

Rex Buchanan: Good afternoon. I'm Rex Buchanan, former director of the Kansas Geological Survey. Today is May 20, 2024. We're here to Interview former Senator Janis Lee and former Representative Laura McClure for the Kansas Oral History Project. Our videographer is Michael Quade. We thank the Glassman Bird Powell law firm for hosting this interview in its office in Hays.

Janis Lee is a native Kansan from Smith County. She graduated from Smith County High School and Kansas State University. Janis served in the Kansas State Senate from 1989 until 2012, representing the 36th Senate District in the north-central part of the state. Janis was Assistant Minority Leader in the Senate from 1997 until 2012. Of particular interest for this interview was her service on Senate committees on Utilities, Natural Resources, and Agricultural. After leaving the Senate, Janis served as Chief Hearing Officer and Judge *pro tem* and Acting Executive Director of the Kansas Court of Tax Appeals. She's currently the Secretary-Treasurer of a family farming/ranching operation. She continues her public service as Co-Chair of the Governor's Tax Council and lives here in Hays.

Laura McClure is also a native Kansan, born in Hays, and currently living in Osborne, which is in the district she represented in the Kansas House. Her involvement in public issues of particular interest for this interview began when she read a story in the local newspaper about federal plans to build a low-level radioactive waste facility in Kansas. That night Laura began circulating a petition against the [location of the] Central Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact site in Kansas. Asking for support for that petition at her son's baseball game, started Laura's and [eventually] her husband John's journey into politics.

After going to Topeka to testify on the issue and witnessing how the process worked and sometimes didn't work, John ran for and was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1988 to represent District 106 in the north-central part of the state. He took office in 1989 as a member of the minority party.

When John was re-elected in 1991, he was a member of the majority party that had a one-person advantage. It was only the third time in the history of the state that the Democrats were in the majority in the House.

In 1992, Laura ran for what was then the 119th District in the House, made up of pieces and parts of five counties. She was re-elected [4 times] and served for ten years. Laura and John were the first husband and wife consecutively elected to serve in the [Kansas] House of Representatives. Laura served on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee for her entire time in the House. She also served on the House Utilities Committee.

Because their time in the legislature and their districts overlapped, Laura and Janis both worked on a wide range of policies pertinent to the Energy & Environment Collection of oral histories. Confined feeding facilities, solid waste (Subtitle D landfills), waste tires, water quality standards, the Kansas-Colorado lawsuit, and the Water Transfer Act that [the city of] Hays is currently exploring, among others. In the energy arena, significant issues included retail wheeling of electricity, oil and gas pollution remediation, well plugging, and gas-gathering systems regulations.

This interview is part of the Kansas Oral History Project's series examining the development of public policy at the nexus of energy and the environment during the late 20th and 21st centuries. In these interviews, we explore those policies through the eyes of executives, administrators, legislators, environmentalists, and others. The Kansas Oral History Project is a nonprofit corporation that collects and preserves oral histories of Kansans. The project is supported by donations from generous individuals and grants from Evergy and ITC Great Plains.

With that, Janis and Laura, thank you for agreeing to share your insights today and Michael for your videography skills.

So, let's start a little bit with the topic of how you get into politics. In the introduction, we talked about that. Let's start with you, Laura. I understand that a lot of folks get engaged with local grassroots policies, but they all don't wind up in the [state] House of Representatives. I guess, first of all, walk us through the [low-level radioactive] waste compact issue.

Let me preface by saying this was a low-level waste issue. This was not high-level waste. Kansas went through those issues in the [19]60s about how to dispose of low-level waste, like hospital radioactive waste, that sort of thing. Those kinds of facilities were up in the air. Kansas was part of [an interstate] compact to find a state in, as I recall, a five-state area, and at one point, folks were looking at north-central Kansas sites. So how did you get [involved in] that?

Laura McClure: [Laughing] Well, as [you] said, I started a petition. The first thing I told myself was I need to learn about nuclear waste before we could start an organization or do anything about it. I'm so glad you said "low-level radioactive waste," and you're right. High-level are the rods. Everything else is low-level, which includes the gowns and the booties and the medical waste, but it also includes all the resins and all the filtrations out of the water in those radiation ponds.

So, it is very, very dangerous. Those examples of nuclear waste can last in their half-lives, which is also very interesting, for a week or millions of years. The reason the feds set up these compacts, and they set up ten across the country. Ours was the north-central area, and the five states were Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

It's a long story, but I'll try and make it short. The first people I called was the Kansas Natural Resource Council, and the second people I called was the Kansas Department of Health and Environment because I needed to know what we needed to do, what it was, and how. The state had already been researching putting nuclear waste in the Lyons salt mine, and they have discovered that it does not hold nuclear waste. There are cracks, and water does seep out of there. So, we sure didn't want to go with that.

But what we did decide was that it should be stored on-site at Wolf Creek. We had a nuclear power plant. To be responsible, we should be saying we should take care of our own. That takes out the transportation because [if the compact facility was located here] all of this waste from the five states would be on trucks or trains heading to Kansas.

So, we learned a lot. How we got into the Capitol first was we did develop with a lot of help—I'm looking at Mary—in Research. The people there are wonderful. But we wrote a bill. They wrote the bill to not allow burial of nuclear waste in Kansas. If we were going to be the compact site, it had to be above ground.

The first time I ever testified was in the old Supreme Court room. Here I am, a little farm wife, and all the legislators up there in the big chairs, and I did it. Over and over and over, we went to all of the places in the state that we could get to. We had rallies on the Capitol steps. We had garnered a lot of interest, a lot of newspaper stories. I first met Janis, in Smith Center, at one of the meetings we had in Smith Center.

But the best part of the whole thing was that we had worked so hard, and the compact and the state were having their meeting in Beloit [KS] to talk about the compact. The people came in buses from all across the state, all the places we had gone out and visited and talked to. There were over 8,000 people at their meeting.

Ray Peery was the director of the compact. He was quite a character. He came up, and he was standing by me, and he said, "Are these all God-fearing people?" And I looked at him and I said, "Yes, and they all have questions."

I found out later the police had riot gear under the bleachers because they were preparing for any trouble there might be. But [it was] a wonderful experience, a very wearing experience. Ultimately, through a very long process, Nebraska was chosen by the compact, and they ultimately sued. So far, in all ten compacts, there has not been one site built. The Ray Peery I was talking about spent four years in federal prison for embezzling \$800,000 from the compact. He loved cars and watches. So that's how I got involved.

RB: But why did you make that decision to go from that grassroots activity there to being in the House where it's going to be a lot of issues, not just low-level waste?

LM: John ran first. It just felt like the right thing to do because we lived in rural Kansas and didn't feel like we had a real voice.

Janis Lee: You wanted a voice.

LM: Yes, we wanted a voice.

RB: So, Janis, I'm going to come back to your response to this low-level waste issue, but the same question for you because we didn't touch on that in your introduction. Why did you go into politics?

JL: Well, politics, talking about government and service was always a part of my life. My father ran for the Kansas Senate when I was about eight years old, and I remember traveling with him on Sundays, putting up posters on telephone poles. That's where you put them up way back then. He didn't win, but it gave me a real love of politics.

When we first graduated from college, we lived in Iowa. But in [19]73, we made the decision to move back to the farm—my brother and his wife and my husband and me. I soon got involved—well, first of all, my first elected office, I got a call the day after the election from the County Clerk telling me that I was the new Township Treasurer. I had not run for the office, but the current three County Chairmen and their wives had decided that the Treasurer was going to retire, and they decided they needed somebody new. So, they all wrote my name in.

From that, I went to the School Board. From being on the School Board, I became very involved in what was happening at the state level, and that was my impetus for running was because my concern for and support for school finance and those issues that really affected our local schools. So that's where I got involved.

RB: That's interesting. In some respects, you took more of the traditional part of starting at one level and working your way up, whereas, Laura, you just sort of jump in, but also jump in at a grassroots level based on that issue specifically that then propels you.

Janis let's talk a little bit about that low-level siting issue because you all represented areas, obviously a Senate district is much bigger than a House district, but there was some overlap. First of all, talk a little bit about your districts, and then let's come back to this low-level—

JL: Laura, you had part of five counties, and I think all of your district was in my district, I believe. I started out with eight counties and then ended up after that with ten counties, each one of my districts. I went through three reapportionments [creation of new legislative districts] during the time that I was in the Senate.

But we shared the same communities, yes. I was not as involved as she was in [the low-level waste issue]. My perspective for nuclear is much different than hers. Both of my brothers have degrees in nuclear engineering. My older brother spent his working life dealing with nuclear power plants, the rebuilding of the Granbury, Texas one, the other, I think it was in Cleveland. That's what he spent his life doing. So, I had a different view, but I did not want the low-level waste. I did not think it was appropriate for it to be buried in north-central Kansas. As Laura said, that's how we met.

RB: And I remember that time because the [Kanss Geological] Survey got involved with identification of possible locations, and we even drew a map based on—my memory is mostly the Cretaceous shales in north-central Kansas as a possible, in effect, landfill site. That then triggered a lot of the response that you all were both involved in.

LM: I'll jump in. Eighty percent of the sites in those five states were in Kansas. Oklahoma didn't have any. Arkansas had two, I think, just possible sites. The Kansas Geological Survey had done such a great job on maps, [laughter] —Dames & Moore [was the firm] that did the official study through the compact, and they said we were it, and that's another reason I got in. Just because we had better maps— [Laughter]

JL: It didn't seem fair.

RB: I remember that era. Frank Wilson was the geologist at the Survey who did that, and I think there were folks at the Survey who thought land filling was a reasonable idea, at least at that juncture. So, what was the basis for your opposition?

LM: The compacts were formed at the federal level because all of the [existing] sites were leaking. So [the feds] wanted out. They were going to close. I mean, it's water. We've got to protect, have quality water.

I was thinking on the way down here, it doesn't matter how much money we have. If you don't have water, we're not going to make it.

RB: So, it was out of concern of groundwater contamination?

LM: Absolutely.

RB: So, Janis, you just said you had a different perspective on it. Do you mean you were more supportive of that siting?

JL: No. I did not want—I just have a different perspective in terms of the background of nuclear waste and all of that. No, I was not supportive of it. I didn't think it was appropriate.

LM: And something that they've started out with and—I agree it's a very scientific method to make electricity. In the very beginning, they said [nuclear generation of electricity] would [make power] too cheap to meter. But they didn't think—or we didn't know—about what are called “externalities.” So, when you dig the uranium out of the ground, people are exposed. The air is exposed. Water might be exposed. Every step in the process has its problems and they didn't consider the waste.

A lot of companies have gone bankrupt because they didn't figure the waste in when they were making their plans, and this has been a very expensive—millions and millions of dollars were spent on just that concept of the compacts. I think it was \$800,000 that our compact spent in those sixteen years when this was all going on.

RB: So, there wasn't any sense of looking at a low-level waste site as an economic development possibility?

LM: Not for me.

RB: But in your district.

LM: No. We had commissioners in two counties that paid our way to Louisiana for their official compact meeting there. We flew. We worked all on donations and our money, which I never even tried to keep track of. But that's how [the proponents] tried to sell it—any kind of waste facility. They go to an ethnic community, a very poor community or county, and they tell what wonderful things will happen and jobs. No. It was never—there may have been a few [residents]—I should be fair—that would have.

JL: I think there [was some support], yes, but it wasn't widespread.

LM: No.

RB: So, you didn't ever run into that then, Janis, of folks that said—

JL: No.

RB: Because you all come from a part of the state that's a relatively small population, an aging population in a lot of cases, and in a lot of cases, fairly low per capita income counties.

JL: Yes.

RB: There wasn't any sense of here's an opportunity to—

JL: I don't recall that, no.

LM: We never had opposition at any of the meetings. I think they were afraid to stand up if they were for it.

RB: People who would come out and speak on behalf of it.

LM: Right, as economic development.

JL: I do not recall any, no.

RB: Interesting. So, what are the biggest towns in both of your districts?

JL: Beloit was probably the biggest. . .

LM: And that's where the meeting was. That's where we had eight thousand people.

JL: . . . at that point in our districts, yes.

RB: And Beloit is what? Four or five thousand population? Some ballpark like that?

JL: Something like that. It was probably at least five thousand back then.

RB: So, this is really a very rural district.

LM: Yes.

JL: Very rural, yes.

RB: And small-town district.

JL: That's why I had eight counties and later on ten counties because it's such a rural area. I mean, Hays [KS] is a huge town in any of the districts I had.

RB: Yes, the district expands because not only is it a big district at the beginning, but it gets bigger because the population is in effect going down compared to the other parts of the state.

JL: That's right, yes.

RB: And we'll get on to these other issues, but I just got a kick out of listening to the two of you talk about campaigning together. It relates to the question that I just asked you, which is when you're dealing with a predominantly rural district like that, you have a lot of windshield time.

JL: I spent six months every campaign year door to door from Monday through Friday, from 9:00 in the morning until dark, doing door-to-door.

RB: How do you do door-to-door when everybody's out on the farm?

JL: You don't go in the country. I went in towns of a hundred or more. And you have more effect, as Laura knows, in town. The only problem, my campaigning with her, is I had so much more territory to cover. So, I couldn't spend as long at a door as she could spend at a door. But in the daytime, I'd go to small towns, two, three hundred people. And by 4:00, I'd go to my larger towns and take a bathroom break in-between.

LM: Think how many miles we put on our vehicles from Osborne to Lorraine [KS] was my farthest. Before you even knock on a door, you've already driven—I never kept track because we didn't get paid for it.

JL: We lived eight miles south of the [KS-NE] state line, and I went all the way down to Larned [KS] and Jetmore [KS].

RB: Wow. Larned, that's quite a ways down there.

JL: It was, yes. The fortunate thing was, those areas came into my district in 2004, and we had some very good friends here in Hays. And the 2004 and the 2008 campaigns, I actually hired young women who had been my interns who worked the campaign with me. I paid them. They lived with me because there was no place else to live at Kensington [KS].

But we had friends here in Hays that had a bathroom and two bedrooms and their basement. And from about September on, we literally stayed at their house because it saved three hours of driving for us and campaigned in the southern half of the district then—Hays and the southern

half. It takes lots—I'd drive forty thousand miles in a campaign because every day you went someplace.

RB: I remember you had talked about how many miles you put on a car in that process.

LM: And Janis is very right, and I love to talk, and sometimes that was the only time I got to see that person because a lot of them were elderly.

JL: And elderly women, especially. They would invite us in their house, and they would show us pillows and all sorts—

LM: Quilts.

JL: All sorts of stuff.

LM: The worst thing was dogs. You had to be really careful.

JL: Well, I'm not as afraid of dogs.

LM: John got bit.

JL: I only got bit once. I got bit by a little terrier that I never saw. It was at a Democrat house, too [Laughter] but I learned if a dog was on a chain or a rope, you stayed away.

JL: My husband would tell you the story. He went with me one time. It was actually on a Sunday afternoon in rural Jewell County. We went out to this house that had a fence all around the house, and I went to open the gate and this dog came that we later learned was half wolf. He came to the gate. His hair was all standing up. I just put my hand out, and the dog smelled my hand and followed me to the door. And the lady said, "How did you get to my door?" I said, "I don't know. I just let your dog smell my hand." She said, "Nobody gets to my door." But I learned if I put my hand out and let them smell my hand, it was usually okay.

But I always carried a clipboard for information—but for defense.

LM: I got the worst one that ever happened to me in a very small town. I knocked on the door, and he came, and I talked, and he had had a bad experience with government. He'd been in the service. I was trying to calm him down. And you're like, face to face together at the door, he had my brochure, and he looked me in the eye, and he shook his brochure at me, and he said, "If you do anything I don't like, I'll find you." And he had a gun symbol thingy on his house. So, I called Janis, and I told her where that place was and don't go there.

RB: Okay. Let's talk about this a little bit. Obviously, I want to talk about it in terms of your roles in the legislature, but let's talk about gender. You're out there a lot of times, independent, by yourself.

JL: I never felt threatened that I was a woman. Well, one time, I went into this one town. I won't tell the name of the town. The first year, and I went up there. There was this gentleman raking his dirt in his yard. I went to him, handing my brochure. I said, "Hi, I'm Janis Lee. I'm running for the Kansas Senate." He said, "Well, you should be home taking care of your children." And I said, "Well, my youngest son just graduated from high school this year, and he's going to college in the fall." He said, "Well, then you should be home taking care of your husband." I said, "Sir, my husband is a man, and he can take care of himself." But I didn't—very seldom did you have that.

LM: Probably the worst thing I had like that was in a parade in a very small town. I was told my jacket didn't match my campaign sign. [Laughter]

JL: You have to tell the story about the dog and Laura.

LM: Oh, boy. You tell it. I can't remember it.

JL: She was campaigning in this town, and this dog started following her. From door to door to door, this dog kept following her. And finally, she went to a door and knocked, and the lady opened the door and said, "Laura, go home!" The dog's name was Laura.

RB: Obviously, you run into those kinds of sexist comments if you want to call them that, but it didn't sound like you spent a lot of time—

JL: I heard more comments, "Well, it's about time we get some women in there because men have been doing such a lousy job."

RB: Really? Interesting.

JL: Yes. But there were certain things. If there was going to be drinking at an event, I would be there early, and then I would leave. I never wanted to be around in that sort of a situation unless it was a group of people that I knew everybody. But in a public situation, you stayed away from those situations where people may have had too much to drink to say things that would be inappropriate.

RB: But it would be different today, wouldn't it? Or would you not worry about it today?

JL: I wouldn't worry about it.

LM: I wouldn't worry about campaigning in my district. There was one town I never went to because of some trouble, not with me, but in that town. Do you remember the story about Kathleen Sebelius? She was in Topeka, I believe, campaigning in a kind of rough neighborhood, and there was—she knocked on the door, and the men that were there went with her door to door because they were concerned for her.

JL: I never had that. I had one gentleman who told me one time he could never vote for Democrats because they had always started all the wars. But he wasn't mean. I had gotten no threat from him. Probably the nastiest thing I ever had was I left my brochure at a door and knocked on a door and nobody answered. So, I left my brochure, and I walked about a half a block away, and the lady came out and she called me back. So, I went back, and she just tore my brochure up in front of me.

LM: Even back then, the thing that made me the maddest after walking hours, they'd come to the door, open the door, they're on the phone, they take the brochure, and they shut the door.

JL: But if you went into an older person's home, if they invited you in and you stepped inside, if it was by the time you sent out stuff in the mail, if they had some sort of a stand near the door, you'd be very likely to see your material on the stand, if it were an older person.

RB: I do get a kick about the way you guys talked about these town but won't say what they are.

JL: Oh, no, no, no.

LM: That would not be good.

JL: No, you wouldn't do that.

LM: And you do meet so many wonderful people.

JL: Yes. Of both parties. My district was 67 percent Republican and 21 percent Democrat. I got 67 percent of the vote in my first election. So, I had to have a lot of Republican support, and you knew that as you represented those people. You respected them all. You learned from them all.

LM: We never got elected—

JL: By Democrats.

LM: The Democrats.

RB: So why were you Democrats?

JL: Because Democrats cared.

LM: And I think maybe in your situation, was your family—

JL: Oh, yes, both my mother and my father were very strong Democrats. In fact, my father thought I was crazy for running because it was impossible for me to win.

RB: As a Democrat?

JL: As a Democrat. That's right. But I have always been a Democrat, and I would not change just to run. That was something that I could not morally do. But he became very involved in me being a Senator. I worried more about him in later years if I were to lose than I worried about myself.

RB: So why did you?

LM: And my family's Republican. And after going to Topeka and seeing the two parties at work, I chose the Democrats.

RB: But politically wouldn't your life have been easier? I mean, your district couldn't look any different than what Janis is talking about, 67 percent Republican.

LM: No. The way they treat—I don't know how much I should do here.

JL: It wouldn't be easier because you would not be able to fight for the things that you thought were important.

LM: Good, good.

JL: Is that the way to put it?

LM: Yes. And if you did something too many times, [Republican leadership] took chairmanships away. They took your office away. Just the way that they treated their own.

RB: So, let's go back to the radioactive waste fight. In effect, you win, right?

LM: Yes, we won. No sites were selected. The site that the commission, compact voted for in Nebraska was clear on the South Dakota border. It was right on the Niobrara [River], and they fought hard. Of course, they were in the win, and Ray Peery helped us, of course.

But it was a stupid idea. The feds set up that idea as Russian roulette. Whoever lost was going to get the site. And they did everything and got nothing.

RB: My memory of that was originally the idea was that those sites would rotate from one state to another, but everybody sort of assumed that once the first state was selected, that would be the end of it. So, no matter what they said, that was going to be the process.

LM: You could not believe them. And US Ecology was their contractor, and it was owned by American Ecology. It was all just—rotten.

RB: So, Janis, you said that really the issue that sort of propels you down this road is school finance. How do you get involved on the environmental side, the kinds of committees that we've talked about?

JL: Because I'm one that loves to learn. I enjoyed natural resources, those sorts of things, but once I became part of that committee, then it became my responsibility to learn everything I could about the issues. I loved to learn. That's one of the things that I enjoyed the most about the legislature was all of the opportunities, all of the responsibility you had to learn and to learn about the many different issues.

And obviously involved in a farming operation, the environment was important. My father had been one of the first ones in terms of doing the contouring of the land, putting in all of the terraces and that sort of thing to better manage the land, to better farm the land. And actually, our farming operation had taken many acres of land that had been farmed that never should have been farmed and put them back to grass.

RB: CRP [Conservation Reserve Program] and those kinds of things.

JL: Just back to grass pastures. I used to hunt musk thistle, and I used to hate to drive over those portions of pasture that had been farmed because they were so much rougher than the natural prairie.

RB: So that connection between ag and sort of the environment, conservation side.

JL: Yes.

RB: The connection for you seems pretty obvious, Laura.

LM: Yes. I was so fortunate. I saw several of these [oral history interviews online]. One with Carl Holmes, Representative [from Liberal, KS,] and Chairman [of House Energy and Natural Resources Committee]. He was just fantastic, and whenever, whoever was up there testifying, he would just look at me because he knew I had questions. [Laughter]

JL: I found the same thing in the Senate, that my chairman would look at me because I always asked questions.

RB: I kind of remember that specifically about you. I would remember as soon as Carl [Holmes] opened it up [to questions], I kind of knew who was going to be first in line in that process.

LM: And I'd also like to give credit to the Kansas Geological Survey because Senator Lee and I had the best times, being inquisitive and asking questions on the [KGS Field Conference] tours.

JL: On the tours you used to give, yes. Yes, those were great.

LM: I learned so, so much, and it was usually based on something that had been or was going to be in the legislature. We could speak knowledgeably.

RB: Let's talk a little bit about water issues. You raised those. Before we started, we were talking a little bit about Waters of the US [federal regulation]. That was one issue that I remember Janis, you in particular were pretty vocal about.

JL: Yes.

RB: This was a question of how you define, in effect, a perennial stream as opposed to an ephemeral stream. And then the question is, what is subject to regulation by the federal government?

JL: That's right. And the federal government had disapproved what Kansas had in place. At that point, it was 2001. Part of the fear that many of us from western Kansas had was that we had draws that if you had a three-inch rain, the water would run down. But otherwise, there wasn't any water in that for years, and there was talk that the federal government might make you fence those off with some of the—although I don't think it would have happened. That was some of the fear.

So I began to work with a lady by the name of Allie Devine who at the time was working for the [Kansas] Livestock Association, and we spent a great deal of time with [US Geological Survey] (USGS), talking about how do you define, how do you determine how much flow there should be in an area on a regular basis before it can be called a stream and worked very, very hard on that.

Ultimately, we got the bill passed. And ultimately the EPA [US Environmental Protection Agency] approved. The KDHE [Kansas Department of Health and Environment] had to go through a series of years of studying what we actually had proposed to be able to provide—

RB: When you say, “got the bill passed,” what bill are we talking about?

JL: It was Senate Bill 204 in 2001.

RB: And it was aimed at?

JL: It was aimed at defining what a stream was, what would define how much water flow there had to be in the stream and where it would end up, where that water would end up in terms of what would then be a “Waters of the US.”

RB: Because in terms of water quantity issues, that’s predominantly a state-based issue.

JL: Yes.

RB: Not much of a fed-based issue. But water quality is very different, and the Environmental Protection Agency is sort of the driver of KDHE in that process. So, you’re dealing both with technical questions and that fed-state [relationship]—

JL: That’s correct, that fed-state—the federal government had to ultimately approve whatever the state was doing. But the quality was affected by the quantity.

RB: Right. Is that one where you felt like the resolution was what you were after?

JL: Yes, it was what we were after. It provided what satisfied the EPA but still kept rural, especially western Kansas rural, landowners from being able to have better use of their land.

RB: Is that a hard tightrope to walk between the folks out in your part of the world that would probably assume that there wasn’t any regulation at all in both the state and federal regulatory—

JL: That's true, yes. But you have to find—that's part of what you do as a legislator. You find a compromise that's a good solution that the governments will agree with, but you can explain to your constituents.

And, Kansas, as you know, is one of those really interesting states in terms of the amount of rainfall that we have which affects the amount of water flow that we have.

RB: It's a completely different state from one end of the state to the other. Yet the rules in effect will have to—

JL: Have to match, have to work for all. So, yes.

RB: Let's also talk about this Water Transfer Act, which is an issue that raises its head for exactly that reason. There's some water-short parts of the state, and there are other parts of the state that have a lot of water, and it's pretty easy for the water-short parts of the state to look at those other parts and say, "Why don't we just move some of that water here?"

You were involved, what triggered that water transfer conversation?

JL: Well, from my perspective, it started out in Johnson County, and it dealt with Water District One, I think.

RB: Water One is the big water district there.

JL: In Johnson County, and where they were going to get their water. At that point, my district was all north of this area, and I viewed it from really looking at eastern Colorado, and how much of eastern Colorado water had been mined and taken to the foothills.

RB: The front range.

JL: The front range, yes, and how that had really hurt—I felt it hurt the eastern part of Colorado and looked at it from that perspective.

RB: Was this an issue you got involved with, Laura?

LM: Oh, yes. I think there was also Wichita.

RB: Wichita was the town I was going to talk about. In my memory, it triggered this with conversations particularly about Milford Reservoir and other places.

LM: Yes. I know Carl Holmes was in from the beginning, was probably stirring the pot for quite a while. It was a very interesting debate, too. We talk about the differences and battles between Democrats and Republicans, but it's far worse when I was there between urban and rural.

JL: It was urban and rural issues.

LM: And school finance was huge.

JL: Always urban and rural.

LM: We're not going to talk about that. But the whole process. I know Carl wanted to have it basin-to-basin instead of anywhere.

JL: I remember helping to determine what an entity wanting to transfer the water, how they would have to go through the process and prove that they needed it more than where the water currently was.

LM: And that they were using conservation. I'll put a plug in for Hays now. They did an amazing job. They got the public [use of water in Hays] way down—I'm thinking thirteen gallons a person per day.

JL: Hays uses less water per person than any other city in the state.

LM: I was at a meeting in Wichita, and I was asking them, "When are you going to start using indigenous grasses for the lawns?"

RB: But the point, and your urban-rural is a good one because a lot of times it was Wichita or big cities that were casting about, looking for water, and the concern is that they would go to rural areas that didn't have the political wherewithal to prevent that, or somebody would just sell them water rights, and that was the end of the game, and people didn't have any control over water in effect in their own basin or whatever area they want to talk about.

JL: That's correct, yes.

RB: But it is interesting then, the city that trips this is not Wichita, but it's Hays.

JL: Yes, and Hays purchased that ranch. In fact, John Bird, whose office we are doing this interview in, was the attorney for Hays at the time. And they purchased that ranch and converted a lot of irrigation water and no longer—that's no longer irrigated down there, what they're doing.

RB: Yes, this is the Circle K Ranch down by Kinsley. Because of the distance and volume of water that was going to be transferred up here, it triggered the Transfer Act.

JL: More than 2,000 gallons, more than 35 miles.

RB: So, as we sit here today, that transfer hasn't been completely approved.

JL: It's virtually there, but, no, it's not completely approved yet, but it's to the point that the city is beginning to look at contracting to do the pipeline to do it.

RB: Okay.

JL: And it goes also to Russell.

RB: Right.

JL: It's not just Hays. Part of it goes to Russell.

RB: I know Russell was always in conversation about taking water out of Wilson, but because of salinity issues, Wilson wasn't—

JL: It didn't work.

RB: So, part of the value I think of these conversations in terms of oral history is looking back and sort of making—passing judgments about what you had to decide about in the heat of the battle. You look back at the Water Transfer Act. Are you happy with the result there?

JL: I am. They've going through a long, long process, and I got to sit in on a couple of—it's been fascinating—a couple of the hearings that they've had where you hear both sides. Yes, I am satisfied with the law that we passed.

LM: And I'm not changing the subject, but probably the hardest thing about spending hours and years and doing all that work on the nuclear waste, the bill that we did get passed to not bury nuclear waste in Kansas has probably already been repealed or changed or not there anymore. Any legislature can—

JL: Anything you've done can change afterwards.

LM: So, this is a real win that this lasted that long. How many years ago did we pass it? This is the first—I can't remember.

JL: I don't remember.

LM: But this is the first city to take—

RB: Let me play devil's advocate and say, "I remember that purchase and the initial application happened maybe twenty years ago."

JL: Yes.

RB: It's been a long time. Is maybe the process too onerous?

JL: I don't know. It's hard to say. From the perspective of Hays, it's been expensive. Yes, that's right. But from the perspective of protecting water rights—I'm a strong advocate. One of my father's best friends was an attorney from Smith Center, Arno Windscheffel. Arno Windscheffel is one of the people that helped write the first Kansas water law. And Guy Gibson who was also from Smith County.

RB: Chief engineer of the Division of Water Resources.

JL: Yes, of the Division of Water Resources. He was there when I first was elected. So, water law is something that I find to be very important. I think Kansas is very fortunate that our water law was written way back— [19]45, wasn't it?

RB: That Water Appropriation Act that sort of starts everything was 1945.

JL: Before irrigation or anything else became so important in Kansas. I believe it allows us to have better water law than many, many states have.

LM: Would it be because they're the first? I mean, it's all new.

RB: That's a good question. I think there was also a period of time where Hays was not pursuing it real actively because of water-quality issues that they subsequently found out after they purchased the ranch. But it is a balancing act between the city of Hays and a lot of landowners in a part of the state quite a ways away whose reaction was, "Why should we subsidize Hays's growth with water that should be down here?" So, in effect, you're trying to do a pretty tough balancing act.

JL: That's right. That's what we tried to do in that bill. We tried to find a way to do that balance.

RB: Another issue related to water that you brought up was confined feeding operations. This is one that I don't know as much about as I do some of the other things that we've talked about. What is the context here? What are we talking about?

LM: I think it was, I'd have to look, maybe 1990 sometime, Seaboard was looking at southwest Kansas to put in a confined feed area or CAFO [Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation].

JL: It was for hogs, right?

LM: Yes. Ding, ding, ding. Water. The lagoons were the first thing I hit on. I went to the committee that does research for the legislators and found out that there were no standards for lagoons, period—not people lagoons, hog lagoons. Cattle—they don't normally use lagoons.

JL: No, livestock doesn't have a lagoon.

LM: I did a lot of research. The State hired Kansas State University to do a study on lagoons, plastic liners, clay, and other issues. The State took a whole group, kind of like what you did, to North Carolina to look at what they did wrong. They have millions of hogs, and they have just polluted their water something terrible. So, they used to have all these little farms with tobacco, and a lot of those have turned to chicken or hogs. It was a very interesting—I brought a whole suitcase back full of information that I took to the library. I hope they still have it.

But they didn't have setback distances. They used the liquid part if they do a swill thing. They spray it on the fields. They were hitting cars on Sunday, church in the country. I didn't think that was too good.

The other thing they did was they sprayed it on so much that it became totally unusable because of high nitrates.

JL: Just far too much of it.

LM: Just way too much. So, we worked on setback distances. We worked on testing the fields. The farmers go out and they test to see what kind of fertilizer they need while they're putting fertilizer on. So, it's the same test. So that was part of it. The main things were the lagoons and the setback distances, but it was a real eye-opener to see what they had done and not done.

JL: Those laws are still in place.

LM: I believe they are.

JL: Oh, yes.

LM: What was interesting was shortly after we passed ours, the feds came out with almost the same thing, and we were already ahead of the game. We'd done a lot of work.

RB: What particular liners are related to lagoons, disposal, and in particular nitrate contamination?

JL: I had a constituent with a large hog operation, and he built a lagoon, only he built it over a well.

LM: Oh, no.

JL: He could have built it over a well if you have the well appropriately plugged. This was a gentleman—that case just was settled, and this happened ten, fifteen years ago. But the state rightfully made him get rid of the hogs he'd just brought in, and we're talking about not a small number of hogs. He had to empty the lagoon and totally rebuild the lagoon. He had to have somebody there inspecting him while that well was being plugged before he could ultimately use it, which is the way that it should have happened. If he would have had somebody there in the beginning when he was building the lagoon and to show that it was being appropriately plugged, he wouldn't have had any problem.

RB: A lot of these issues, though, for Confined Feeding Operations are in southwestern Kansas because that's where there's a lot of the [meat processing plants] are.

JL: There are confined hog operations all over, not like they are down there.

LM: Northeast.

RB: I would say particularly for some of those hog factories like Seaboard, that's where I see them in southwestern Kansas. You didn't run into anybody who said, "What are you worried about my part of the world for?"

LM: No. Well, no.

JL: Seaboard did, but she probably didn't talk to them. [Laughing]

LM: There were a few people that wouldn't come in my office. [Laughing]

JL: I always let them in. I always let them talk. That was their right to come and talk to me. That didn't mean that I agreed with them, or I was going to change. But I learned.

LM: I talked to them in the hall. [Laughing] Seaboard did not come into Kansas at that time. They put a slaughter plant in Guymon, Oklahoma.

RB: Any other water issues in the time that jump out at you?

LM: Oh, Kansas-Colorado.

JL: Oh, yes.

RB: We're talking about the lawsuit of the Arkansas River. That lawsuit starts in 1985. It's filed basically over flow that Colorado is supposed to deliver to the state line, in effect, to Kansas.

JL: Yes.

RB: How did you guys get involved with that?

JL: Because the Republican River actually—

RB: Okay. You said *Kansas v. Colorado*. Why are we talking about the Republican River?

JL: Because it's all part of that compact that has Nebraska in it, too.

LM: We're in two compacts. The one—and I don't know which one is which, but Colorado was not supposed to build any dams or anything. The Arkansas [River]—I couldn't think of Arkansas.

RB: That's *Kansas v. Colorado* in 1985.

JL: I'm thinking about the other lawsuit. That's what I'm thinking of.

LM: Two lawsuits. This one was first, of course, with Carl Holmes right in there. A brief version of water law is so, so, so much different than regular law. But they started out with a water judge. There are special water judges. And semis of papers up there, days, and he died.

RB: This is the Special Master?

JL: The Special Master. Then he had to start—

LM: California. They started all over again, trucking all of this. And our main guy that was going to testify had a nervous breakdown.

RB: The consultant had a nervous breakdown.

LM: They finally got through it. I don't know how many years or anything, and we won. But what Colorado did was release the tail water out of their irrigation. So, it wasn't—we didn't have a piece in that compact on quality but quantity.

Now the one on the Republican [River], there is a piece on quality.

JL: And the Republican [River lawsuit], ultimately Colorado closed down a reservoir that actually people in northwest Kansas went to. I didn't even think about that until I found out that later. But they used that reservoir. But Colorado had the choice of either cutting off irrigators or doing away with the reservoir to do what they had to do, and that happened because of the Republican River [lawsuit], and that came into a lot of my northern counties.

RB: We visited that Colorado reservoir after it was dried up. It was the first time I walked across basically a dry reservoir bed in that process. So, there's two compact lawsuits in effect—the *Kansas v. Colorado*, and I think that was [19]85 to 2005. It went on for a long time.

JL: Yes.

RB: And then there was a Republican River compact that was a fight that was settled in less time, maybe a little more amiably, maybe not.

JL: One of the [Kansas] Geological Survey tours you took us on, we actually went—I think we went up into Nebraska. And I sat at a dinner table, at a lunch table with some of the farmers from Nebraska, and it was such a fascinating discussion. And I fully understood where they were coming from, being on a family farm, that my father and his brothers had started. This gentleman was so concerned that his grandson was not going to be able to have enough water to have the kind of farm that he had had. But if you drove across southern Nebraska, you would see that the farmsteads were far nicer than many of the farmsteads in the area of the state that I was used to being in.

RB: I remember that trip. We had put that together with some legislators from Nebraska. I think we were sort of hoping that everybody would sort of join hands and sing “Kumbaya.” It didn't work that way.

JL: But I found it to be very educational.

RB: Good.

JL: It was very good in terms of while I didn't agree, I understood.

LM: I really think because the Nebraska legislators wouldn't do anything, they kept selling land. They kept letting them irrigate. They wanted us to sue them. They wouldn't take the heat.

JL: That's one of the reasons I think the Kansas Water Law is such a good law.

LM: Yes.

JL: We got it long before—Nebraska didn't do their Water Law until they had the local groups that were in control of the water as opposed to the state being in control of the water.

RB: They had those Natural Resource Districts, and the state didn't have much control over problems that were affecting their interstate issues like Republican River. And Nebraska also didn't recognize that groundwater/surface water connection for a long, long time legally which was kind of mind boggling, if you look back on it now.

JL: Yes, it just seems so incredibly—

RB: Hard to believe.

JL: Yes, you didn't believe that there was a connection between groundwater and surface water.

RB: Any other water issues? If not, let's move on to, and if you think of something, let's go on to—water is obviously kind of the 600-pound gorilla in the state, but there are other environmental issues and energy issues. I know, Janis, one of the ones that you wanted to talk about was—

JL: Gas.

RB: Let's talk about it.

JL: Gas gathering?

RB: Yes.

JL: That was such a fascinating one to me. I'm from north-central Kansas.

RB: Not much oil and gas up there.

JL: No oil and gas in Smith County. But an interesting thing, in the [19]96 campaign, I got a lot of donations from gas-gathering companies. I really had no idea why, but they were legal campaign donations, and so I took them.

Well, we come into the [19]97 session, and I began to understand why. I began to work with two Representatives, Bob Krehbiel and Dennis McKinney, along with a gentleman by the name of Montgomery Escue. Do you remember Montgomery?

LM: Yes.

JL: So, Montgomery came and wanted to talk. He was working with the gas producers in southwest Kansas.

RB: Just to back up, Bob Krehbiel is a legislator from Pretty Prairie who was also on the Corporation Commission, and Dennis McKinney is from the Greensburg [KS] area.

JL: That's right. They were two legislators, and they were working on a bill in the House. And Montgomery Escue was the one working with them and asked to come and visit me and to—

RB: But not a legislator.

JL: Not a legislator.

RB: Montgomery Escue. I would remember that name.

LM: Tall.

JL: He was not a legislator, and he was not a lobbyist. He was just an individual from southwest Kansas that worked with the other gas-producing people and wanted to come and talk to us about gas-gathering because the federal government had deregulated gas-gathering. And many of the people that had natural gas wells were just Mom and Pops that had one or two natural gas wells. You had to somehow get your natural gas to a gas-gathering, and it cost you—this was back in [19]97. It cost about \$50,000 a mile to build a pipeline, and there were not very many gatherers. You had very little choice.

What began to happen during that time after the federal government was deregulating gas-gathering was that the companies would come and sign a contract with you to gather your gas, but you had to promise that you would not tell anybody what you were being paid, period. And if you told anybody, then that contract was null and void, and they wouldn't gather your gas. Montgomery was trying to represent those people. As I mentioned, I had the president of more than one gas gathering company come and visit with me.

Well, I began to work with Stan Clark who was a senator from northwest Kansas. He also had very little gas gathering, but we were both on the Utilities Committee. I don't remember whether it was Energies or Utilities. I don't remember which it was, or if at that time, the committee was together. Anyway, we began to work with the House members. The chairman of the Senate committee and the Senate president had promised the gas gatherers that nothing would really happen in Kansas.

Well, Stan and I, when the bill came to the Senate committee and it was open for discussion, Stan and I had enough votes on the committee that we began to amend into the bill what the House had passed, the bill that the House had passed. The Chairman was unhappy and didn't have committee [meetings]—just stopped the committee, and we didn't have committee for I don't know how long, but for several days, if not a couple of weeks.

And finally, the time came when we had to bring the bill to the floor. During that time, Stan and I had worked with both Democrats and Republicans and had the votes, not just the votes to pass it, but we had twenty-six votes, and there was a 27th senator who had to vote with us although we had not talked with that senator because he was very involved with leadership, but we knew that he had to vote with us because of where he was from.

What we had in the bill was that the gas gatherers had to go to the KCC and tell the KCC what they were paying for the gas that they were gathering, what they were charging, what they were paying, and the gas-gathering companies kept saying, "There's all qualities of gas," which there is in natural gas. "And we pay more for some, and the producers just won't understand that." And we said, "Well, it's sort of like when you sell wheat." When you go to an elevator and you sell your wheat, you get a higher price if you've got good protein. If the moisture's wrong, etc., there's a lot of different prices. But farmers are able to understand that, and we said, "We think gas producers will be able to understand that."

And we ultimately got the bill passed with twenty-seven votes in the Senate, which meant that it would not do any good to veto the bill. But it was one of those fascinating experiences for me because it was an issue that I really knew nothing about to begin with but by visiting people on both sides, I learned a lot, and we were able to put together a coalition, a very bipartisan coalition

to bring about what I think is a good law that protects many of those gas producers or just small independent people.

RB: Were you involved in that in any fashion, Laura?

LM: I was just peripherally. Janis was far, far more involved, but I did let them in my office.
[Laughter]

RB: What about energy issues from your perspective? We've talked about the low-level waste compact. Are there other energy issues?

LM: That retail wheeling and anything that was wind power I worked for.

JL: Retail wheeling was fascinating.

RB: So, weigh out that issue because again electricity is not exactly my wheelhouse here.

JL: Large companies wanted to be able to buy [electricity]—rather than going through a [utility] company like Midwest Energy or Evergy or any of those, they wanted to be able to go directly. Right now, electric rates are sort of—they're evened out. Somebody that uses very little electricity pays the same rate as somebody that uses a fair amount of electricity, probably not as much as a large company, but there's a lot of what I would call "evening out" in those rates.

There were those who wanted us to go so everybody bought directly, and therefore, if you didn't use very much, the rates would probably be a whole lot higher because it cost a lot per kilowatt to get it to you. And that's really what retail wheeling was all about, how much were we going to allow the generators of electricity to go straight to the consumer of electricity, and trying to protect the average homeowner, the average person that used electricity and needed it, we all need it, but wasn't a huge consumer.

RB: You mentioned wind power. This must have been pretty early on in terms of conversations about wind farms.

JL: We went down to Spearville. You were on that trip.

LM: Yes.

JL: When the first wind farm—

RB: Which was basically the first wind farm in that part of the state. I don't remember what year that was. That's one of the oldest ones in the state. So is that just a case of becoming informed or—

LM: I was particularly interested to see if it would be feasible for the counties in my district. The biggest issue were the transmission lines, and that we didn't have any that would do that. What they found out with the first one was they had—the towers were generating more electricity when they turned it on. I'm just going to use my words. It blew up the station that it was going into. So, there was a lot of development to go through.

We now have a couple of—and I don't know if they're full—huge generation lines coming through.

JL: They're getting fuller. There are times when you'll see that there's wind, but the wind generators are turned off because there's too much power being produced.

LM: And we're getting a few. Wilson [County] is probably—that area, the place where the most are in what was my district.

JL: I got to serve on the Kansas Electric Transmission Authority, which Carl Holmes was the chair of that. That was developed to encourage transmission lines and brought in—ITC brought in that first line.

RB: I've got a couple of, sort of, big-picture questions I wanted to ask. But before I do that, any other specific issue things that we haven't talked about in this process?

JL: I can't think of anything.

RB: Okay. If you do, we can come back to it. And you're probably not going to see this question coming. So, you may need a second or two to think about it. But what was the most rewarding part—either the most rewarding issue you worked on most rewarding part of the job?

JL: For me, the most rewarding part of the job without question was the individuals that you could help that probably nobody but them and you knew about. There was a family in my very first years in office, who had a child who was normal when he was born, and then he got his shots, and he became very, very disabled. After that, they had two more children, but this child, they kept him home until he was about seven, and then they sent him down to Windfield.

This was when DSNWK was coming into Hays, and they wanted Brandon to be able to be brought to Hays because they lived close enough that they could bring their other two children—

RB: And just to back up, DSNWK?

JL: Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas that has homes for children who are disabled here in Hays. They wanted Brandon to be brought here so that they could bring their other children to see Brandon because they both worked, and going to Windfield was a long ways away.

So, I began to work on that. Well, I found out that Brandon was fed by a stomach tube. He couldn't eat. And I worked all session with the nurses. For them to bring him to one of the facilities in Hays, he had to have a full-time RN there. And I was trying to get around those rules some way.

I remember it was a Wednesday, and I'd been gone, and I went home, and I called Brandon's mother just to talk about it, and I said, "It's so bad that Brandon lost the ability to eat," and she said, "Oh, he didn't." She said, "The nurses just got tired of feeding him by mouth at Windfield. So, they had a stomach tube put in." It was something I couldn't believe, but I thanked her, and I said, "Let me see what I can do." I called the Secretary of Health and Environment—I'd been working with him, and I said, "You need to hear this discussion that I just had."

This was in October, and I told him, and it was a Wednesday in October. And on Friday, I got a call back. He said, "You'll be pleased to know, Janis, that they are beginning to work with Brandon now so that he can eat by mouth." And by February, they were able to bring him to Hays.

It's those kinds of things that you can do that make all of it worth it, to be able just to help individuals. That to me was one of the main things that you're supposed to do. Jeff Farney was another one that I worked a lot with who at the time I started helping him, he told me he was a Republican, and then he changed. But just things that you can do to help individuals that need help, and you have a way to find the resources to help them.

RB: That's a tough act to follow.

LM: Oh, yes, it is!

RB: I should have let you go first.

JL: I'm sorry.

LM: No, that's amazing. You can switch it on there, can't you?

RB: Do you have an answer for that?

LM: Yes. Whenever I was asked, it's the people. Mine's not that incredible of a story, but you get—and I can't imagine how many emails they get now—but we had letters and letters and letters and helping people. One of my constituents' son had died in an accident in Arizona. Just all those stories. And I would be there on Saturdays and Sundays sometimes taking people up to the [Statehouse] dome. I've probably been up there with more—not my constituents, but it's absolutely the people.

I wanted to toss in one of the most interesting debates on the House floor, and it has nothing to do with the thing that you just asked me. We spent eight hours on the House floor debating the Confined Feeding Areas Bill, just back and forth and back and forth. That was a good experience. Almost everybody on the committee testified at the mic, and that's when two people went to the mic and actually had a debate. And actually, you could change minds, change votes because they were listening, and it made a difference.

I don't see that now. To answer your next question, it seems like when they go to the mic or the things in the papers that they don't even talk about the issue, the topic. They just bash each other, and that does not work, and it's not good.

JL: You always knew in the Senate when you were in a debate, and the other person would say, "Well, my good friend, the Senator from . . ." [Laughter]

RB: I think that's a good point. Even in the best of times, it always looked to me like people on the outside didn't understand how much work gets done in committee. They have this view that the floor is where everything happens. From what I could see, the committees were where everything happens.

LM: Yes.

RB: By the time you got to the full floor, the kind of thing you're talking about happened but not very often.

JL: That's correct. That's true. I always found that I was so much more effective in a committee. Lots of times, the question I asked, I knew the answer, but I asked it because if somebody else said the answer beyond me, I felt that it had more impact.

LM: Yes.

JL: At least to back up what I was saying.

RB: I've got a couple of questions that relate very directly to that. How do you feel about the role of lobbyists? Were you surprised at the role that lobbyists played when you showed up there? What are your thoughts about it as you look back?

LM: The good lobbyists are a valuable resource, and you always know that they're coming from that perspective, and you listen. That was directed at me. And you weigh that. The more lobbyists you talked to on that same issue, you'll get all the answers. And you ask them questions, and they'll bring you information.

The thing that concerned me the most were certain legislators that would go out at lunch, go out in the hall, and pick a lobbyist, to take them out to eat. I didn't believe in that. If they took the whole committee, fine, or all the Democrats or all the Republicans or whatever. But they do play a valuable role.

JL: I would agree with that. And you learn when you're there for a while, you learn which lobbyist you can trust. It's not just because they agree with you.

LM: No.

JL: It's just because you can trust what they're telling you.

LM: Yes.

JL: And a really good lobbyist if you ask them, can tell you the other side of the issue, why they don't agree with that, but what the other side of the issue is.

They provide a service, especially those lobbyists that represent different interest groups like nurses or farmers or whatever because the average person can't be down there. They can't be involved in knowing. I do however remember—it's another story, but it dealt with tires, used tires, I think.

RB: Waste tires.

JL: Yes, waste tires. I was supporting a bill, and I don't exactly remember what the bill was. I just remember it dealt with tires, and this lobbyist from this group had come in and told me I had to vote this way on it. And it wasn't very long until I was—which I wasn't going to vote that way on it, and I was talking with one of the members of his group. So, I said, "Do you know the whole story?" Well, this is what he knew. This was a constituent of mine. I said, "Well, here's

the rest of the story.” And he said, “Wait a minute.” He said, “You’re right. We’re not being told the whole story.”

LM: You learn.

JL: You have to have a good enough relationship with your constituents that you can sort of understand the lobbyists for this organization is talking for the, the bigger people in that group, the bigger companies in that group, and maybe not for the people that are in that group from your district, which may have a different interest than what they have, what their big lobbying organization have.

RB: Was that waste-tire issue one that you wanted to bring up, Laura?

LM: You just haven’t lived until you’ve been to a three-day waste-tire conference. [Laughter]
One for me.

It was fascinating. All the products that can be made. If you take the wires out. I know they use a lot of it on playgrounds now. But what they were trying to do also was make monofils, just waste tires in a landfill so ultimately when it became economical, we could go back. They’d be there.

There was an issue somebody was floating around that they’d fill up with water, float to the top. That wasn’t true. And I honestly can’t remember what happened to that bill or if they ever monofilled any of them. There’s oil. You can squeeze the oil out of them. But if oil is a bazillion [dollars] a barrel.

RB: I thought it was during that time period then the fee got placed on waste [tire] disposal.

LM: Yes.

RB: That was beginning to address, make people more conscious of what a big issue this was, partly because sometimes people would get rid of them by setting them on fire.

LM: That house that caught on fire, wasn’t that in Topeka that was full of tires because that’s where they were storing them? I think that was in Topeka.

JL: When you talk about that fee on tires, it makes me think of when we put a fee on gas for doing the clean-up of the filling stations, underground storage tanks. I don’t remember how much had to be in the fund before we took the penny off. There’s so much that has to be in the fund to clean up the underground storage tanks.

You get the same thing on dry-cleaning, too, something similar on dry-cleaning.

RB: The big issue in Hutch and Wichita and various places.

So why did you quit when you quit? Or maybe “quit” isn’t quite the right word.

JL: Tell the whole story, Laura.

LM: Redistricting was awful.

JL: They redistricted her on purpose to another legislator’s district in order to save a third legislator, and Laura decided to step down.

LM: There was one stormy night that a couple of Republicans didn’t go home, and on Monday, they said, “We have a new”—they always made new maps, and they’d be on the desk. They said, “This is our SOL—Save Our Laura map.”

It wasn’t. No, it was not fun. I like to say it took five House members to replace me.

RB: So, in effect they drew district lines in ways that made—

JL: It was going to be difficult, very.

RB: You would be running against in effect an incumbent.

JL: Yes.

LM: And gerrymandered. It was just horrible. It wasn’t to Texas, but almost.

RB: So, in some respects, it’s almost a—it’s not necessarily a choice—I mean, it is a choice obviously, but not one that was just a case of “I’ve decided to step down.”

LM: No.

RB: Janis, what about you? I know you served much longer.

JL: I had served twenty-two years. I had decided that the next election, I was going to have to make a decision, and it probably might be time to step down, but in the meantime, Governor Parkinson asked me if I would serve on the Court of Tax Appeals. There were two jobs that I was interested in besides the legislature. One would have been the KCC, and the other was the

Court of Tax Appeals because I had served twenty years on the Senate Tax Committee and had been the ranking minority member for many of those years.

So, when he offered me that opportunity, I decided it was time. Being a Democrat Senator in the district that I represented which was such a majority Republican, all of my summer was spent—I was in twenty-five to thirty parades every summer. I went to all the community celebrations because it was a way that I could—and it wasn't just election year. It was every year because it was a way that I was able to in pleasure communicate with my constituents. So, we had not had very many family vacations and were not able to spend very much time with our kids as they were moving out of home and stuff.

So, it was just time. I made the decision that it was time, and I had the great opportunity to serve on the Kansas Court of Tax Appeals. I wish that every legislator had the opportunity to serve in a government agency because one of the things I found out was how hard the vast majority of those people work to make those agencies operate in the manner that they're supposed to. I gained a tremendous amount of respect for the people working in those offices.

RB: I appreciate that. I would say in my experience I was consistently impressed by the quality of the folks on the water side. That's the one that I was always familiar with. The quality of folks that people had dealing with a lot of the water issues in the state I always thought was under appreciated by most people. It's obviously a highly technical, very emotional issue that's difficult to deal with [from] one end of the state or the other. The quality of folks that I dealt with in that process never failed to impress the heck out of me.

JL: I was very impressed with the people that I worked with in the Court of Tax Appeals. And I'm thrilled that I had that opportunity, and it was a nice way to be able to step down, my choice.

RB: So, do you miss it?

LM: Yes and no. I miss the people. With the atmosphere there now, I couldn't do it. It's just not right.

RB: In terms of the partisanship or the process itself?

LM: Partisanship. It feels like they're not dealing with real issues. Has there been a water bill any time recently?

RB: There have been several water bills, yes.

LM: I don't even read the Topeka paper anymore. It's just too sad. I'm just heartbroken. So, no, I wouldn't be there now. If I was, I'd be at the mic telling them [makes emotional noises].

JL: I miss the people. I miss the process. I miss the policy making. I loved the need to study all of the issues and the opportunity to work on finding solutions to problems. I don't miss the politics. And, frankly, at this point in my life, I'm pleased where I am. It was time for me to retire. I'd still love to be involved in the policy. Actually, the governor is a very good friend of mine. We often text. I get to stay in a little bit that way.

RB: I asked you before about what was most rewarding. If you were to identify, and because of the nature of these conversations, I think this question is energy, natural resource driven. What are the big issues, and again this is oral history, and I realize we're asking you here to look backwards, but I think we'd be remiss if we didn't ask a little bit more in terms of based on the years of experience you both have had, what are the environmental issues most troubling to you facing the state at this point that you think the state should be more involved with? You see where I'm going with this question.

LM: If I was going to introduce a bill....

RB: That may be a good way to put it.

LM: I mean, again, water is the issue. If we don't change the way we do almost everything, we're not going to have any water left. And if we don't change, get rid of plastic and plastic bags, I have no solutions. Don't ask. I mean, we're killing ourselves firstly in the ocean, and there are a lot of countries that still put nuclear waste or solid waste—we're killing our oceans. The plastics are just killing our oceans.

How do you make people care? We can't force them to care. But they need to look at and deal with real issues instead of—please, I'm pro-life. Instead of bringing at every election, there's the abortion bills. There used to be the flag-burning bills. There used to be bills that just make people irate, just to get their attention. Let's save—and the schools. I mean, the schools are another huge, huge issue. But water's the main one.

JL: And I would agree. Water is a very important issue to continue to find ways to better protect our water and the water usage. That's going to be a very difficult issue for our state. Eastern Kansas has plenty of water, but with the irrigation in western Kansas, at some point, I mean, there's been some—there's certain areas that have done something which really had some effect, but I see water continuing to be a very important issue.

RB: One of the leaders there is Sheridan County.

JL: Yes.

RB: I don't know if that was in your district or not.

JL: No, it wasn't.

RB: It wasn't very far away.

JL: I'm aware of what they've done. They've done some good work there.

RB: And I would also say, too, [Governor Kelly] has made water a very high priority, and it's reflected. At the end of the day, there's still a huge distance to go. Neither one of you mentioned climate change.

JL: It is an issue.

LM: Yes.

JL: I believe it is an issue.

LM: But until people believe it is, I don't know if we'll get anything passed. It used to be air pollution was a problem. The joke was, until it starts messing up their TV towers, their TV reception, they don't care. But I had quite a discussion with another person on the Kansas Geological Survey about climate change years ago. He even gave me a book.

RB: I think I have a pretty good idea of who that is.

LM: Yes, it is a problem. If the world doesn't work on it, I mean, we can do what we can, but we can't possibly do it all. I think we would agree that those storms and everything that have been changing are caused by something different.

RB: Any thoughts, Janis?

JL: I think climate change is a real issue that we have to figure out a way to deal with. But I'm not certain how the state alone deals with that. It's something that we need to deal with on a national level.

LM: Maybe if we start.

RB: Anything else that we haven't talked about that we should?

LM: I'm thinking. You're in trouble. [Laughter]

RB: Go ahead.

LM: Another misunderstanding about what people think and there's some really great stories. In my office in the Capitol second floor, it was divided down the middle, and there were three legislators on this side, three legislators on this side, and a secretary and a secretary. And I have to give, I talked about Carl Homes. Ken Grotewiel was such a mentor.

RB: From Wichita.

LM: From Wichita. He was in my office. When we'd do coffees every once in a while, they'd ask, "How much do you get paid?" They always think that we're like in Washington, and it's not. I know they're trying to increase the—

JL: They did pass a bill to increase.

LM: They did get it.

JL: They didn't pass a bill, but they get up a commission. And the commission actually doubled their salary, I think, and that—in order for that not to take place, they had to vote it down. They did not. And I think that's great.

LM: Yes.

JL: Because there were far too many young, really intelligent legislators that served maybe two terms, and they left because you couldn't afford it. People don't understand, especially for like a Senator from western Kansas. So much of your time—it would take me three hours to go to a meeting in my district, three hours driving one way and maybe two hours at a meeting and three hours driving back home. The only way that I got paid for mileage in my district was if I took money out of my campaign fund because the state only paid you to go to and from Topeka on an assigned committee, not just because you wanted to go there.

So, I drove an average every year of 45,000 miles, and the state paid for about 13,000 of those. So, I'm thrilled that they have done something to increase the salaries. I'm hoping that it will increase the quality of the legislators.

LM: Yes, and I remember when you left the State House, and drove to Beloit that afternoon. This was in the week. This wasn't the weekend. Drove clear to Beloit for the meeting.

JL: And drove back to Topeka.

LM: And yelled at herself for the last ten miles or so to stay awake. Her husband would call.

JL: I had a cellphone, the old "bag phone," very early on. I had an agreement with my husband if I got sleepy, I called him, and we'd talk just to keep me awake. I remembered one time, it was in the summertime, and Senator [Rip] Gooch, who was from Wichita, and I were on an interim committee. I was saying, "I hope this gets over pretty soon because I'm going to go to Belleville tonight for a meeting." And he said, "You're going to drive to Belleville? Are you coming back tomorrow?" and I said, "Yes, Rip, I'm going to be back here because we have a committee meeting again tomorrow." He said, "You're going to drive on two-lane roads in the dark?" And I said, "Rip, I'm glad when they're two-lane highways. A lot of the roads that I drive on are dirt roads." It's just so different.

LM: I've got another issue. For the future, they have got to learn how to redistrict. I mean, they've pushed it off and pushed it off to all these outside committees and be fair, be logical. I wanted to try to get my one county whole. Forget that. Redistricting needs a special session.

JL: Actually, I think it needs to be out of—I would rather see redistricting done by an independent commission.

RB: I want to go back to what you were just saying though, Janis. Obviously, there is a whole variety of legislators but the ones that really worked hard—and you both have mentioned Carl Holmes here today several times. If there was anybody that studied arcane, detailed issues harder than Carl Holmes, I don't know who they were.

JL: There wasn't.

RB: And that's another one. I'm not sure that everyone quite appreciated the level of care and time and blood, sweat, and tears that folks like Carl and you all put into some of those issues.

LM: And Janis mentioned Stan Clark. He was Energy and Natural—whatever [the committee is] called in the Senate.

JL: Yes.

LM: But one bill, I can't remember which bill it was, but we went up to his office. Carl Holmes and Stan Clark and I, we "fly specked" a bill. I don't remember how many pages, but we checked every period, every word, every, every, every, every, and that's dedication.

JL: Those were good people to work with.

LM: Yes.

JL: Stan and I worked on quite a number of bills together.

RB: It would show. Sitting out in the audience and watching that process, when Carl came in to talk about a bill, the people on the other side had better make sure that they'd done their homework because you knew Carl had done his. That was a pretty typical form of behavior.

JL: One time I served on a—at that time, I wasn't on the Ways and Means Committee in the Senate, but because a bill that I had had been put in this Ways and Means bill, so I ended up on the conference committee. I was so shocked when the Chairman of the Senate side of that conference committee, there was three parts of the bill, and he was saying what was in the first part of the bill. And I had to say, "No, Mr. Chairman, that is not what is in that. Here's what's in that." Then he got to the second and he got to the third. The Chairman on the Senate side of that conference committee did not know what was in any of the three parts of the bill, even though he was supposed to be the Chairman, which was shocking to me because since I was on the conference committee, I made certain I knew so at least I'd know what we were talking about.

So, some people worked very, very hard. Carl was one of those. And some people just don't.

LM: One thing that happened, you talked about Ways and Means. On the House side, when we were doing those eight hours of debate on the Confined Feeding Area, and there's steps that are up there by the podium, and thank goodness, I was standing on a step because a House member that was quite tall came up and said, "If you"—what's the Ways and Means in the House?

JL: Appropriations.

LM: Appropriations. "If you ever have anything in Appropriations, it is not getting out."

RB: That sounds like a fruitful debate, doesn't it?

LM: Can I do one more?

JL: Yes.

LM: There was a legislator that would come down, just anything I took down. I don't know if the counties still have the Indigent Tax Fund. I went down every year and tried—if someone dies and doesn't have family, the county used to have to, but the state gave them \$200 or something. So, I was down there again doing that.

And he came down and he asked me, “Are any of them alcoholics?” and I have to say his first name. I looked at him and I said, “Ted, they're dead.” That stopped it. I'd better be good now. [Laughter]

RB: I was just going to say, “You guys don't name people's names or tell names,” but you kind of slipped up there.

LM: It wouldn't work.

JL: When we say nice things, we say their names.

LM: Yes.

RB: That's a good policy.

Well, I appreciate you doing this today. This has been fun. I think the perspective that you all have both geographically and politically has made for a good conversation. Thank you.

JL: We always enjoyed serving together.

LM: We had our rolling office. I'm the person that wants to drive, and we took Janis's car, and she would be working and on the phone, and I'm driving to the coffees on Saturday mornings. That was our rolling office.

JL: Actually, one coffee we had, do you remember this when we went to Natoma the year after the bombing?

LM: Yes.

JL: In Oklahoma City. And Highway Patrol showed up. They followed us that day, and we hadn't thought about the fact that we had scheduled a legislative coffee in our district one year after.

RB: On the anniversary.

JL: On the anniversary of the bombing in Oklahoma City.

RB: Let me ask you a question that just occurred to me as I sat here and listened to you describe that process. I've heard it not just from you all but from a couple of other legislators that I've gotten to know over the years. Were you like a two-person support group? Is that partly how you dealt with some of the issues of either gender or distance or whatever you want to—

JL: Yes. We had a district together. So, we just did things together. It made it much easier to have somebody with you.

RB: But you couldn't have done that if you didn't like each other.

JL: No, that's correct.

LM: We like each other.

JL: And again, we didn't always agree.

LM: No.

JL: That was okay.

LM: And that's something that the Democrats loved in the House to say a lot. "We agree to disagree agreeably."

LM: That's our motto. And "I'm Laura, and she's Janis." We had tee shirts made with that motto because people couldn't tell us apart.

RB: Thank you. I appreciate it.

JL: Thank you very much, Rex. It was a lot of fun.

LM: Thank you.

[End of File]