in the state and the poorest county in the state. That would be Chautauqua County is the poorest. It was at that time. And Coffey County with Burlington and the power plant was the richest.

JM: The Wolf Creek power plant.

TE: The Wolf Creek power plant. They got money to burn. To this day, every little community has a fabulous library that Wolf Creek has built, and the schools are Cadillacs.

JM: I remember driving back and forth to Parsons, where I was from, on the 75 Highway there, and seeing the new football stadium go up that I think was a direct result of that.

TE: We're talking small college, yes. That was a lot of problems of disparity there. They were trying to equalize that. Then you have the problem of—of course, Johnson County is another county that just had a lot of money without much of a mill levy. I can't remember the exact figures now, but it used to be like one mill in Coffey County would raise \$200,000, and in Chautauqua County, it would raise \$20. That's exaggerating, but it was ridiculous.

So if you believe every child should have an equal education regardless of where they live in this state, then you think something's got to be done.

JM: That was the principle that was underlying that entire debate.

TE: That is correct.

JM: In that same law, they created the local option budget.

TE: Yes, which created a whole different set—

JM: Created a whole different set of problems. People argued, particularly in Johnson County, the argument from that standpoint was we have the resources in this county to have really quality schools, and who are you to say that we can't spend it the way we want to spend it, right? The local option budget was created to give, essentially allow districts to levy essentially

an extra property tax for local purposes. A lot of people argued from its inception that that was disqualifying in and of itself.

TE: And it was. The question was how—there was always a cap on how much they could do the local option budget. In the initial years, the question was whether they could even keep their local option budget that they had under the old law.

JM: What was the immediate fall-out after the passage of that law when you got here? What was being debated then when you first got here in terms of changing that formula or modifying it somehow?

TE: I think when I first got here, it was more or less, “Let's find out what we've done. Let's find out where we are.”

JM: Even then you were dealing with the courts. That law was passed essentially again because—I can't remember the exact number—but I think more than forty school districts had filed lawsuits that had been consolidated in the court here in Shawnee County and the late Terry Bullock had been presiding over the case. That's when a lot of this back and forth that we're still dealing with to some degree today, the court was telling you that this law, the formula that existed at the time wasn't fair.

TE: Right. It wasn't fair. So how are you going to fix it?

JM: When you got here, then the debate was still you weren't sure about how the law that you passed in '92 was actually going to play out.

TE: It's all about those unintended consequences.

JM: Do you recall, generally speaking?

TE: I don't. I think such a major blow had been struck by the law itself of saying “This is where we are” that everything else was kind of working around the fringes at that point.

JM: How difficult was it to hold that coalition together in terms of the people who wanted to make sure that public schools were funded—again, the eye of the beholder—were funded at an adequate level, people like you.

TE: I don't really have a memory of that. It was just business as usual. If you're a pro-education person, fighting about funding is kind of like getting up and eating breakfast. It's just something you do. It's always there.

JM: Were those the days when the day would come when you would be debating the annual school finance bill, and everybody would sit on the floor of the House or the Senate with these

big print-outs and going down to figure out exactly what the impact of this small change was on their districts?

TE: I don't believe in saints on earth, but if there is one, it's Dale Dennis, just unbelievable, page after page after page.

JM: Just for the record, so to speak, Dale Dennis had been at the State Department of Education for a long time. He is quite a character. he has a unique way of expressing himself, of talking. He's got that pencil behind his ear, and he had mastered all of that and could do almost those kind of calculations in his head on the spot.

TE: And you haven't censored what I'm supposed to say or can say, I will tell you that he is the most abused individual in this town by certain people in the legislature and the most unappreciated. He does the work of ten people, and he does it well impartially.

JM: Yes, he's been here for a long time. There was a move a couple of years ago to essentially discredit him.

TE: Oh, yes.

JM: It backfired.

TE: Yes.

JM: He's been on the scene here for a long, long time.

TE: He's still here.

JM: You got to know him probably pretty well.

TE: Very well.

JM: You were on the State Board.

TE: Actually clear back to when I was on the local School Board. He was giving seminars to local school boards back then.

JM: What else stands out to you about your service here in terms of issues, personal relationships. When you walked into this chamber, did it trigger any memories, any specific memories?

TE: It has to. It has to, some good, some bad. Mostly good, mostly good. I think one of the truest statements I've ever heard, and this is certainly not original. The first thing that people

ask you is “Do you miss being in the Senate?” and the answer is, “I miss the people, but I don't miss the process.” I loved the people. (I misspoke on this.)

JM: The people here, this place, it grows on you when you're here.

TE: It does.

JM: I said think I think previously, but it's a little bit like its own little small town.

TE: I've got to think it's almost like going back to your high school. You spend so many years in high school with the same people, and you make all of these memories and friendships. It's kind of like going back, going home.

JM: There's a lot of talks these days about the way legislative bodies at the state and the federal level function, and there's a concern that the personal relationships aren't as strong as they used to be, and that that has an impact on public policy. The partisanship is at such a high level that it gets in the way of doing the public's business. Again, some of the was changing while you were here. What do you remember about personal relationships across the aisle and maybe with people of different philosophies?

TE: It's like working on that higher ed bill with Christine Downey who's obviously of a different political party. I have great respect for Anthony Hensley. I just think he is a jewel. Of course, I have a great relationship with Dick Bond. We're of the same party, but we spent a lot of time together. Senator Pat Ranson and her husband, Jack. Pat and I were polar opposite on social issues but we continued to be great friends until her death; Senator Carolyn Tillotson was defeated on her run for re-election. We were great friends and she eventually became my chief of staff and we continued to be good friends.

JM: People did socialize around here in ways that maybe—

TE: I don't think they do it anymore. We used to have receptions or little get-togethers with people of the opposite party. It wasn't bad. It was great.

JM: Were you able to work things out that way before you got on the floor here?

TE: Yes, I think you could. One of my great regrets is I probably took on too much. When you're a majority leader and you're also the—

JM: Chair of the Judiciary.

TE: Chair of the Judiciary, which handles more bills and more complicated things than anybody.

JM: It was a heavy load.

TE: I kept busy.

JM: Maybe you didn't go to every one of those receptions, probably.

TE: After about two years, you find out that #1, you don't have to go, and #2, you can pick and choose the ones you really—I shouldn't even say this. Rochelle Chronister who is one of my dearest friends was a constituent of mine. I represented her county.

JM: That's Wilson County?

TE: Wilson County. She's a great mentor. She used to tell me all the things—

JM: She was a longtime House member and was Chair of the Republican Party for a while.

TE: Yes, and then Secretary of SRS.

JM: Of course, right.

TE: Early on, I was complaining, "Oh, I had to go to this thing last night where there wasn't even any of my constituents there. It was three hours." She said, "You don't have to go even if you have constituents. You can go have a drink, and then you can leave if you have something else to do." I wouldn't take anything for the experience.

JM: Looking back, was there anything that you thought you had a big personal role in making happen here that you consider, when you think back on those years, you consider a bit of a legacy, other than just helping the place run officially while you were here?

TE: Well, we started out the remodeling of this place. It was part of it.

JM: Right. That's when it all began. It took forever.

TE: What nobody talks about is we had a big fight with certain people about redoing Cedar Crest. One of the sweetest things that ever happened to me was there was a bill. Since I controlled the bills, you could push them ahead, and I pushed up the bill to get the Cedar Crest thing going. Katie Graves, you know who that is?

JM: Bill Graves's daughter.

TE: The governor's daughter, who at that time was about four years old, brought me a box of cookies, she and Bill's personal assistant came up in the elevator, and I got this box of cookies from Katie Graves. It's just a sweet little thing you don't forget.

JM: Was she lobbying you for something?

TE: No, it was already. We'd already done it. We'd already gotten what her mother wanted. Linda usually got what she wanted.

JM: They greatly improved that place.

TE: Heavens, yes.

JM: I remember going there. Back in those days, there was a lot more collegiality around here, even with members of the media. Typically the media was invited to Cedar Crest for sort of a Christmas get-together with the governor. I remember going out there when Mike Hayden was governor. I think we went down into the basement and watched the Super Bowl or something. I remember thinking how threadbare it seemed.

TE: Yes.

JM: I then went back several years later to see Governor Graves on multiple occasions. I was really impressed by the way they had just transformed that place, particularly the basement, which had just really—they did a great job.

TE: The First Lady should get a lot of credit for that. She and Friends of Cedar Crest, I think it's called, raised a lot of money. It wasn't just taxpayer dollars that fixed that place up.

JM: I think it was before your time, but Karen Carlin when she was First Lady, there was a big controversy about building a swimming pool out there. It never happened. That's a really interesting place. It's the governor's mansion. It sits up on the bluffs of the river outside Topeka. It's really a nice place.

But back to the renovation of the Capitol. That's got to be something that you're proud of.

TE: Oh, yes. The bill we did only renovated the Capitol. It was mostly done to upgrade electrical and technical stuff.

JM: Something had to be done.

TE: It was later that they added the underground parking. That's not in the original bill, and it's beautiful. We were down there today. It's fantastic.

JM: I remember covering the renovations. It took so long. When I was at the Topeka newspaper, they brought people in. They brought in a Scottish stone mason to go up on scaffolding and sound all the limestone on the building because it had been caulked inappropriately many, many years before, and water was getting behind it. He would paint it

with a rubber hammer. Big pieces of it would just fall off because the water had gotten behind it. The point of all that is how painstaking the work was and what a great job over time they did to restore this place.

TE: It took time, but it was worth it.

JM: Real quickly, let's talk a little bit about your tenure on the Board of Regents. Do you remember anything specific about that time? You were chairman for a while.

TE: I was.

JM: Governor Parkinson appointed you.

TE: I had served in the Senate with Mark. He called and said, "Would you be interested in going on the Board of Regents?" and I said I hadn't given it a lot of thought. I had retired. He said, "I'm going to reappoint the people this time, but the next time, I want you to be it, if you'll do it." So I did it. It was great. It was enjoyable. It was a pleasure. It wasn't the work of even the State Board of Education. It's a well-run operation. It was interesting to see how it worked out with the community colleges being there. I think they still felt a little neglected. It wasn't just the State Board.

The thing about that is that the community colleges are the only entity that have their own board.

JM: Right. The Board of Trustees at every one of them.

TE: They control the purse strings. It is like a school board. The Regents are accustomed to governing the high education system. If they tell you to do something, it usually gets done. If the community college doesn't like it, they'll say, "We don't listen to you. We have our own board."

JM: What was your overall impression of the quality of the university system?

TE: I think they're fantastic. The thing I probably learned the most about being on the Board of Regents was how impressive the regional schools are. Everybody knows KU is wonderful and K State, I hate to say it, is even wonderful.

JM: That's big of you. That really is.

TE: The things that go on in Pittsburg and Emporia and Hays are just amazing. Wichita, I was surprised about it. I grew up in an area that Wichita was a university, it wasn't too far away, and I thought it was this little city college kind of place.

JM: Hardly.

TE: That it was a lot of part-timers go to pick up stuff there. Wichita is amazing.

JM: I think that was one of the intentions of reorganization was to help each one of those schools find a niche that it can occupy and really excel in. I think we've seen that happen in Pittsburg and Hays and Emporia where they're really kind of taking something on that really is identifiable with that school. You were there at that time when all of that was kind of taking shape.

TE: To be personal, I have only one grandchild. That's all I'm going to get. I have a grandson. I'd love for him to go to KU, but I'd be thrilled if he went to any school in this state.

JM: That says a lot about it.

TE: The regional ones are so student oriented. Just by numbers, they can be, but they focus on it. One of my daughters went to Emporia. She started out at KU. She came home. It was kind of funny. She said, "I have two things I want to tell you, Dad, and you're not going to like either one of them." She was a freshman at KU then. She said, "#1, I want to be a high school English teacher. I know they don't make any money, but that's what I want to be."

JM: Let's park that for a second. I want to know why you would object to that, but go ahead.

TE: "The other thing is, I want to go to Emporia. I want to leave KU and go to Emporia." I said to her mother, "It could have been drugs or a pregnancy."

JM: You're saying those things would be preferable.

TE: No, no, no.

JM: That would be even worse.

TE: When she said, "You're not going to like it," "I love it. Just please finish this year at KU. When you finish the year, we'll send you to Emporia." She went to Emporia and loved it.

JM: I am curious, something we just kind of breezed past when we started talking when I was going over your bio and realized you were a J-School graduate.

TE: Yes.

JM: Why did you pick that?

TE: Can I take the Fifth? Actually I had more majors in college than you can believe. I was going to start out to be a chemical engineer. I went into speech and drama. I went into business. Suddenly I decided I wanted to go to law school. I looked at the requirements to get into law school, and I found that if I went into the J-School, I could graduate in four years. J-School, a lot of things apply. I was taking freshman and senior classes in the J-School all at the same time, and I graduated and got into law school. I don't press the people that say, "I have a journalism degree."

JM: But that goes back to yourself as realistic and pragmatic. you saw a means to an end there, right?

TE: Right.

JM: You went to J-School. Was that in the early sixties?

TE: I would have graduated from there in '62. I graduated from high school in '58 and then '62.

JM: So it wasn't a burning desire to be a muckraker or anything like that.

TE: William Allen White was not a name I even hardly knew.

JM: I was just curious about that. I didn't know that about you. It does seem interesting. Chemical engineering, theatre, did you say?

TE: Yes, I was a theatre major at one time. I was a business major.

JM: You really were trying to find yourself, weren't you?

TE: Yes, I did. I haven't found me yet.

JM: It's been a pleasure taking with you.

TE: I enjoyed it. Thank you, Jim.

JM: Thank you on behalf of all of us for your service to this state.

TE: It's been rewarding to get to know people like you.

JM: Thanks.

[End of File]

