

*[This is one of ten oral history interviews of Kansas legislators in 2015 by Dr. Burdett Loomis done under the auspices of the University of Kansas and the Shawnee County Historical Society with funding from the Kansas Humanities Council. This set of interviews became the foundation for the Kansas Oral History Project with its incorporation.]*

LOOMIS: So, it's March 30th in Pratt, Kansas. We're with Fred Kerr at his wonderful urban-suburban-rural home here.

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LOOMIS: Usually I just start these interviews with asking you how you got into politics? How did you first decide to run for the Legislature?

KERR: Well, I had done a number of things locally, such as Chamber of Commerce, United Fund, church administrative board, [Kansas] Farm Bureau, so I had an interest in local affairs. And then the state senator who held this position was retiring in 1976. My family and I took a good—

LOOMIS: What was his—who was that?

KERR: Williams, Dick Williams was his name. And so, my family and I took a look at the feasibility of trying to win that seat. We determined that it was feasible. The district at that time covered about seven counties, but Pratt was at the center, which was an advantage for somebody from Pratt.

LOOMIS- How big was Pratt at that time?

KERR: About 7,000 people, and that's about what it is now.

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KERR: But that's the biggest town—

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KERR: —in that district. So, we went to work. Nancy, of course, is a great asset. She's a good campaigner. She's well known. She's a singer, and so a lot of people knew her, and that was an advantage for me as well. And we ran a successful campaign, primary and general, and—

LOOMIS: Was this pretty much a Republican district at that time?

KERR: It was, although there was a very strong Democrat that was running in the general election, W. W. Graber from—

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KERR: G-r-a-b-e-r, from Reno County, and he had been in the House for several terms.

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KERR: And so, he was well-known, too, although I was from the center of the district, and he was not.

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KERR: And that was a hard-fought campaign, but we ended the campaign friends.

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KERR: And that's the way it was then. You worked hard in the election, but then when it was over, your friends.

LOOMIS: Did you have a primary?

KERR: I did. It was not a hard-fought primary.

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KERR: It was not closely contested.

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KERR: But the general election was. And I think the final result was something like 53 percent to 47 with me and Mr. Graber.

LOOMIS: So, you talked a little bit about your previous civic engagement. Did you grow up here in Pratt?

KERR: In Pratt County. I grew up in the town of Coats, which is about twelve miles southwest of Pratt, and that's where our farm was and is, and so—a very tiny town, but that's where I grew up. But I did—most of our civic work was here in Pratt.

LOOMIS: - And so, were those informal kind of connections you had through your civic engagement—did that form, do you think, the basis of your campaign?

KERR: It did. First, it gave me some experience—

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KERR: —in leadership, because I did end up chairman of several of those things that I was in, so I thought that would better prepare me—

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KERR: —which is did, for service in the Legislature. And my family always was interested in local affairs. By “family,” I mean Dad and Mom and Granddad. So, there was some of that as we were growing up, —

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KERR: —Dave and me. There were just the two of us. Dave and I were brothers in the family.

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KERR: And so, there were interests locally. My dad served extensively on the hospital board here at Pratt. In fact, when he died suddenly in 1979, he was chairman of the hospital board—

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KERR: —here in Pratt at that time, so he was certainly involved, as well as my mother. So, all of those interests I think helped get Dave and I—

LOOMIS: - Just while we're still on the family—so you were in your first term in the Legislature, and your father died.

KERR: Yes.

LOOMIS: Did that—I would only assume that created some requirements that you be back here more, or in the family business.

KERR: Well, it did. We made some changes in the business. We'd been in—cattle had been part of the business, —

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KERR: —and we ended that. But, yes, my father died one night of a heart attack, totally unexpected.

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KERR: I mean, one hour I was talking to him, and two hours later he was gone.

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KERR: So of course, it was a shock, and it affected the business some, yes. But we had some good help, and—

LOOMIS: And did you ever think that maybe, you know, it would be difficult to serve after that?

KERR: Well, the calendar does work for the farm business—

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KERR: —if you don't have livestock, which we did end that. But for the grain production business, which is what we did then and do now, the calendar works pretty well. You've got some time flexibility in the winter.

LOOMIS: It was kind of set up for farmers.

KERR: I think it was.

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KERR: And ironically, I just saw, in reviewing files, that I had a great-grandfather who was in the House of Representatives in 1909.

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KERR: - And so, I guess—now, that has nothing to do with my service, because I wasn't even aware of that.

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KERR: I came across it later. But, yes, it kind of runs in the family.

LOOMIS: - So is 1976—in a sense, you’re coming in at the end of that great era of reform, the [Robert F.] “Bob” Bennett era, which took kind of a horse-and-buggy Kansas government into what I would call the modern age, and you’re serving in, what, the last two years of the Bennett—

KERR: Yes, he was Governor.

LOOMIS: —governorship. So how did you learn the ropes of being a state senator once you got to Topeka?

KERR: Well, that’s a good question because as far as how the Legislature operates, I was green. I had everything yet to learn. But there were some good mentors in the Senate, and my first term, the Senate -

KERR: And I was—

LOOMIS: And that was the term—was that the term that [John W.] Carlin was actually speak- —he was Speaker. That meant the Democrats had a slight majority in the House that year.

KERR: Wasn’t he minority leader?

LOOMIS: I think they got the majority in ’77.

KERR: Well, they got the majority at one point, because Marvin Barkis became the Speaker.

LOOMIS: But that was the second time.

KERR: Oh, that was the second time.

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KERR: Okay.

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KERR: Well, maybe John was the Speaker.

LOOMIS: He was, by 63-62.

KERR: Okay.

LOOMIS: So, in any event, it was very close, right.

KERR: It was. But then there were some very good mentors. [Robert] “Bob” Talkington and [Charles L.] “Charlie” Angell, [Joseph C.] “Joe” Harder. And some of those folks were really on my side, and so even though I didn’t know what committees I should ask to serve on, they did, and so they helped set me up with a good agenda of committees that first term, which helped get me started. And then I was very serious about learning the rules and the procedures, and even though I was green to start with, I did learn it.

LOOMIS: - Well, see, if there were only twenty-two, twenty-three senators, that's not too many senators to serve across the board on committees, so you did have some opportunities to get on—

KERR: Very much.

LOOMIS: —some good committees at the very beginning.

KERR: Certainly did. What did they call it? Energy and Natural Resources—

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KERR: —at that time, to deal with water issues, —

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KERR: —which of course are important now across the state here.

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KERR: I was on the Taxation Committee and then later became chair of the Taxation Committee, and so, again, some of those senators were taking care of me.

LOOMIS: - So, when you moved to Topeka—you were up there for the work week, the five day[s], and then did you come back to Pratt on the weekends?

KERR: Yes, and there were actually two or three years when we took our kids to Topeka, and we would live in a home—

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KERR: —up there, and put our—our daughter was the older, so she would be in the school system. So would our son. During that time of year.

LOOMIS: No kidding!

KERR: Yeah, yeah, so that was pretty unusual.

LOOMIS: I was just going to say, that seems very uncommon to me.

KERR: Yeah. But, of course, the teachers would work together, and I wouldn't call it an ideal situation, but I think if you ask our kids now, they'd say yes, it was a positive experience, even though it disrupted—

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KERR: —their friends.

LOOMIS: But they were fairly young.

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LOOMIS: I'm trying to think of taking a sophomore in high school and do that.

KERR: No, they weren't that old. They were in the grade school.

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KERR: Nancy would remember exactly which years we did that. But they were in grade school, and I think our son was just in, like, preschool.

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KERR: Yeah, but they went up and were in the Topeka school system for several weeks those years.

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KERR: But that just was probably two or three years.

LOOMIS: -So, what did your constituents in Pratt think of that arrangement?

KERR: Oh, I think they liked it, and the fact that here was a younger family—

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KERR: —with the dad serving in the Senate. I think they appreciated that.

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KERR: Not too many have that opportunity at that age.

LOOMIS: - And speaking of age, how old were you when you ran?

KERR: Well, in '76, which is when the election was, —

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KERR: —I would have been thirty-five.

LOOMIS: - So that would be reasonably unusual.

KERR: Yeah. And it was, especially then. There were—I remember on the Democrat side—it was 21 to 19, and the Democrats did have two or three young men who were senators.

LOOMIS: -. So, what's—getting to Topeka, what—if you can remember back, what surprised you, do you think? It's hard to, you know, forty years after the fact, you're remembering first impressions, but do you have a sense of What have I got myself into?

KERR: Oh, well, one surprise probably along that line was leadership races, and that's when, of course, your own caucus—in my case, the Republicans—

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KERR: —you select the leaders, and I didn't know these people personally very well before I started serving with them.

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KERR: And as I recall, there was a pretty spirited race for majority leader. Ross [O.] Doyen was Senate president, —

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KERR: —but there was a hotly-contested race for majority leader. So that kind of, oh, pressure, if we want to call it that—

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KERR: That was kind of a surprise, and that was very quickly. I mean, that's before—

LOOMIS: No, no, exactly.

KERR: —that's before he'd even started to serve in the Legislature, because these leadership elections take place a few weeks beforehand.

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KERR: So, I remember that.

LOOMIS: Who were contending? Do you remember?

KERR: Well, Norman [E.] Gaar and Joe Harder.

LOOMIS: Oh, sure, sure.

KERR: And Norman Gaar got it.

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KERR: And Joe Harder continued as Education chairman, which was of course important then, as it is now. And I believe Joe had been majority leader. I think Norman Gaar unseated him.

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KERR: And that was—in those days, that was kind of the moderate versus conservative battle.

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KERR: And that wasn't nearly as divisive as those battles are now. But in a way, Norman Gaar was the moderate, —

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KERR: —Ross Doyen was the conservative, —

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KERR: —as Senate president, but the way things were so evenly split, Ross ended up supporting Norman Gaar.

LOOMIS: - That's interesting. So, one of my great regrets in this project is that Ross Doyen died before we got to interview him, and that's probably my fault, but Ross Doyen had a very long career—

KERR: He did.

LOOMIS: —in the Senate. That kind of taps into the middle of it. How did you—in getting up there—and twenty-one Republicans. Ross Doyen needed everyone. Can you describe your relationship with Doyen as you start out?

KERR: Well, at that time the relationship was good, and Ross was very helpful. Here I was, somebody he didn't know, but I went up and met him—

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KERR: —so he was helpful and had suggestions for the campaign and so forth, and to some extent, I was a surprise because W. W. Graber, the Democrat that I ran against, was well known in the House, —

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KERR: —and a lot of people up there assumed he would win that seat.

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KERR: Had he won it, it would have been the 20-20 split, so I was kind of the surprise. So, things were pretty good, and Ross helped me get good committees. He was certainly part of that, —

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KERR: —and even though I didn't know it at the time, he was helping me get some things that really helped later on.

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KERR: That did a change a few years later, when I supported Bob Talkington to become Senate president, having felt that Ross had had two terms already, —

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KERR: —plus part of another, I think.

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KERR: And Bob Talkington was more the moderate, and I felt it was time for that change. So, four years later, I guess that would have been 1980 leadership elections.

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KERR: And Ross—no, I think it was later than that. I believe it was '84 when that happened.

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KERR: That's what it was. Ross had served two terms as the Senate president, but in '84 I did support Bob Talkington.

LOOMIS: And Talkington won.



KERR: And Talkington won. Dave was a brand-new freshman senator at that time. He also supported Bob Talkington. So, Ross to some extent blamed us for his loss.

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KERR: Because, again, it was a close election.

LOOMIS: - Now, those Senate elections with a small number of people are very intimate affairs.

KERR: Mm-hm. Yes, they are. And after your first term, then you know these people well.

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KERR: And so, you have to make a choice, and then, of course, I became involved later on, myself.

LOOMIS: We'll talk about that.

As your first term unfolded between '76 and '80, now, how did you, once being up there for a couple of sessions—you know, how did you, at least early in your career, approach your job? How did you spend your week?

KERR: Well, I had a busy committee—I think I was on five committees that met most days, so there's five hours out of the day right there.

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KERR: And starting at eight o'clock in the morning, so—

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KERR: —you had to get a lot of things done before eight o'clock.

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KERR: So that occupied the days. I was on the Agriculture Committee, which—that's not an important committee in the Legislature as it's viewed in Topeka.

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KERR: It's important out here.

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KERR: But by being on that committee and carrying, on behalf of the committee, some of the bills on the Senate floor, I certainly learned the process. And so that actually was helpful, to carry some of the bills on behalf of the committee, as those bills were being debated on the Senate floor. So that was part of the learning process.

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KERR: And they weren't major bills—

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KERR: —at that time. I mean, they were bills. They were important to somebody. But that was part of my learning process.

LOOMIS: - Actually, that's really interesting, the idea that not that [unintelligible; 21:13] the bills but— not everybody—it's not a tax bill, it's not a big omnibus appropriations bill, —

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LOOMIS: —but it's still a bill you got to carry.

KERR: Yeah, and learn the process.

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KERR: And if it was controversial at all, you had to learn the process of counting votes.

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KERR: I don't remember a specific bill where that happened during that first term, but that's part of it.

LOOMIS: So, in the middle of your first term or your first four years, somewhat surprisingly to everyone, John Carlin becomes a Democrat. The former Speaker becomes Governor. Bob Bennett, who—in many ways—was a great hero to me—for a variety of reasons is beaten. How did that change your job in the Senate? Did it change it at all, having John Carlin, a Democrat, in the governor's office?

KERR: Well, what I remember about that—first of all, it was a surprise that John Carlin beat Bob Bennett, and I had high respect for Bob Bennett. What an articulate person!

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KERR: But as it turns out, as you go across the state, Bob Bennett didn't identify with a lot of the people across the state as well, and John Carlin, a farm boy—

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KERR: —from somewhere near Salina, —

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KERR: —who was a personable, down-to-earth guy—and he did connect with a lot of people across the state, and so he won. But what I remember about that—you know that it was a surprise, and in this case, John Carlin was a Democrat.

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KERR: But I remember it was a hard-fought election, but once it was over, the Republicans and the Democrats worked together to solve whatever the problems were of the day. And that continued during all of the time that I was in the Senate.

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KERR: You worked together to solve the important issues of the day.

LOOMIS: - After your first term, did you ever face serious electoral opposition again?

KERR: No. There were opponents. I don't think any of the races were very close.

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KERR: So, of course, at that point, then, I had the advantage.

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KERR: The district remained the same, with Pratt being—

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KERR: —in the center.

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KERR: The boundaries changed a little, and then I was known at that point because I did—well, you asked about how we spent our time the first term or even later on. Many of the Saturdays we would come back here and hold town hall meetings in the county seats—well, not always county seats but in the towns—

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KERR: —in the district.

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KERR: So that serves two purposes. The first one is to listen and explain what's going on or listen to what the reactions are and see what the people want to say, and then you do become more known that way.

LOOMIS: Sure, sure. Of course.

KERR: So, had advantages, then, in future elections.

LOOMIS: -

Did you have—there's a congressional scholar, a great one, named Richard [F.] Fenno [Jr.], who talks about various constituencies, but one of the constituencies he talks about is kind of a personal constituency. Did you have a group of friends, particularly from down here, that you'd check in with on any—you know, on a regular basis?

KERR: Oh, yes. I mean, we certainly have a group of friends that we were in contact with. Most of them were not really involved in whatever the legislative issues were.

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KERR: So as far as getting feedback, maybe not. But there was personal support, certainly, and encouragement and some great people when we did have campaigns, in which you'd have chairmen in each county and organization and, oh, some great people and great support during those times. But that was mainly in election years.

LOOMIS: -. What was your relationship—so you got on Ag Committee and, of course, Taxes [sic] was very important, as we're learning today [chuckles] to the ag community.

KERR: Oh, boy!

LOOMIS: -But what was your relationship with the agricultural community in Topeka, the ag groups?

KERR: Oh, I think very good. The prominent groups at that time, and many still are, would be Farm Bureau and the LA, [Kansas] Livestock [Association]. Those are two that I worked with a lot.

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KERR: Then there were water issues, and I think some groups—I can't remember the formal names but associated with water. But in the agriculture arena, those were the two big ones. I think they probably still are—

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KERR: —the two most prominent.

LOOMIS: Sure. So, I mean, would you talk to their lobbyists—

KERR: Yes.

LOOMIS: —on a regular basis?

KERR: And that's one thing. Maybe that was a surprise. Honestly, a lot of people maybe thought lobbyists was a little shady in reputation- —but you really—at least in those days, you relied on what they told you, and they had to tell you the truth.

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KERR: If they didn't, and you found out later that they gave you some slanted or information that wasn't correct, then they've hurt their own credibility.

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KERR: So, they couldn't afford to do that.

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KERR: So, I did learn, and maybe this was kind of unexpected, but I learned to rely quite a little bit on what the lobbyists would tell us as to how certain bills would affect their constituencies. And, of course,

by their constituencies, in the cases we're talking about here, Farm Bureau and Kansas Livestock—well, those are my constituencies, too.

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KERR: So, yes, I relied quite a little bit on [Kansas Farm Bureau lobbyists] Paul Fleenor and John Blythe—

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KERR: —and let's see, [Kansas Livestock Association CEO] Dee Likes. Dee just recently retired from his position.

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KERR: He was kind of a young lobbyist at that time, and he was not the head lobbyist for KLA then. He became that.

KERR: And he just recently retired as president of Kansas Livestock Association. [Transcriber's note: On December 31, 2014.]

LOOMIS: -

So as time went on—in your second term, how did your job change as you become a more veteran legislator?

KERR: Well, the second term, I was chairman of the Agriculture Committee and there were—well, one in particular, a pretty major issue which had to do with farm corporations, that we did handle during that second term. And it was controversial, as you might imagine. But anyway, that was an important bill, and we wrote farm corporation law. I mean, it was a change in the law. I don't remember the details now.

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KERR: But those changes stayed in place a long time. So that was important.

Then tax issues. I was becoming more involved in the tax issues and education issues—again, on the Education Committee.

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KERR: And so, school finance and, in my later years, when I really was involved in school finance—it goes back to a background of both Education Committee and Tax Committee and handling those pieces of legislation over the years.

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KERR: That's part of the background that served me later, when I really was involved in the middle of the school finance issue.

LOOMIS: - Was school finance—is it something that was going through this annually for a certain number of times, and you get more comfortable with the entire process?

KERR: Oh ,yeah, you certainly did. And there were always two things in school finance. You wanted to take care of your own constituency. That's one thing. That's your job.

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KERR: But then you also wanted good public policy for the state, so those are the two things that we would juggle. And that was every year because there was always tweaking going on with school finance. Some years, major changes. But in most years, some minor tweaking.

LOOMIS: Let's go fast forward to sort of 1991-'92, when, as I recall, the formula, which is now being displaced, was written. How did you go about writing the formula back in the early '90s?

KERR: Well, the courts became quite involved in certain years, —

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KERR: —and we had to react to court decisions, and we took those decisions seriously, that third branch of government, and we took seriously what they said. So that had some influence, and the last time that occurred did result in the formula which in essence stayed in place for twenty-some years, —

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KERR: —twenty-three years, probably.

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KERR: How did we go about it? It was a balance between the tax and then satisfying the courts and supplying public schools with the amount of money per student and balancing districts according to wealth. That certainly was an important part of the court decision, so that there was an equal opportunity to education for students across the state in the various schools.

LOOMIS: Did it take more than one session to get this done?

KERR: Yes, I would say it did. At least two sessions. And, well, this balancing of equal opportunity for the students across the state was a very important part of it, and then the tax structure. In the tax structure, property tax is a local tax, —

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KERR: —so some districts had a lot of advantage over others when it comes to property tax. At the state level, sales and income taxes were the most important, of course. And on the tax side, we would try to balance what we thought was fair to the people, to raise money. And education was certainly the biggest area that the Legislature appropriated money, so there had to be that balance between a fair level of taxation but adequate funding of education.

LOOMIS: Without being too leading, one of the complaints, alleged complaints today is that, “Oh, this formula is so complex,” but it strikes me, again without being too leading, that part of the complexity is addressing all these multiple concerns that you’re talking about.

KERR: Well, talk about being complex, and yes, it is, but a lot of the balancing of the wealth across—that’s computer driven, really.

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KERR: And so, you don’t have to understand; you just see when you make a change—

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KERR: —the Department of Education will very quickly show how that affects the districts across the state.

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KERR: So, you don’t have to understand every detail of it. It just needs to be fair.

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KERR: And that’s what we arrived at. And it did withstand time, when it lasted until now. And, of course, we have a very different view—

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KERR: —of public education now.

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KERR: That’s what changed.

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KERR: It’s not the formula—

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KERR: —that was worn out.

LOOMIS: - No, I understand that.

You say you had some mentors, guys like Bob Talkington, Charlie Angell when you came in. Can you reflect on at least one or two people that maybe the press didn't focus on, more quiet people that really contributed a lot to the legislative process?

KERR: Well, the first term, there were some what we thought were pretty liberal Republican senators. Norman [E.] Gaar was one, and, of course, he did get elected majority leader, —

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KERR: —but he had some pretty strong support, obviously.

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KERR: I remember John Simpson of Salina.

LOOMIS: Sure, sure, who became a Democrat.

KERR: Oh, I guess he did later on.

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KERR: But he was chair of the Tax Committee during my first term.

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KERR: And John treated me very well. We were good friends. Paul Hess was an interesting person, —

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KERR: —who was from Wichita, and he was young. He later became Appropriations—what we call Ways and Means chair, Paul did. The thing—I mean, I was more conservative than those—than that group.

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KERR: But some others? Let's see, Bill Morris went into the Senate the same time I did, and Bill and I were very good friends. He was from Wichita.

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KERR: And he had been a lobbyist. Well, he had been president of the [Kansas] Restaurant [& Hospitality] Association. Maybe not a lobbyist formally.

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KERR: So, he knew—

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KERR: —how the Legislature operated.

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KERR: But Bill was a great guy, and I enjoyed serving with Bill. When we got down to conference committees dealing with transportation later on, and when I was majority leader, Bill was always on those.

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KERR: And that was the other major issue of the time: balancing taxes for tax fairness for transportation including highways.

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KERR: Let's see, and I guess I did mention Joe Harder.

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KERR: He was the education—he was highly respected across the nation as an expert on state education issues.

Neil [H.] Arasmith was good to work with.

LOOMIS: Yeah. A lot of these names are coming back to me that I wouldn't necessarily have focused on.

KERR: Oh, I've got a picture in my office of the first term, which showed all of these folks. Billy [Q.] McCray. He was a Democrat. He was the only African-American in the Senate.

Jan Meyers, Republican from Johnson County—

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KERR: —was the only woman during my first term in the Senate.

LOOMIS: Is that right?

KERR: During that first term.

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KERR: She was the only woman.

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KERR: And she was part of the little more liberal group.

LOOMIS: -

So, as you took on more tax responsibilities—when did you become chair of the Tax Committee?

KERR: In my third term, so, let's see, —

LOOMIS: After the '84 election?

KERR: That's right. I was Agriculture chairman during my second term.

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KERR: So, then it would be after the '84 election, I became Tax chair. Let's see, I even tried for majority leader that—

LOOMIS: In '84.

KERR: In '84.

LOOMIS: After the '84 election.

KERR: That's right, after the '84 election. Did not get that. But the Tax chair—I mean, that was viewed as the second most important chairmanship—

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KERR: —in the Senate, so I did get that. And we had a lot of issues to handle. [John Michael] "Mike" Hayden became Governor—

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KERR: —during that time.

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KERR: This whole classification, which was a huge issue, —

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KERR: —of property taxation—

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KERR: We did handle that, and successfully.

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KERR: And that has been tweaked since then.

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KERR: In essence, during whatever year in the late '80s that would have been, middle to late '80s. That stayed in place and still is in place today, —

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KERR: —the classification of property.

LOOMIS: You were serving in the Legislature the same time Mike Hayden was first Ways and Means chair.

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LOOMIS: And then he was Speaker, and then he became Governor.

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LOOMIS: Over that time, what were your relations with him?

KERR: Oh, they were good. There were a couple of people I should mention along this line. Ed Rolfs was chairman of the House Tax Committee—

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KERR: —at the same time I was chair of the Senate Tax Committee.

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KERR: We were both representing our bodies, the Senate and the House, —

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KERR: —but we had a very good working relationship, Ed and I did.

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KERR: And that's one reason, I think, that very complex tax legislation such as classification—we were able to pass it, is because of our working relationship.

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KERR: And at that time, I had good knowledge of what I thought the Senate would support, and Ed was the same way in the House, and so when there were differences, we kind of knew how to find the common ground.

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KERR: And that worked well.

And the other person I should mention at this point is [Michael L.] "Mike" Johnston, the Senator. He and I came into the Senate at the same time, and then we were very good friends. Our families are friends, and that continues today. And so, then Mike became Senate Minority Leader, and I'm not quite sure what year that was then, —

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KERR: —but probably about '88. I know he was then. And that was a hard-fought—with [John] "Jack" Steineger, who was a long-time—

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KERR: —Democrat leader—

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KERR: —in the Senate. But Mike finally beat him. And so, then Mike was Senate Minority Leader while I was Majority Leader. And we were good friends.

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KERR: And so, sure, we would—during election time, we would fight for our own people to get elected, but once the election was over, we worked together.

LOOMIS: Of course.

KERR: And so, Mike's cooperation, too, was helpful, especially on transportation issues. Mike was really an expert in that area—

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KERR: —and then later on became Secretary of Transportation.

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KERR: —under—who? —Joan Finney, I guess.

LOOMIS: Yeah, and stayed into the—

KERR: Oh.

LOOMIS: —and then went to the KTA [Kansas Turnpike Authority].

KERR: Yes, later the KTA. Yeah.

LOOMIS: Y-

When you're talking about, say, the classification of—working with Ed Rolfs—would you be consulting closely with the administration as well, or did the Legislature really work those bills on their own?

KERR: Well, the Legislature didn't want their own—the classification was a constitutional amendment.

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KERR: And so, while the Governor's support was important, it wasn't part of the process. It didn't go to the Governor.

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KERR: Now, let's see, reappraisal. That was the huge issue that did involve the Governor when Mike Hayden was Governor.

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KERR: That was a huge tax issue—

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KERR: —because during the same timeframe—I'm not sure of the year, so it might have been separate by a year—

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KERR: —but there was a reappraisal—

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KERR: —of property done across the state.

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KERR: And, again, complex, highly—oh, highly debated, controversial, and the reappraisal hurt Mike Hayden when he ran for reelection.

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KERR: Probably unfairly hurt him because it really wasn't his fault; it had to be done. Again, it was being—I think ultimately the courts did order it.

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KERR: But that was a complicated, complex issue that we did handle, and I think was during the time, too, that I was chair of the Senate Tax Committee and Ed Rolfs was of the House.

LOOMIS: -

Talk about your relationship with lobbyists at the beginning, say, with agriculture, which is pretty straightforward.

KERR: Mm-hm.

LOOMIS: When you get into tax, —you know, with ag you might be hearing some dissonant voices, but with tax everybody's got their—you know. So, what was your relationship with lobbyists as time went on, particularly as chair of the Tax Committee?

KERR: Well, another group was the Chamber of Commerce.

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KERR: Let's see, what did we call it? Or what did they call it? Not Chamber of Commerce. It got slightly different wording.

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KERR: But they, of course, had some business interests across the state, and as I was kind of looking through my files recently, I came across a letter from the taxation chairman of that organization. Commerce and Indus- —well.

LOOMIS: Yeah, I think it was Commerce and Industry.

KERR: Is that what it was? I don't think I have it quite right.

LOOMIS: They changed it to Chamber of Commerce later on.

KERR: Okay. But it was the Chamber organization anyway.

LOOMIS: What about the letter?

KERR: I have a letter from him, and it was a thank-you letter for handling that complex legislation and getting it through.

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KERR: That's the business viewpoint. That's very different than the agriculture group.

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KERR: But that was another—of course, the business interests of the state was another very important lobbying organization to work with. I relied a lot on what they said.

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KERR: And they represented the larger businesses. There was also smaller businesses—

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KERR: —represented by—I remember Tim Witsman [president of Wichita Independent Business Association and the Kansas Independent Business Coalition] as the lobbyist and spokesperson for—what was that called? The Independence Business—or—the smaller businesses.

LOOMIS: -. The Federation of Independent Business.

KERR: Yeah. And, of course, he was Wichita.

LOOMIS: NFI[B], National Federation of Independent Business. That would be—I'm not sure that was Wichita or not.

KERR: I'm not sure it was, either.

LOOMIS: But it's like the bank—the big bankers and the small bankers.

KERR: Yeah, that's right, that's right.

LOOMIS: They were always in very distinct in their—

KERR: And the banking—that's another area, although I didn't really get heavily involved in issues that affected the banks.

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KERR: While I knew [KBA lobbyist] Harold Stones and Jim Maag [one-time Senior Vice President, then President and CEO of Kansas Bankers Association; member of Kansas House 1969-1976, administrator, and lobbyist] well—let's see, now, Jim was with Chamber of Commerce and then the banks, I believe. While I knew them well, —

LOOMIS: But basically, he was the lobbyist for the banks for a long, long time.

KERR: Yeah.-

LOOMIS: And we've interviewed him for this project.

KERR: Oh, did you? And he wasn't ever at the Chamber?

LOOMIS: Maybe just briefly. As I recall, he went to the governor's office and then was recruited—

KERR: Oh, and Bob Bennett.

LOOMIS: He went to Bennett, and then the bankers came to him. And right after that, he had an opportunity to go to Washington to work for [U.S. Senator Nancy L.] Kassebaum, and he turned it down.

KERR: Oh, he did. Oh.

LOOMIS: And then he stayed with the bankers for, you know, twenty-five years.

KERR: He'd been a representative from Dodge City, —

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KERR: —in the House.

LOOMIS: -

So, let's get to the—I did a book on the '88-'89—after the election of '88 and then the session of '89. And as I mentioned to you, I really had not spent much time with the Legislature. I proposed this book, and it was accepted. I was going to do one year in the Legislature following the election but came home for the caucuses in 1988, and as you mentioned—you said you'd taken a shot at majority leader in 1984, but when I came over there, it was maybe a day or two before and then the day of the Republican caucuses. I think you had 22 Republicans, as I recall.

KERR: That may be right. Maybe 22, then.

LOOMIS: It was 22-18, I'm pretty sure. And you were, as I recall, running against Bud Burke. Is that correct?

KERR: That's right.

LOOMIS: For president of the Senate.

KERR: For president. Yes, that's right.

LOOMIS: Can you talk a little bit about how you decided to do that?

KERR: Well, I thought I could do it.

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KERR: By that time, I certainly knew the legislative process.

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KERR: I had been involved in the most important issues of—oh, for ten years there.

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KERR: So, I thought I was qualified—

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KERR: —and thought I could do it. And so—those races take a long time. First of all, you're trying to help get these people elected in their own race.

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KERR: So, you travel the state, —

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KERR: —trying to help people get elected. I vividly remember the early morning that I was traveling up to help Sheila [S.] Frahm in northwest Kansas and was involved in a car accident.

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KERR: —by Great Bend, and it could have been serious.

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KERR: So those were the kind of thing—I mean, obviously that's unusual, but you did travel the state, —

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KERR: —helping other Republican Senate candidates—

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KERR: —win their race.

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KERR: So that's how it starts. And then, of course, once the election is over and you know who has won, then you stay in constant contact with them, —

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KERR: —trying to put together the votes. And sometimes you don't really know who a person is going to vote for.

LOOMIS: Sure. I mean, it's a secret ballot.

KERR: It is. It's secret, and so people don't want to make you mad, so they're careful—

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KERR: —what they tell you.

LOOMIS: Did you have someone, aside from yourself, sort of helping you with your campaign on that?

KERR: Well, I wouldn't say openly. I certainly had contacts and people that would have their—would be listening and would pass the information on to me.

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KERR: There was plenty of that. But as far as out front, I would say no, and I don't think—well, Bud probably did because Bug Burke was from Johnson County and there were other Johnson County senators, —

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KERR: —and they were very obviously on his side. And, of course, Dave from Hutchinson, my brother, was on my side.

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KERR: But there was only so much he could do—

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KERR: —because of the relationship. So anyway, when it came down to the very end, the part where you physically came up to Topeka—it might even have been the night before.

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KERR: It became pretty clear that I wasn't going to win Senate president. And some of the people that were kind of the balancing votes on that—decided to vote for Bud—encouraged me to run for majority leader. [James L.] "Jim" Allen was already a candidate—

LOOMIS: Yes, Jim Allen.

KERR: —for majority leader. So, when that came up—and there were probably three or four days, actually, to think about that—

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KERR: Part of it was balancing the state. I mean, so Bud Burke was going to be the Senate president.

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KERR: Johnson County, northeast.

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KERR: Jim Allen was from Ottawa, right next to Johnson County, northeast.

LOOMIS: Right. Although a very different guy.

KERR: A very different guy, but—

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KERR: —geographically,

LOOMIS: Oh, physically. -

KERR: It made some sense for me to be the majority leader—

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KERR: —with Bud as president, and that was a pretty important factor.

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KERR: So that's—[I] made the decision to do that and let it be known that that's what I would accept. And so, when you walked in, that's what was happening.

LOOMIS: And as I recall, this came as a fair surprise to Sen. Allen.

KERR: Well, yeah, it probably—I mean, all the weeks and months leading up—this wasn't the issue.

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KERR: And so, he wasn't expecting it then.

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KERR: Now, as it came close, maybe the week of the election and senators are talking with each other, it became obvious that this was at least a possibility, —

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KERR: —that I would not win Senate president but would have support to be majority leader.

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KERR: Didn't mean Jim liked it at all.

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KERR: Obviously, I wouldn't like it in his shoes, either.

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KERR: But that's the way it worked out, and I think time proved it successful.

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KERR: But I think Bud Burke and I were a good combination.

LOOMIS: -.

I've got a question. I'm looking at—Ross Doyen and Jim Allen. Ross Doyen clearly got a good run, was defeated, and conventional wisdom is that, for want of a better term, kind of sulked in his later years in the Senate. I'll just let it go at that. Jim Allen lost his race. But, of course, he was still a senator. How did Jim deal with that? I have great affect- —I didn't know him very well. I got to be good friends with him as a lobbyist and have great affection for him.

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LOOMIS: But I never talked to him about this.

KERR: Well, I would say—Jim and I had a good working relationship. Given that he was very disappointed in me and in the outcome, I think he recovered from that very well and was productive,

cooperative, worked with the Republican caucus, worked with the whole Senate and was—he was a good, productive senator—

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KERR: —during that next term, which started in '89.

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KERR: So, you know, I compliment Jim. I can't remember what position, what chairmanship he had during that four years, but he was fine.

LOOMIS: - Well, that's what I would have expected, but I never—I never really thought about it that much.

KERR: Well, it was a much better reaction than Ross Doyen had.

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KERR: And, of course, Ross forever, then, held it against Dave and me, —

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KERR: —mainly me because I was the older one and had been there longer, —

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KERR: —that he lost to Bob Talkington, and he never forgave us. And in that '84—when I took a shot at majority leader—and naturally, geographically Ross should have been supporting me.

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KERR: Similar type district.

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KERR: He didn't at all. He strongly supported Bud Burke to be majority leader, which would be starting, what, the '85—

LOOMIS: Eighty-five.

KERR: —year.

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KERR: And Bud won. And that's largely why he won, is Ross getting even with me.

LOOMIS: Talk a little bit about two related things. One, Johnson County in the Legislature, and then, more generally, in your time, was there an evolution in urban-rural differences?

KERR: Well, during my whole sixteen years, that was the division: urban-rural. I mean, yes, it would be Republican-Democrat around the election.

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KERR: But once that was over—and then especially school finance and tax issues, the division in the Legislature and the votes often would be divided between urban and rural, regardless of which party you were in.

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KERR: So that's how you counted votes a lot of the time.

LOOMIS: Sure, sure. You're coming from—I come down here, I see the cattle ranches, I see oil, et cetera, driving down to Hutchinson and then from Hutchinson. Do you think that the Johnson County people ever get western Kansas?

KERR: Oh, in general I think not.

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KERR: It's not that they have anything against western Kansas, but I just think they don't really have the need to understand the nuances. Now, having said that, it's not totally fair, —

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KERR: —because a lot of people in Johnson County have family—either they, themselves, or they have family—

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KERR: —out across the state.

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KERR: I visited a couple of days ago with a nephew of mine who lives in Johnson County but came from Nickerson. So, there are a lot of families like that.

LOOMIS: Yeah. So, I want to pursue this a little bit because I've talked about this at various times.

Kansas redistricted as per the court's mandates in the '60s. The House changed very dramatically. The Senate changed quite a bit, moving more legislators to urban areas, Johnson County, Wichita, whatever. But it struck me, even into the twenty-first century, even though we reapportion, redistrict every ten years, more and more people live in urban areas, that rural Kansas continues to have a substantial impact on policy.

And one thing I thought about is that a lot of those people do have people who living Johnson County and live in Wichita, may own land or they're one generation removed. But can you reflect on the continuing importance of rural values and rural impact on Kansas politics?

KERR: Oh, I'm trying to think of some of the people. [Charles Patrick] "Pat" Roberts and Jerry Moran. I guess both have backgrounds—

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KERR: —in the western half of the state. The governors. John Carlin was—

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KERR: —out this way.

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KERR: Mike Hayden certainly was.

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KERR: Oh, if anything, maybe people in the more rural counties, at least in those times, paid more attention to Kansas and the issues of Kansas and were more involved, and legislators such as me—that's part of our background, whereas Wichita and Johnson County—there are a lot of other interests that go beyond the borders of Kansas—

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KERR: —and maybe don't spend as much time thinking or being involved in issues that are specifically Kansas. That would be one—maybe that's a stretch. I don't know.

LOOMIS: - Sure, No, no, I—it's just—when I did some work on redistricting, I did some work on Jess Taylor out in Ulysses.

KERR: Oh, boy! When was that?

LOOMIS: In the '60s.

KERR: Okay. I heard about it.

LOOMIS: A bantam guy, small guy.

KERR: Oh, really? I don't think I ever met him.

LOOMIS: But he engineered redistricting. And so, every county used to have one person.

KERR: Yeah.

LOOMIS: And then it changed dramatically. And he managed to keep his seat. [Laughs.]

KERR: Oh, he figured that out.

LOOMIS: It was a good story.

So, let's fast forward now to 1992, and you retired from the Senate after sixteen years. Did you expect, do you think, when you went there that you might stay for sixteen years?

KERR: No, no. When I started, I did not expect to stay for sixteen years. And after eight years, I had a really tough decision [as] to whether to continue or not.

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KERR: And it was partly family and business and so forth, —

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KERR: —farm business. But, no, I didn't expect to serve for sixteen years, and neither did I expect to be a part of the first two families to have two brothers in the state Senate at the same time.

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KERR: But Dave in '84 decided to run in Reno County and was elected. Of course, it was a privilege to serve with your brother in the Senate. There's only forty senators.

LOOMIS: - The Kerr caucus.

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LOOMIS: How was it—you know, what was it like to serve with your brother?

KERR: Oh, just fine. Of course, he's very knowledgeable. He took issues that were more the budget type

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KERR: —the Ways and Means issues, where I was more involved in the tax issues.

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KERR: So that worked very well.

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KERR: And his knowledge of budgets was greater than mine, certainly.

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KERR: And so, he was very good at what he did on the Ways and Means Committee, and he was always on that Ways and Means Committee, and he knew those state budgets extremely well, and much better than I did.

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KERR: So those interests—and I probably knew tax issues better than he did.

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KERR: So those two interests certainly dovetailed—

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KERR: —in the legislative process.

LOOMIS: Did he—I would only assume that he talked to you some about running for the Senate before he did.

KERR: Yes, but not very much. I mean, I was supportive of him, obviously, but he—what was his position in Reno County? I think his responsibility was to get a candidate to run against Bert Chaney, who was the Democrat representing Hutchinson.

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KERR: And so literally he flew to Topeka, and I think it was actually the morning of the deadline. The deadline was at noon.

LOOMIS: Oh, no kidding!

KERR: And he took a plane to Topeka to file for that seat.

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KERR: So - didn't know much about it ahead of time. I mean, I knew it was a possibility.

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KERR: But I still remember the headline in The Hutchinson News: "Kerr Finds a Candidate for the State Senate. It's Himself."

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KERR: And that was Dave.

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KERR: I don't think the media knew that this was much of a possibility.

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KERR: I mean they'd have to interview Dave to get—

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KERR: —those details, but—

LOOMIS: Yeah. So, it wasn't something that he was cooking up.

KERR: No.

LOOMIS: And you've seen this from time to time—I mean, recruiting candidates is very, very hard business.

KERR: Yeah, it is, for a good candidate.

LOOMIS: I understand that.

KERR: So, I'm sure I was aware that that was an option, but I didn't necessarily know that was the way it was going to go.

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KERR: And I was—again, in those days, when the election was over, you worked with the other side of the aisle.

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KERR: And I can still remember Bert Chaney and Jack Janssen, two Democrats, seatmates, and I was forever just a good-natured—had good-natured visits with those two senators, and Bert being one of them.

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KERR: But for very obvious reasons, I was openly supportive of Dave doing what he did.

LOOMIS: -

So, when you decided to leave, was it just you made your contribution?

KERR: Yeah, it had been long enough.

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KERR: Yeah, that's very much what it was. I wasn't just trying to be there forever.

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KERR: Yeah, I'd made my contribution, we had addressed the issues that were important to that time,

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KERR: —up through 1992, and so I just thought it was a good time to look at other interests.

LOOMIS: -

I want to come back to your service on the Board of Regents because I think that gives you a different perspective back on your former career in some ways. One of the people you've mentioned a couple of times—and I've interviewed him on another project, not this one—is Norman Gaar. And can you talk a little bit about Gaar's role in the Legislature in your time there?

KERR: Well, I would describe Norman as somewhat of a maverick, not too much of a maverick because mavericks don't get elected, —

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KERR: —and he got elected to majority leader.

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KERR: But he was kind of his own guy and wasn't really similar to the senate profile of most of the other senators.

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KERR: Very smart guy.

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KERR: And actually, Ross Doyen would be a very different person from Norman Gaar, but they actually worked together pretty well. And [Winton A.] "Wint" Winter Sr., "W.W.I", was another—I should have mentioned him earlier. I mean, he really helped me as a freshman senator. I'll digress to that and then come back to Wint later. And Wint Winter I, W. W. I—his personality and my personality are not similar at all. I mean, he's a very big, aggressive—

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KERR: —tell all kinds of stories type of guy.

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KERR: But I would walk by his office—and he was chair of Ways and Means at the time—

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KERR: I would walk by his office as I would leave the Capitol, and often he'd say, "C'mon in. Let's visit." And he would tell me some things, and I always valued that.

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KERR: Then, of course, later I became very good friends with his son, Wint Winter Jr.

LOOMIS: Now I'm very good friends with Wint Winter [unintelligible; 64:41], so—

KERR: Yeah.-

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KERR: So, he was one that was influential—

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KERR: —in helping me get started in the Senate.

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KERR: But then when Norman Gaar was the majority leader and Ross Doyen was president—of course, Ross was much more conservative in philosophy than Norman, and Norman was more liberal, and then Wint Winter Sr. was chair of the Ways and Means Committee—but that was a pretty good team.

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KERR: I mean, they worked together well, and as I recall, things were just pretty smooth—

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KERR: —in the Senate during that time. You might not expect that.

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KERR: And Norman was part of that.

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KERR: So even though he was kind of a maverick, he was part of that, and I think it functioned pretty well.

LOOMIS: - You see these clips from the early days, when Norman and Bob Bennett, coming from Johnson County, and then they had a falling out.

KERR: Well, they did. And when was that falling out?

LOOMIS: I think it was during that—maybe early '70s.

KERR: Early '70s, so while— ‘

LOOMIS: Because Norman was very ambitious.

KERR: He was.

LOOMIS: And Bennett was ambitious.

KERR: Yes.

LOOMIS: And they're both from the same area, so—and I think Bob was a little better at it.

KERR: Well, of course, Bob—I never heard better speeches than Bob Bennett gave.

LOOMIS: -

So, when were you appointed into the Board of Regents?

KERR: Well, of course, I had run for Governor in '94.

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KERR: Of course, I didn't win. [William Preston] "Bill" Graves did. But still, it wasn't bitter. I mean, we were cordial. And the reorganization of higher education is when Bill Graves asked me to serve on the Board of Regents.

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KERR: Was that 1999? Would that be the first year?

LOOMIS: That would be close to that, yeah.

KERR: And so, Bill Graves asked me to serve on the board. And this was the original board of the reformed higher education, —

LOOMIS: Reconstituted. Yeah, yeah.

KERR: —when community colleges came under the Board of Regents.

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KERR: So, I still remember Bill calling me up, and I was working out on the farm, and asked me if I would do that. And I thought that would be a good—I thought I had something to contribute to that, and so I accepted.

LOOMIS: Did you enjoy your service?

KERR: I did. I really did. And, again, I mean, all along you work with great people. You really do. A lot of them are behind the scenes, and—I'm looking through my files. I've got some great letters from staff people that I worked with during—and then the same was true when I was on the Board of Regents. The various presidents and chancellor, who would never otherwise know, —

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KERR: And these are fine people, —

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KERR: —and it's just great to get to know them and to help them do their job, —

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KERR: —which—that was part of what the Board of Regents is for.

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KERR: And I mentioned earlier, Nancy's a singer. A number of times, Jon Wefald [at the time, President of Kansas State University] asked Nancy to come over to K-State to sing the national anthem prior to a basketball game.

LOOMIS: Is that right?

KERR: She did that, oh, at least a half a dozen times, and I think that was mainly when I was in the Senate and not on the Board of Regents yet.

LOOMIS: - But Jon Wefald was a pretty good politician.

KERR: Oh, yeah.

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KERR: Yeah, he was. Enjoyed him. I still remember the first speech that I heard Jon Wefald give in Topeka. There was some event. It may have even the Chamber annual meeting. Anyway, I thought, this is never gonna work. This guy doesn't represent K State at all. I mean, here, this kind of liberal guy, making these kind of, oh, high-pitched speeches. But he turned out to be a great president for Kansas State. Great.

LOOMIS: - I think everybody would agree with that.

So, you finished in '92, and then you ran for Governor. What were your thought processes making that decision?

KERR: Well, I knew it was a possibility when I didn't run for the Senate anymore, but then it took a while. Nancy and I had to really come to grips, because it's a total, total commitment.

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KERR: And I can remember she and I took a trip in, I guess that would have been spring of '93, and during that trip we made the final decision to do it. And so, I wasn't in the Senate anymore.

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KERR: Some observed that, well, I might have been in a better position to run had I still been in the Senate. That's debatable. I think I was better qualified by not being in the Senate because I really could travel the state.

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KERR: And in those days, that was important. It's not important now, but it was then, to travel the state and really know the people, know the 105 counties. And so that's what we did and put together a grassroots campaign, and I think as a result, I was well qualified to be Governor at that point.

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KERR: And part of it, though, was being out of the Senate and being able to travel the state and really learn the issues in the various areas.

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KERR: Our daughter—we had a Johnson County office when I was running for Governor, and our daughter, who—I don't know how old she would have been at that time, nineteen or twenty, probably—was in that office, worked with Bruce [D.] Mayfield, who was in that office there in Overland Park. He was helping us. He was county chair. And so, I think we were well qualified. But money was important in those days, too.

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KERR: Bill Graves personally had a lot of money, and Bill—for whatever reason, Bill was elected.

LOOMIS: Were you surprised how, for want of a better term, how good an electoral politician Bill Graves turned out to be?

KERR: Oh, yeah, I might be surprised somewhat, because when I first knew him, what was he? Secretary of state.

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KERR: And not prominent.

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KERR: But, no, he—but he was kind of in an advantageous position. First of all, he got elected and quite a bit of money to start with.

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KERR: And then times were pretty good in—

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KERR: —in Kansas.

LOOMIS: Well, they were.

KERR: And that really helps whoever is Governor.

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KERR: And it really helped him.

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KERR: And he's a nice guy. I mean, people liked him. I liked him.

LOOMIS: Yeah. No, absolutely. And he's been very nice to us, my intern program when we've gone to D.C., and he's talked to us at length sometimes. I never had any great impression of him, and then—I've been here for fifteen years. And then he turned out to be, you know, to me, a much better electoral politician that I would have ever expected.

KERR: Well, I think he had a successful term. Two terms?

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KERR: As Governor. He had a successful two terms. He stayed out of the way. And times were good.

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KERR: He stayed out of the way. He didn't create problems like [Samuel Dale] "Sam" Brownback just did.

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KERR: And so—

LOOMIS: And you did have—at the end, there was a downturn, and, you know, I think he was already gone to D.C.—

KERR: Yeah.

LOOMIS: —in his mind a little bit. But, I mean, —anyway, I just—and I—was there anyone else in that race, in the primary?

KERR: Yes, there were six.

LOOMIS: Yeah, that's what—

KERR: [O.] Gene Bicknell.

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KERR: Of course, he had all kinds of money.

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KERR: One of the persons that was helping me was Eric Yost over in Wichita. At one point during the campaign, he said, "Fred, why did you get in this race with these millionaires?"

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KERR: And he was kidding, but in a way it was serious.

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KERR: And then, so, I ended up third out of the six.

LOOMIS: Right. I know. I had really forgotten that, to tell you the truth. And now you reminded me of Gene Bicknell. -

Is there anything—well, it's now 2015. You know, when you think about your time in the Senate, —as you reminded me, it was a while ago, but what do you think about? How do you reflect back on it?

KERR: Oh, I look back on it very favorably. Again, Nancy was so supportive, and so it was really a team. And when I ran for Governor, I mean, she—it was really a team.

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KERR: But I look back on it very favorably, and those relationships and the fact that we solved the property tax issues of the time, the school finance.

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KERR: We passed highway programs and—we haven't talked much about that, but those highway programs have been key for the last twenty years to the success of Kansas. I mean, we've got a good transportation system. It's largely because of those highway programs. Passed one of them when Mike Hayden was Governor, and the other one would have been '89, I think.

LOOMIS: That was '89.

KERR: Oh, that was '89. But there were two major highway programs—

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KERR: —at that time, and I certainly remember Bob Talkington and Mike Johnston and Bill Morris being involved in those, and I supported them. And I look back with pride at that, —

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KERR: —because when I drive the highways of Kansas, I think, we did it right.

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KERR: And the same way with the schools and higher education. We've got good universities, and I look back at that. That's what makes it so hard now to see what's going on, but that's another topic.

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KERR: There's one other thing—

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KERR: —I think might be instructive here. Jerry Moran is a good friend of mine. We served in the Senate together quite a little bit. I came across a picture of Jerry and me being sworn in for one of the terms. And I thought—

LOOMIS: The only term it would have been would have been after the '88 election.

KERR: I thought I served eight years with Jerry.

LOOMIS: No, Jerry came in in '88.

KERR: In '88.

LOOMIS: I'll guarantee you he came in in '88.

KERR: Okay. Well, all right. You've got a better recall—

LOOMIS: Well, I wrote the book on that, so I—

KERR: Okay. All right, all right. So, it was then.

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KERR: But anyway, during those years when I was in the state Senate, I always thought the highest job in the field that I'm in would be U.S. senator.

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KERR: Not that I was ever going to be that.

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KERR: Someday, sometime maybe it would have occurred, but—and now I look at Jerry Moran, who's in the U.S. Senate, and he's pretty prominent there.

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KERR: I wouldn't trade places one minute with Jerry.

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KERR: With all due respects to Jerry, I would hate to be spending my time doing what Jerry is doing. I would much rather be every day right here in Pratt Country, Kansas, and doing the work here. And that's so different than the view I had of that work and that position during the time I was in the state Senate.

LOOMIS: - And I would argue that the job of being a senator has changed substantially—

KERR: Oh, I think so. I think so.

LOOMIS: —over that time.

KERR: And now the only job is to make sure that guy isn't reelected again. How would you like to spend years and that's your number one job? That's terrible.

LOOMIS: No, it's not—

Well, let's start getting [unintelligible; 76:50].

KERR: I know.

LOOMIS: Thank you so much. I mean, this has been fantastic.

KERR: - Okay.

LOOMIS: I really enjoyed it very, very, very much.

KERR: Well, I may be off a year or two here and there on some things, but—

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KERR: —I think we caught the gist of it.

[End of interview.]