Interview with Mike Hayden by H. Edward Flentje, June 13, 2019
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Ed Flentje: This oral history of Mike Hayden, the former speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, is being conducted under the sponsorship of the Kansas Oral History Project, a nonprofit corporation created for the purpose of establishing an archive of oral histories of Kansas legislators who served prior to the year of 2000. Professor Ed Flentje of Wichita State University is conducting this interview at the Kansas State House in Topeka in the House Chambers on June 13, 2019.

Mr. Hayden, now retired and living in Lawrence, has had a broad ranging career of public service. In addition to serving in the Kansas legislature, his public-service career includes service in the US Army, one term as Kansas governor, a time as assistant secretary of the US Department of Interior during the George H. W. Bush administration and nine years as secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife~~,~~ and Parks for Governors Graves, Sebelius, and Parkinson.

He graduated from Kansas State University in 1966, with a degree in wildlife conservation and completed a master's degree in biology in 1974 at Fort Hays State University. He was first elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1972 and re-elected to six additional terms, serving from 1973 through 1987. He served as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee in 1979, '80, '81, and '82 legislative sessions, and as speaker of the house in 1983, '84, '85, and '86 legislative sessions. Does that sound fairly reasonable?

Mike Hayden: That's correct.

EF: Now I don't know whether to call you Governor or Speaker or Mike.

MH: Mike's the best.

EF: You've been interviewed numerous times about your governorship. I'm sure many people remember you in that regard, but as indicated, you served seven terms in the Kansas legislature before that. The folks at the Oral History Project wanted to cover your legislative service before you became governor. I'm going to do my best to keep us focused on that.

MH: Sure.

EF: First, talk a bit about how, at the age of twenty-eight or so, you decided to run for the legislature, 1972.

MH: First off, I come from a family of public servants. My grandfather was mayor. My grandmother, my mother were former school board members. My dad was a county commissioner. He was a city councilman. I came from a broad background of public service.

I graduated from college, and then I was in the service for nearly three years. When I came home from Vietnam, I went on the GI Bill to Fort Hays to get my master's. I had a district that was spread over many counties. In those days, it was three-and-a-half counties. Today, it's five-

and-a-half. My major was in wildlife conservation. My background was in biology. This legislator that we had, who was a Republican, he constantly voted against fish and game. He constantly voted against conservation. He was strictly pro-business. Any time there was a conflict, he never did support conservation, wildlife. He didn't support public land. It just irritated me. One time there was an article in the paper about his opposition to these kind of things that were very important to me. I said, “Well, I'm going to run for the legislature. I can do a better job than this guy's doing.”

I was twenty-eight years old, and I went over to see the county Republican chairman. I was still in graduate school. I sat down at his dinner table, and I said, “I'm going to run for the legislature, and I'd sure appreciate your support.” He said, “Well, you've got my support,” but he said, “We've never elected anyone under fifty before.” So he said, “It's going to be an uphill battle.”

And it was. It was, but we worked hard at it. We defeated the incumbent in the primary. Then there was actually two Democrats running, and so I had a general election—the advantage I had was there were four counties, and I had a geographic advantage. My dad always said to me, “If you don't know the candidates, you always vote for the person closest to home.” That's so true in the rural areas. I had a geographic advantage because I was more central in the district and everything. So when I ran against these people, these other folks, I hometowned them in a lot of respects and was able then to get elected and to come up here to Topeka to the organizational meeting in December of '72 and begin a fourteen-year career here in the House.

EF: You have had a career in the environmental area, broadly defined. What did environment mean to you at that time? I'd read that that was a major motivation, and you just said that. Was it wildlife conservation?

MH: That's part of it. But even at that early stage, I was very interested in water. I was very interested in public lands. I was interested certainly in hunting and fishing, but I was also interested in—those were the early days of people being concerned about endangered species. I was interested in environmental education.

In fact, the real break I got in a sense, this is quite a story. ~~is~~ I was sitting in the back row, and, of course, I had very few committee assignments. The committees didn't meet very often in those days. I noticed that there was the governor's Advisory Council on Ecology, and that the position for the Kansas House of Representatives was open. It was vacant.

I marched into Speaker McGill's office and said, “Mr. Speaker,” I had the book, and I said, “I see here where no one's representing the House, and that's right down my alley. If no one else wants it, would you be kind enough to appoint me?” and he did.

EF: And that's the first year?

MH: That's right. I had only been there two or three weeks at that time, but nobody else cared about it or wanted it. So he appointed me. That's first off where I met John Strickler.

EF: Is that right?

MH: John and I then have had a relationship all these years ever since. Of course, John served as special advisor to the governor on the environment and natural resources. And that's where I first met him and met a number of other people in state government that were interested in natural resources.

EF: How long did you stay on that?

MH: Well, that's quite a story in itself. That's one of the areas that maybe I got—it's quite a story really. The president of the Senate was Ross Doyen, and he was very, very much opposed to the governor's Advisory Council on Ecology. He was a farmer. He was a conservative, and he was very much opposed to conservation-type ideas. I served on it for a couple, three years, and the senator who never showed up—there was a senator assigned, too. The House had a seat, and the Senate had a seat. The senator never came, and I drove all the way from Atwood every time, 321 miles each way. I never missed a meeting.

Lo and behold, in about 1975, on the last day of the session, the Senate passed a bill to abolish the governor's Advisory Council on Ecology. It came over here to the House. Speaker McGill carried it. He came down here on the dais, and he said, “This is a little old bill. It's just a clean-up bill. It doesn't mean anything. This Council, it's no longer needed. Are there any questions?”

I came down and said, “Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I'm the House representative on the Advisory Council on Ecology, and I have never missed a meeting since you appointed me two-and-a-half years ago, even though I live in Atwood.” I said, “This bill came over from the Senate, and I want to tell you that the senator who serves on this advisory council has never shown up once. He's never ever been there.” I said, “I won't embarrass him by saying who it was, but I can tell you right now he's never made a meeting, and I think we ought to kill this bill. It's a terrible idea, and it's misplaced and misdirected.” And by god, they put it up on the board. There was one green light. Speaker McGill. The bill died 124-1.

So not only did we get my start by meeting guys like John Strickler and others—in fact, at that time, the Advisory Council was chaired by the corporation commission. So I got to know them and their leadership and everything, too, which I knew nothing about in the beginning. So the Advisory Council lasted—it ultimately was abolished, but it lasted up at least until—it was abolished when John Carlin was speaker several years later, but I served on it probably five years.

EF: That's quite a story. I remember the Council but had forgotten, didn't know that story. Living in Atwood, you probably didn't frequent the state capital. Do you remember anything about coming in here for the first time when you were sworn in?

MH: Yes, I do. I remember coming to the organizational meeting. I was driving in, and they said on the radio, “Pete McGill is going to be the next speaker of the House.” I said, “Wait a minute. We haven't even voted yet. What are you talking about?” That's how naive I was.

I do remember it because there was a huge blizzard the night before. All the parking lot was covered with two feet of snow. They were trying to clear things off to get the legislature in. It was a real mess. But I remember it very clearly, walking through the door the very first time. It's a very special place. You can't help but be overcome by it the first time.

EF: You didn't think, “I can run this place”?

MH: No, I didn't. No, I did not. I was so far back, the guy on my right was the sergeant-of-arms.

EF: Do you remember coming down the podium for the first time?

MH: Yes. I think it was on the Mad Dog bill, I do, I remember, a bill to abolish county welfare departments and create the Department of SRS. That was the very first time.

EF: Well, talk about that a little bit.

MH: Of course, my dad had been a county commissioner. He was no longer a county commissioner at that time, but he had been one. I knew the local county officials real well. We lived right across the street from the courthouse. They told me, they said one thing about going down there is they're going to propose to take away welfare from the counties and consolidate it into the state, and we don't want that. We think it's best administered at a local level.

I came down here, and lo and behold, a few weeks later, here came an Executive Reorganization Order to create SRS.

EF: It would have been Docking.

MH: It would have, Bob Docking. So the bill came down here to the house to approve the Executive Reorganization Order, to take away the welfare responsibilities with the counties and place them in Social Rehabilitative Services. The debate raged on. Of course, there were local government advocates, and there were the folks who had a broader perspective. It raged on and on.

Finally I came down, got my light on, and got recognized. I walked in. It's kind of like walking in from the bullpen at a ballgame. I walked in from the back row and said how bad I thought this idea was. I said, “This bill is a Mad Dog. Out in Western Kansas, when we have a rabid dog, we cut off its head and bury it. That's exactly what we ought to do with this bill.” The speaker was sitting right here. As I walked by back to my chair, I heard him say, “Who the hell was that?” because I was a freshman, see?

The bill ultimately passed, and the truth is, it was the right thing to do, but my constituents were very much opposed to it. In representing them, of course, I spoke against it.

EF: That would have been the action by the legislature had to be within a certain time.

MH: That's correct.

EF: That would have been early, early—

MH: I hadn't been there very long. You only have sixty days or something on EROs or—

EF: That's a pretty audacious statement from a backbencher.

MH: Right, exactly.

EF: Where did this come from?

MH: Well, I felt passionate about it, you know? That's all I can say.

EF: You've mentioned Pete McGill.

MH: Yes.

EF: He's speaker. Did he have competition in that first year?

MH: Not really, no. Pete, in one sense, he became the speaker who never spoke. Pete McGill was due to be speaker two years before, and he was defeated in his own election. He was defeated at home. So he never came up here. So Cal Strowig became the speaker. Then Pete won. He had been chairman of Federal and state. That's how he came up, through the Federal and State committee side. Then he won, and actually Cal Strowig retired, and Pete became the speaker.

EF: Did he get to know you after that first trip to the podium?

MH: He did. Pete McGill was very instrumental in my career. I still remember it very clearly. I was at home. Actually it was in the dead of winter, and I'd been ice fishing all day, and it was cold as hell. I got home, and Patti said, “The speaker called.”

EF: And this would have been—

MH: This would have been December of '74, I guess.

EF: The second term, you'd been re-elected.

MH: Right. She said, “The speaker called.” By that time, it was night. It was dark. I thought, “Well, there probably won't be anybody there, but I'll return the call.” So I called. Well, I'll be damned if the speaker didn't answer. I said, “Mr. Speaker, this is Mike Hayden. I'm returning your call,” and he said, “Yeah, I'm working on committee assignments, and I'm thinking of putting you on the Ways and Means Committee.”

Well, I was so naive that I said, “You know, Mr. Speaker, I really want to be on the Natural Resources Committee.” I said, “That's my background.” He said, “Well, we need some geographic balance on Ways and Means.” He said, “I'm going to appoint Wendell Lady. He's from Johnson County, and we need some balance,” and he said, “I want to get some young people on there, too.” So he said, “Why don't you give it a try?” I said, “Okay. You're the speaker.”

EF: He had to talk you into Ways and Means?

MH: He had to talk me into it, really. He really did because I really wanted to be on the Natural Resources Committee.

EF: Amazing.

MH: That's really what gave me the start with Speaker McGill. McGill served two terms as speaker. Wendell must have chaired the committee. He did chair those four years when I was on it.

EF: When you went on. So you had two years’ experience with Wendell.

MH: Four, four years.

EF: Four years on the committee?

MH: Yes.

EF: I got the impression that you and Wendell had a partnership of some kind.

MH: We were very close. Wendell was chairman for four years. At the end of that four years, I was one of those who said to Wendell, actually early on, “Wendell, you need to be the next speaker. After Speaker McGill, you really need to be the next speaker. You're the one that's ready. You've been chairman of Ways and Means.”

I was in an early group of people who were Wendell's supporters from like a year and a half or even like in '75. We have a tradition which is still alive today in the House that nobody serves as speaker for more than four consecutive years. So you could see that Speaker McGill was coming up against that, and we were going to need a new speaker. At that time, Wendell was the one

who was ready. He had the experience. He was chairman of Ways and Means. As chairman of Ways and Means, you end up on a lot of other committees like post audit, you get familiar with all the inner workings.

I was one of the very first ones, not the first one, but one of the very first ones that went to Wendell and said, "You need to be the next speaker." There was a group of us. That group gradually grew. Actually Pete McGill kind of put out the overtures that he'd like to run for a third term, but there was enough resistance, not that people were against Pete, but there was enough resistance against breaking the tradition that Pete actually ran for Congress is what he did. In fact, he got up there and made his speech right here on the floor of the House that he was running for Congress.

Of course, that was all derailed because it was the Watergate era, and Jimmy Carter and the loyal opposition, the Democrats, won the majority. So Wendell became the minority leader, and I was the assistant minority leader. That's incorrect. I was the minority Whip. I was the third ranking. Bob Arbuthnot, who Wendell had run against, was the assistant minority leader. So for two years, we sat on the north side.

EF: Some of the folks we've interviewed for the Oral History Project, the legislative leaders have talked about Wendell organizing a group of the younger folks. How did that work?

MH: Yes, he did. He was very farsighted in that respect. He saw that we needed to cultivate young people that were coming into the legislature. You've got to remember, back in those days, when I went on the ag committee, that was my first assignment. Jack Burwell and I were the only people on there under sixty. Wendell could see that we needed to start young people at a lower level, and ultimately they were going to become committee chairs and legislative leaders.

There was a group of us. It was kind of a mutual thing. We supported Wendell, but he also cultivated a number, and there were people from east and west. There were people from Wichita. There were people from Johnson County. There were people from far western Kansas, too.

EF: How exactly did he do that?

MH: He would meet with us. In fact—

EF: In advance of the session and so forth?

MH: Oh, yes. In advance of the session and sometimes during the session, and in fact, I remember Jim Maag organizing a similar thing with Governor Bennett in his very first year in office. Jim said, "You know, Governor, there's a bunch of young guys over there in the legislature, young Republicans, and you ought to have lunch with them. You ought to get to

know them because they're going to be—some of them are going to be the leaders down the road."

I remember we had lunch with Bennett—I didn't even hardly know him at that point, really. So Wendell did the same thing. There were several people that helped us kind of get, what I want to say, support, the idea of "Hey, we need to take some young people, and we need to educate them, and we need to get them prepared for roles of leadership," whatever that might be down the road.

EF: How would you compare Pete McGill and Wendell as legislative leaders?

MH: They each had a different style. Pete was one of the last of the dinosaurs. He was the old-time speaker. The power of the speaker in those days was awesome. The rules were such that the speaker essentially could rule with an iron hand, and that's not all bad because you got things done, but it wasn't very collegial in that respect. Pete was of the old school. His motto was, "We've got a lot of hay down." In other words, get the job done. His whole idea was "We're going to keep the trains running on time. We're going to come here. We're going to do our business, and we're going to leave." He was of the old school.

Wendell, he's the only person to ever lead the Republican party in the House for six consecutive years because, of course, he was minority leader for two years and speaker for four. Nobody else had ever done that in state history. So that tells you somebody about what kind of leader he was. But he was, of course, a lot younger. He was a lot more visionary. Pete was of the old school, which isn't bad, and he did it his way. Wendell, he spread the power, so to speak. He relied heavily on his committee chairs and expected them to do the job. Once in a while, he'd say, "This is what we're going to do." Pete McGill said that every day, "This is what we're going to do." Wendell would say, "All right. What do you think we ought to do?"

EF: He'd ask.

MH: That's right. So they each had a different style.

EF: You're not there too long, I guess your fourth term, and Wendell names you chair of Ways and Means.

MH: Yes.

EF: What was your style? Was it a combination of McGill and Lady?

MH: I learned from both of them. There is a time when you have to take the gavel, and you have to say, "This is it. We've had enough. We're going to move ahead." There's other times when you have to let everybody have their say. So I learned from both of them.

EF: Now I'm talking about chair of Ways and Means.

MH: Yes, I know. I studied under two different chairs. I studied under Wendell, and I studied under Fred Weaver. One of the things that happened in my career, which was tremendously beneficial, and it sounds counterintuitive, is I spent two years in the minority. That is a great, great lesson.

I remember Irving Niles, they asked him about it one time, and he said, "I've sat on the north side, and I've sat on the south side." He said, "There's a lot more sunshine on the south side." I never forgot that. By serving in the minority, I was able to study under Fred Weaver.

EF: In your third term is when you were in the minority.

MH: That's right. I was the minority whip, and I was also the ranking Republican on Ways and Means. There were two Democrat leaders on Ways and Means in those days. Fred Weaver was the chairman, and George Wingert was the vice chairman. They both were very good friends of mine, and the real truth is that we worked very, very closely together.

EF: Was there a concept of the loyal opposition?

MH: Oh, sure, sure. That's all part of it. But when it came down to the tough choices, I can't ever remember any animosity with those guys. They let me have my piece. The truth is, we compromised a lot. But ultimately Fred was the chairman. In the end, he decided what we were going to do. That was a great lesson to me. I had both Wendell as chairman as a majority and I had Fred when I was in the minority. I got to learn from both of them. Those six years were very, very formative years for me because I got to learn all the budgets of all of these agencies. I remember my first budget, the Board of Cosmetology. It took about thirty seconds to do their budget.

EF: And the Barbers Board.

MH: And the Barbers Board, and don't ever try to combine the two, if you want to have a legislative career.

EF: Well, you get to your sixth term. You run for speaker. I don't recall you had opposition—

MH: I had no opposition either time when I was running for speaker. I had no opposition. At that time, one thing is, as Republicans, we'd been in the minority, and then we became the majority. Actually our majority in those days, it had been slipping in the early seventies, and then with Watergate and everything, it got down to where there was only sixty Republicans here, but then it gradually started building back. With the Reagan era in Washington and stuff like that, the Republican party had more and more members.

It was not contentious in the respect that I had paid my dues. I had started in the back row, and I just had gradually worked up. After four years as chairman of Ways and Means, you know the

budget better than anyone, perhaps the Senate chairman maybe, but other than that. So I was unopposed. I was very appreciative of that, the fact that there would be unanimous consent, so to speak, but at the same time, at that time, the Republicans in the House were fairly unified. It's not like later days. There was a lot of camaraderie, and there was a lot of unity among House Republicans in those days.

EF: Did your leadership style change at all when you move from Ways and Means to speaker's chair?

MH: Well, of course, you branch out. It's about more than just the budget. So you have to branch out. Of course, it so happened during those times that we had the major Constitutional amendments. Of course, Constitutional amendments requires two-thirds. So not only do you have to work across the aisle, but you've got to work urban and rural. You've got to work Wichita and Topeka and Kansas City. You've got to work all of that in order to get two-thirds, and we had four major Constitutional amendments during those days, all of which were ultimately were adopted by the House and ultimately were adopted by the people.

EF: As speaker or even before, were you involved in candidate recruitment for legislative slots?

MH: Only to a minor degree. I did a lot of work for candidates, once they had announced. In a few cases, I went out and tried to convince people they ought to run, but not many cases like that. It certainly was a lot of support then once people had announced.

Candidate recruitment was not what it is now in that sense. There were always special interest groups, of course, but most of them did not seek their own candidates as they do now. There weren't groups out there actually recruiting people to run for the legislature, whether it's on the right or on the left, like there are today. These were people who, for the most part, spontaneously decided for themselves, and then, of course, I went out and worked hard for those, particularly those who were nominated, but for others. I spent a little time trying to convince a few people they should run, but not an inordinate amount of time.

EF: I'm going to shift gears more to policy issues. Over fourteen years, there was a huge amount of activity, obviously, fourteen legislative sessions. As you look back, Bennett always used to say, “Point with pride and view with alarm.”

MH: Sure.

EF: What would you point with pride to during your legislative service, either as chair of Ways and Means, or speaker, or as a member of the legislature. What stands out? “I'm really proud of this. This is important.”

MH: There were a lot of accomplishments and a lot of different things that happened. I would say the funding of the state Water Plan would actually be #1, and the reason is because a lot of people tried and failed. A lot of people had tried and could never put something together. It

was very, very contentious. Yet, what's more important than water? In reality, none of us can live without it.

So when we finally got that passed through the Senate by one vote on the last night of the session, that's the one I think—the others, there were a lot of players. There are a lot of things, some of which have faded away, some of which still are in place today, but that one is not only still there, but it's more important than ever. Many people had failed in the past because it was so contentious.

EF: That's your gubernatorial accomplishment.

MH: That's right. You've got to remember that some of that groundwork was laid when I was still in the House.

EF: Talk about that. What do you remember about that?

MH: Well, I remember that water is a huge fight between your urban and the rural peoples. Eighty percent of the water is used by the rural people who are only about 20 percent of the population. Water has always been free in Kansas. In fact, in those days, you could get a permit for $50. You could actually pump all you wanted to begin with.

EF: First come, first serve.

MH: That's right. First in time, first in right. So when you give somebody something for nothing and essentially don't regulate it, and they can use all of it they want, they can even waste it, which a lot of people did in those days, then when you start saying, “Hey, we're going to put sideboards on this. This commodity is so important, we're going to start figuring out a plan for the whole state, not just for cities, not just for irrigators, not just for river flow, but we're going to start figuring out a plan for every basin in the state, and we're going to start getting local input from those basins, and we're going to develop an overall plan, and we're going to develop rules and regulations.

Very, very contentious, very contentious. So it was really, really hard. It took years of laying the groundwork to finally get a compromise that ultimately did pass when I was governor, but the work had been going on for years.

EF: I remember Joe Harkins working on the first water plan—not the first, but certainly a revised—

MH: The modern.

EF: The modern Water Plan. And Governor Bennett, Shelby Smith chaired a Water Resources Task Force.

MH: That's exactly right.

EF: So there was a lot. Were there funding issues when you were on Ways and Means related to water?

MH: Sure there were. Absolutely there were.

EF: What do you remember on that?

MH: Well, some people proposed that there be a tax on irrigation. Some people proposed there be taxes on sand and gravel extraction. Some people even proposed that there be a fee on municipal water use that goes into the state Water Plan. There were a lot of ideas out there.

Then, of course, the question of the public good. Shouldn't the General Fund have a role because this is for everyone? And if so, how much? Of course, you have all the folks that are already supported by the General Fund, they don't want anybody else to draw. So they're resisting that.

EF: You saw this percolating for a good bit of time.

MH: Many years. Many, many years. That's why it was such a great accomplishment in the end because many people had tried. Finally we pushed it over the goal line.

EF: Well, that's kind of how things worked over time—

MH: Right. That's exactly right. None of these ideas are really original, and they take a long, concerted effort. I know I had legislative proposals that I worked on for years and years before they finally passed.

EF: Your original interest in natural resources and not even being on the committee, were you able to elevate natural resource priorities on the Ways and Means Committee?

MH: Even before that. I think I was named Conservation Legislator of the Year twice, probably even before I went on Ways and Means, but at least once before then. I sponsored the Natural and Scientific Areas Act, and I got it passed over Ross Doyen's objections in the Senate. I might have been on Ways and Means, but I certainly wasn't chairman. I got the Kansas Advisory Council on Environmental Education passed. It's still in existence today.

So I worked on some of these conservation issues. I tried to champion public lands from the very beginning.

EF: How did that interest in public lands unfold—there's not a lot of public lands around Atwood, are they?

MH: There are none. There's none owned by the state. Let's say it that way. Not a single acre in Rawlins County is public land owned by the State of Kansas.

EF: Or federal.

MH: Or federal government either. But first off, I grew up on the shores of Lake Atwood, which is a township lake, and I realized how critical that is, how important that was. I saw that at a very early age, long before I ever thought about public policy or anything like that. Then, of course, over time, I've had a hunting and fishing license in forty-seven of the fifty states. So I've seen public lands all over this country, and I've seen what they mean, what they mean for conservation, but also what they mean for public recreation, or what they mean for endangered species, these kinds of things.

I've always been an advocate of it, and Kansas has the smallest percent of public lands of any state in the nation, any state in the nation. It's pathetic, when you consider that Colorado has forty times as much. Even Nebraska has got fifteen times as much as we have. So it wasn't hard for me to start championing that at the very start.

EF: I'm going to shift a little bit. You arrive in '73, and of course, there's a whole series of Constitutional amendments, statutory changes, legislative reform, gubernatorial reform. Were you pretty much in favor of those—of course, you mentioned the welfare takeover, unification of the state with respect to welfare. You had obviously in some cases local objection to that. Did you have trouble with that movement as a legislator?

MH: No. In fact, there's a great story about that. I was on the interim committee, and in those days, it was chaired by Wes Sowers from Wichita. Over here, we had the Department of Health, and over here we had the Department of Environment. Our job was to consider a proposal to combine the two. We had the summer hearings and everything. I was a freshman. It might have been my second year, I'm not sure, but it was in my first term. I think it was maybe even the first year, but it might have been the second year, and we studied that all summer and came to the conclusion that they should be combined. We should reorganize. It should be one department.

EF: That would have been during Bennett's term, most likely.

MH: Well, I don't think it was in '75 yet. It might have been in Bob Docking's—let me say this. It might have been introduced in Bob Docking's last year and passed in Bennett's first year.

But the great story is, I just came out of the committee room upstairs, and here came Speaker McGill down the hall. I said, “Mr. Speaker, what do you think of this idea, combining health and the environment?” He said, “Oh, hell, that will never fly,” and it didn't fly during his term, but it did fly for us. So that was the incubation period of the governmental reorganization, which ultimately I think Governor Bennett might have been there when it finally happened, but it started when Bob Docking was still governor.

EF: One of those Constitutional amendments was revising the executive article of the Kansas Constitution, combining the governor and lieutenant governor and getting rid of some Constitutional officers. Bennett came following that with EROs to get rid of the treasurer and the Insurance Commission.

MH: And state printer.

EF: Yes, a printer.

MH: Bob Sanders was the last state printer.

EF: I recall you were not favorable of those.

MH: Well, you've got to remember, too, that was really before post-audit was any major player. Clay Hedrick was the auditor. I was concerned that somebody needed to do the audit function. I wasn't opposed to doing away with the state printer. We needed desperately to modernize the old printing plant, and we did. But I was concerned that who's going to do the audit function if we abolish the auditor. Ultimately, we did, of course, assign the post-audit function to the state legislature, then.

EF: Right. But you were for the most part supportive of those executive reorganizations and the—I'm thinking the legislative reforms would have been kind of underway when you arrived—offices, staffing.

MH: They were just getting geared up. In fact, when I came, you had one phone and you shared it with your desk mate. My desk mate was a young bachelor from Abilene. Every time the phone rang, it was his girlfriends. Of course, I had to answer it because he was never there.

EF: You remember that.

MH: I do remember it well.

EF: But you got your own phone finally.

MH: Finally. Finally I even got an office, believe it or not. When we first came, Dave Heinemann will tell you, when we first came, this was our office right here.

EF: Hard to believe.

MH: In this building, there was the insurance commissioner. There was the attorney general, and there was the Supreme Court

EF: Part of that legislative reform would have been giving, creating finance staff in the Legislative Research Department.

MH: That's correct. One of the greatest steps we ever made legislatively was to create the Research Department.

EF: Of course, that happened way back. But the finance, I don't know, was Marlin Rein the first finance—

MH: Director, he might have been.

EF: You would have worked with him.

MH: Oh, very closely. I just went to his funeral. He and his wife both, they were interned over at the old Settlers Cemetery on KU campus.

EF: You and Marlin worked closely together on budgets.

MH: We were very, very close.

EF: Quite an alliance.

MH: Marlin was really, really smart, and I learned a tremendous amount from him, particularly on the funding of higher education. That was before he went to KU and sold his soul.

EF: The death penalty bounced around as an issue.

MH: It did.

EF: In that time period. When did you first have to deal with the death penalty as an issue, do you recall?

MH: The Supreme Court had struck it down, existing law. It simmered for a number of years because the US Supreme Court didn't—for a while they didn't really give clear guidance to the states on what to do. Then gradually court cases came and went, and there kind of begin to get a set of guidelines that the US Supreme Court found permissible. Gradually, as those guidelines became clearer, more and more bills were introduced to reinstate the death penalty over time, based on that.

EF: That wasn't an issue that you're necessarily in the front of at all, as in the legislature.

MH: In the legislature, no. Most of that time, it was unclear what we should do. Most of the time, when I was in the House, it became clearer towards the end. Some bills were introduced, but they never passed both bodies or anything. I think the first time maybe it passed the House

was in '87 or '88, but it didn't pass the Senate. Ultimately nothing passed until '93 or whatever when the death penalty was finally reinstated in Kansas.

EF: Bennett had advocated a new medium-security prison.

MH: Yes.

EF: That was front and center for a year or two at least. Were you involved in that at that time?

MH: Not really. I was really just beginning to learn at that point, and I really wasn't involved in those debates. I, of course, later as governor, became very much involved in them, but not in those days when Governor Bennett was in office.

EF: Now we get to later and another building project, which we've talked about a little over lunch, the Kansas Historical Society's museum.

MH: Right.

EF: We're talking about Governor Carlin's term. You're chair of Ways and Means.

MH: That's correct.

EF: You were obviously involved in it then.

MH: Yes, very much so. The Historical Society was over here at the Memorial Building, across the street. The State had purchased the land at the Potawatomi Baptist Mission, out in northwest Topeka. I was chairman of Ways and Means, and the proposal was to build a new Historical Society museum, and it passed the Senate in an appropriation bill, the funding did. It came over here to the House. At the direction of the speaker, we stripped the funding out. Obviously that goes to a conference committee.

We go to the conference committee to reconcile all the differences. I had specific—Wendell very seldom or never told me what to do as chairman. He left that up to me, as Speaker McGill had done with him. But in that particular case, he said to me, “Whatever you do, don't approve the funding for the state historical new museum.”

So the conference committee raged on and on and on and went for several days and several nights.

EF: A number of conferences?

MH: A number of conferences. Everything else was agreed to, all of the other provisions except the museum. I held out and held out and held out. Finally , the real truth is the votes were down here on the floor of the House.

EF: For it?

MH: Yes, they were. They were here for it. Finally on the last night, I gave in and agreed to the conference committee report, and it passed.

EF: On the last hour of the last night of the last day.

MH: It was. The session was actually held up a little bit because of that, but the museum was built, and that was the right thing to do.

EF: I'm going to switch again, switch directions again. You've made comment on this, but I'll ask it in a more specific way. Some political interests emerged certainly later after your term in the legislature and even your term as governor. I'm thinking of Americans for Prosperity and Kansans for Life, maybe the Rifle Association. Did you see any of the beginnings of that during your legislative time?

MH: The answer is partially yes. I'd been in the House here about two weeks when Roe versus Wade passed in the United States Supreme Court. Of course, at first people didn't really know what to make of it or how to react to it. That actually took years and years to develop. It really did.

In the late seventies, one or two legislators from Johnson County came up here who would represent what we'd called “the extreme right” today, one or two. Now for the most part, they were frustrated because they commanded very little attention. They were regarded really as outcasts or far, far right, and sure, they had fiery rhetoric and everything, but they didn't get any bills passed or anything like that, but they were the vanguard of what has become the Far Right.

It really in the very beginning was more about fiscal conservatism than it was about right to life or the Second Amendment or those kind of things. It was really about the growth of government, fiscal conservative, but they were really not influential in a big way in the House. They weren't in the Senate either for that matter.

They became more influential as they elected more and more people of the same persuasion, but they still had a very small caucus. Even throughout my governorship, four years after I was in the House, they made a lot of noise, but they still didn't command many votes. It really wasn't until they engaged in candidate recruitment [their numbers grew]. They engaged a lot in rhetoric, but they hadn't yet engaged in candidate recruitment.

Then, of course, there were some people who were smart enough to know that if you want to control the party, you go out to the precinct level and just start to get people elected, a precinct committee man or a precinct committee woman. Then you build the base from there, which

was the old—that's the old-time religion. That's the way it's always worked. The Far Right finally figured that out in the nineties.

EF: Certainly not while you're in the legislature.

MH: No. They were just kind of a voice in the darkness then.

EF: I don't recall. Were the Kochs [*Charles and David Koch, Koch Industries*] engaged?

MH: No.

EF: Were the Kochs on the radar at all in that time?

MH: No. They were not in those days. They were not.

EF: I didn't think so. I went back and was looking at partisan division in the House. I was a little surprised to see these numbers. The year you were elected, '72, the Republicans lost four seats, in the next year, eight seats, then the next year, twelve. It actually turned over the majority.

MH: Right.

EF: What was going on? And in the Senate, it was the same kind of trend.

MH: It was because of Watergate. Watergate happened in '72. It fermented in '73 with the Congressional hearings, and then Nixon resigned in '74. Of course, Jerry Ford pardoned him. That was a huge prairie fire. As a result of that, the Democrats were smart enough that they figured out that there was an undercurrent there, and that they could build on that. I wasn't surprised. I was a little surprised when they actually got sixty-three votes in the House, but I wasn't totally surprised either because you could see it building. At that point in time, the Republican party was about the lowest you could imagine.

I got to know Jerry Ford very well. I always felt bad about what people thought of him or how they treated him because I think he actually—he's the only president who made a decision for the betterment of the country that cost him the election.

EF: The pardon.

MH: You can't say that about anybody else, that they made one single decision, not for their own good, but for the good of the country that cost him the presidency, and that was Jerry Ford. That's just the kind of guy he was. I always felt terrible about—Richard Nixon was no good, but it wouldn't have done any good to have trials that would have drug on, that would have simply divided the country further. Jerry Ford, I always admired him because they said he took office, they said, “Well, now, Mr. President, how does it feel?” and he said, “All I ever wanted to be was speaker of the House.”

EF: And didn't get to be.

MH: And never got to be. I'm not surprised that the Democrats were able to gain the majority because you could kind of see it coming over time because of the attitude in the country. Watergate was a poison that spread slowly, but it did spread.

EF: And in your view, it seeped into the legislative races.

MH: Absolutely. Republicans kind of hid out. Democrats took advantage, as you should, and that resulted in the first Democratic House in what? Fifty years.

EF: Did you see it in your own races?

MH: Not so much. The loyal opposition ran somebody strong against me when they knew I was going to be speaker of the House. That was the only real strong Democratic opponent I ever had. As it turned out, it wasn't close, but they did a very good job of recruitment, and they found a very good candidate, and we had a very spirited race.

EF: I was just kind of surprised with those numbers being kind of a trending thing.

MH: I'm not at all surprised. You could feel it.

EF: Switching direction again, you obviously saw a lot of legislative leaders over your time period. You saw three governors—Bennett, Lady, Doyen, Talkington, Bogina, Carlin, Hurley, Steineger, Barkis. What stands out among those folks for skills, leadership skills? What did you learn from any of those folks? You mentioned Lady.

MH: I have admiration for all of them. I saw leadership at virtually every level, from the committee—John Vogel was my first committee chairman on the House Ag committee. What a wonderful man. I saw leadership at every level, whether it was Republican or Democrat. I served many years with John Carlin, both in this Chamber and on the second and third floor. The thing I always admired about those people who rose to leadership that I got a privilege to serve with, and that's what it was, a privilege to know, is that the heart was in the right place, whether they were Republican or Democrat, whether I agreed with them, or I didn't. They were trying to do what they thought was best for this country, for the state, and that's really kind of what's lacking today in modern politics—it's lacking in the legislature, and it's lacking certainly at the federal level.

Sure, we've got folks on both sides of the aisle, and we've always got a healthy tension between the House and the Senate. That's the way it should be. You've got a healthy tension between the second floor and the third floor. I remember Don Everett used to always call Bob Docking “a little man on the second floor” right from the dais.

EF: Not in an affirmative way.

MH: Not affirmative, but at the same time, not in a disrespectful way because there is a role for the legislature, and there's a role for the governor. I got to see urban and rural leadership. I saw Ross Doyen go in. I saw Wendell. I got to serve with Bob Talkington. There's a reason they called him “The Gentle Giant.” He was a big man, but he had a way about him to get things done.

I got to serve with Bud Burke, and of course, I actually knew Bob Docking before he became governor. My dad and he were acquaintances, even though my dad was a Republican. They were acquaintances through KU and stuff. So in each of those people, I found characteristics that I could admire or emulate because basically they cared about Kansas. They cared about public service and trying to do what’s best for the people. That was always a privilege to me to watch that, to see it, and I learn from all of them. Sure, we had spirited debates. We were oftentimes on different sides of the issues, but I always still to this day maintain great respect for them.

EF: Let's talk about that. What would you have picked up from Docking?

MH: Well, he was a very, very smart man politically. He was very smart. You still remember the old saying: “austere but adequate,” and he's been gone all of these years. He had a way of capsulizing that when it comes to taxes. He had a way that people could understand. The common person could understand.

I was only here two years while he was still in the State House, but I realized how smart he was in the way of framing the public debate. I learned that from him.

EF: Branding.

MH: That's right. We didn't know it in those days, but that's exactly right.

EF: What about Bennett?

MH: I was in leadership in Bob Bennett's last two years. I got to meet with the governor once a week or so. From him, I learned a great respect for higher education. That's what I remember the most was his constant support of and his constant emphasis on if we're going to have future generations that are prepared for society, we've got to do it through higher education. I always remembered that.

EF: Was that a hard sell for you?

MH: Yes and no. You've got to remember, both my parents were college graduates. I got a master's degree. My wife has a master's degree. I was more conservative fiscally than Governor Bennett, but at the same time, my family benefited greatly from higher education. I could understand where he was coming from.

EF: In some ways, you talked earlier about Wendell.

MH: Yes.

EF: You and Wendell were in some ways counterpoints, urban, rural and all that. Bennett would have been even a further counterpoint, wouldn't he?

MH: Yes, he would. He would have. He was an attorney for one thing, besides being from Johnson County and besides being in the Senate. So he was all of those things, whereas Wendell was from Johnson County, but he was not a lawyer. He was from the House.

I learned a lot—Bob Bennett cared more than most people think about agriculture, which is kind of hard to understand or realize, but I remember very clearly, he wanted to build a building out here on Wanamaker, long before the Wanamaker Strip, and build a big building for the State Department of Agriculture.

EF: I didn't remember that.

MH: And he was working with the Farm Bureau and the KLA and different aspects. It never came to pass, but I always appreciated that, that he had the vision and the interest coming from Johnson County. He had the interest in knowing how important ag was and the fact that the facilities we had at that time were terribly inadequate.

EF: Obviously you were here with John Carlin for all but—he had four terms.

MH: He had two terms before I got here.

EF: I think just one.

MH: Okay.

EF: Just one, but you would have served in the legislature with him.

MH: Absolutely.

EF: And then his eight years as governor. What did you learn from John Carlin?

MH: John was very smart. He was very smart. Bob Bennett lost to him because he took him for granted. You never want to underestimate John. I learned that early on. He had a real political sense to him. He could analyze—I remember in fact when he ran for the second term, and you'll have to help me with the fellow from Wichita that got the nomination. Sam Hardage.

Immediately when Sam got the nomination, he came out opposing the severance tax. The next day, John Carlin had an ad on TV with a housewife filling her car. She looked up and said, “John Carlin wants the big oil companies to pay. Sam Hardage wants you to pay." Hell, the election was over. He had a sense, see, of how to articulate that complicated position into something people could understand, and he did that on a lot of his legislative proposals. He was a dairy farmer. He put it in plain language that people could understand. That was one of his great successes.

EF: As you looked back, did you tangle with him over anything of major import, do you remember?

MH: Well, we had our differences, clearly, but first off, we were never disagreeable. We had different positions on some of the issues, but we weren't disagreeable about it. For example, the major Constitutional amendments passed when he was governor, and I was speaker. Even though some of those I voted against personally because of my district, my constituents opposed some of those amendments, and to represent them, I voted against the amendments. Nevertheless, we brought it up for a vote, and two-thirds of the House agreed with the governor on those positions. So ultimately it went to the people, and it's now in the Constitution.

EF: You're talking about pari-mutuel.

MH: Liquor by the Drink.

EF: Liquor by the Drink. Did you get engaged in those issues, amendments along the way, do you recall?

MH: What I tried to do as speaker was, as Wendell had done with me, I tried to delegate the right amount of authority to my chairman. If somebody wanted—if a Constitutional amendment was going to come up through federal and state affairs for example, I didn't give Bob Miller a direction as far as, “You had the hearings, Bob. You put it up for a vote. If it passes, you bring it down here, and we'll go from there,” and that’s what he did. Most of those amendments came through. I don't know if they all did, but most of them came through Federal and State Affairs.

EF: I remember vaguely on Liquor by the Drink, you were supporting a local option provision. I think that obviously got put in that amendment.

MH: It did. Of course, out in my district, there were a lot of what we called “dry towns.” One town might have private clubs in those days, and another town, thirty miles away, might have their ordinances prohibit it. That was actually kind of one of the secrets of getting enough votes to pass it was the local option. Then everybody could say, “Well, you get a chance back home to decide whether you want it or not in your community.” Ultimately, of course, in the vast, vast, vast majority, they have all gone wet, but that didn't happen overnight. But that's a way in

which you could justify your vote because you're saying essentially, “We're going to let the local people decide.” In the cities, it's a foregone conclusion, but out in Rexford, that's another story.

EF: You've made comments on this a couple of different ways. Were you often in the role of kind of balancing state and local interests in major—

MH: Every speaker has that. When I first came up here, it was a time of huge expansion in Johnson County, and to some extent, in Wyandotte County. You had all these annexation issues. You even had them in Wichita. You had these growth issues that were tearing communities apart or pitting one faction of the community against another. City Councils were divided and so on.

That was one of the great educations I got on local government. Nobody really wanted it. I was on there with Bud Burke and Gus Bogina. We were all freshmen on there together. We didn't know a thing about it at the time but sitting through all of those annexation hearings and all those local officials coming up here, you got a great education on how it works and maybe how to fashion compromises because every community is different. What they needed necessarily for annexation at Sedgwick County isn't what they needed necessarily in Johnson County that was just expanding day and night. It was the Wild, Wild West there for a while in Johnson County. You could go out and drive a stake in the ground and start building in those days.

EF: I was thinking more of your comment about the local county commissioners and balancing this local position or preference with state interests. I've got to bring up a little personal item. When I was working for Bennett, we were trying to kill the state census. We were in a social gathering, and Auggie our son, five, six years old, of course, tries to pin you down, “Are you going to vote for Daddy's bill?”

MH: Right.

EF: I recall you saying, “Well, I can't vote for it, but I'm going to make sure it passes.”

MH: Exactly.

EF: Did you have that kind of perspective on some things.

MH: Oh, yes, many times. Remember, I came from a very rural and conservative district. They're the people who sent me up here. At the same time, when you become speaker, you've got to have a statewide perspective. So there were many times when a chairman would pass out a bill I knew I couldn't support personally, but I knew that it needed to come up for a vote, and I knew that if it did, it was going to pass, many, many times. So you have to balance your role as a speaker versus your role as an individual legislator. You can still vote no, and the bill can pass, and go into law as it should.

So, yes, coming from a very small rural district, I had that conflict a lot of times, but I was dedicated to the fact that I wasn't going to be an obstructionist. Living up here fourteen years, I got very much acquainted with Topeka and the urban issues. They were totally different than many of the issues back home, but I knew that for the betterment of the state and the betterment of our cities, we had to do certain things, which I know the folks back home didn't approve of. So you bring it up for a vote. You vote no, and it passes. Everybody wins.

EF: We've been going a while.

MH: We probably have enough.

EF: Since you've gone through this experience, I'm going to ask you, how would you assess legislative leadership as a basis for high office, as an experience for higher office?

MH: Of course, if I hadn't become speaker of the House, I would never have become governor. One thing about politics, I've heard Bill Graves say this many time, and it's all true. It's been true in my career. You've got to be in the right place at the right time. Timing is absolutely critical. If I hadn't spent two years in the minority, chances are when my term as speaker had ended, it would have been in midterm for the governor, and I would never have run for governor.

It's a matter of timing. You've got to be in the right place at the right time. You do have to be smart enough to take advantage of it when a door opens, but for a lot of people, the door never opens. For some people, it opens, but they never walk through it. I was very fortunate in that I had the opportunity, but then when I had it, I took advantage of it.

EF: In trying to understand Kansas politics, I look at Bennett, Carlin, Hayden, legislative leaders elevated to the governorship, followed by Finney, Graves, Sebelius, thinking, or at least theorizing that the activism of the Bennett, Carlin, Hayden years was somewhat due to voters going a different direction. I'm thinking electing a state treasurer, a secretary of state, and an insurance commissioner in the nineties and beyond. Is that just kind of a wild academic theory? Do you think there was anything to that?

MH: One thing you've got to remember about Kathleen is that she was in the legislature before she became insurance commissioner.

EF: Good point.

MH: She had that background as well as statewide office. That's a little different than Governor Finney and Governor Graves. They both came from statewide office, and those statewide offices, as you know, they're not policy offices. If you've been secretary of state or if you've been state treasurer or even if you've been insurance commissioner and never been in the legislature, you've dealt with very little policy. Governor Sebelius had a real advantage in that she'd been in the legislature. Then she had statewide office. When she got to the governorship, she had the perspective of both of them.

Bill and Joan Finney didn't have that perspective. They had to learn it. Bill had eight years, and he did learn it, and finally in his second term in particular, he got pretty good footing and was able to really take on some of the policy issues, but he hadn't any experience in policy to begin with, and that's a real handicap.

Throughout state history, very few legislators have been elected governor, but that's not a good thing. This is the spawning ground right here. This is where you learn what it's about. I think it makes a lot of sense for people with legislative backgrounds to run for higher office and win those, if you can.

Frank Carlson is the only Kansan ever to serve in the legislature, to serve as governor, and to serve in both houses of Congress. Nobody else in state history has ever done that. That makes a hell of a lot of sense. You start at the bottom; you work up. Bob Dole was in the legislature, then he was in both houses. He never was governor, but he was in both houses of Congress. That served him well.

We've got some statewide officials right now. Vicki Schmidt --she's been in the legislature. She knows what this is about. She's the insurance commissioner. So she's had the policy side, and now she's got the other side of it, the administrative side. The real truth is, the policy side is so critically important, if you're going to be successful on the second floor.

EF: I've got one last question, and you can go wherever you want on it. My real question is, did you through your service in the Army in Vietnam, did any of that come into your work as a legislator and legislative leader?

MH: It certainly did. I would tell you this story, this anecdote. When I was running for governor after being speaker, one day I was over at the campaign office and they said, “Governor Landon is on the phone. He wants to talk to you.” I'd met him in passing. I shook his hand. I knew who he was, but I certainly wasn't close or anything like that.

I said, “Good afternoon, Governor Landon. I'm honored that you called. What can I do for you?” And he said, “Well, I want to endorse you.” I said, “I'm honored.” I didn't know what to say. I said, “I'm honored that you would. Just tell me why you'd want to do it.” And he said, “Because you've been there under fire,” referring to my military service. I never forgot that. I really hadn't thought so much about it, but I was well trained in the military. I was a draftee. I was a medic, and then I went off to [officers] candidate school, and it was unbelievable training. In fact, I eventually got induced into the Infantry Hall of Fame, but here's the true story. When I was in OCS, you know, we had to do a lot of spit and polish, and I used to have to go down to the Hall of Fame and buff the floors at night, and there was Bob Dole's picture up there on the wall. I can't think of the fellow's name who was president of Emporia State, John Visser.

He was a Marine in World War II, and his picture was up there with Bob Dole's because he had gone to the infantry school. So I was buffing the floors, and I'd look up at their picture. By god, twenty years later, I got inducted into the Infantry Hall of Fame, and they put my picture up there.

I never forgot that the military training that I got, both in the states and in Vietnam. It served me well. It's kind of like Alf Landon said to me, he said, “Well, if you can live all that time in the jungle getting shot at, you can sure as hell be governor.” I said, “Thank you. I accept your endorsement.”

EF: Did you feel that—all this happens almost after your legislative service.

MH: Right.

EF: There were times you were getting shot at during your legislative service?

MH: But they weren't using real bullets. That's the difference. Sure. If you're the speaker of the House, you're going to get shot at every day. But they're shooting blanks.

EF: I've covered everything that I can think of. I know we haven't covered everything of fourteen legislative sessions, but thank you for taking time to do this. Is there any last word you want to offer to the folks at the Oral History Project?

MH: No, I would just say thank you. I think it is strategically important, and unfortunately a lot of people have passed away, and we never got to capture their thoughts. It's a tremendous public service, a tremendous honor really to serve in these halls, and over time, thousands of people have done it. A great number of them have been forgotten, and it is really important I think to future generations that some of this be recorded, and that some of it be remembered and perhaps even serve as an inspiration to others who might someday serve.

EF: Good. Thank you.

MH: Thank you.

[End of File]

