INTERVIEW OF KENT GLASSCOCK BY ALAN CONROY, JUNE 11, 2021
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Alan Conroy: Good morning. The date is June 11th, 2021. We're in the Senate Chambers of the Kansas State House in Topeka, Kansas. I would note that there's some maintenance work going on over in the House Chamber today. So we're over across the rotunda, and one quick question, does the setting in the Senate Chamber really fulfill a lifetime dream of yours?

Kent Glasscock: No.

AC: Okay. I'm Alan Conroy, and I'm a forty-year state employee with the majority of that time at service working in the Kansas Legislative Research Department, the central nonpartisan research and budget staff for the legislature. I'm currently with the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. And today I'll be interviewing Speaker Kent Glasscock who served twelve years in the legislature. He was House Majority Leader in 1999 and 2000 and Speaker of the House for two sessions in 2001 and 2002. Ultimately, Speaker Glasscock decided not to run for re-election in the House and sought another elected office. He's currently president for the Kansas State University Institute for Commercialization and serves as chairperson and CEO of his family retail lumber and construction business, which operates in Missouri, Iowa, and Kansas.

I will be conducting this interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing legislators. The interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators, and the interviews are funded in part by a grant from Humanities Kansas. The audio and video equipment is being operated by former House Speaker Pro Tem David Heinemann.

Speaker Glasscock is from Manhattan, Kansas, and before his legislative service, he served on the City of Manhattan Commission. From there, then he became mayor of Manhattan. He's been active in lots of community things in the Manhattan area, Flint Hills Breadbasket, Kansas Retail Council, Manhattan Arts Council, Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, and Rotary International.

In his current role as president of the KSU Institute for Commercialization, which disseminates the technological innovations throughout the world stemming from KSU research via licensing, corporate partnerships, and new company creation. He serves on several boards related to his current position, including the Midwest Research Institute in Kansas City.

Speaker Glasscock was first elected to the House in 1990 and served in that Chamber for the next twelve sessions. He represented House District #62, which covered parts of the city of Manhattan and the townships of Ashland, Grant, Ogden, Wildcat, which I mentioned is a great name for a township, Zeandale, and part of the Manhattan township. While serving in the House, he served on numerous committees—Energy and Natural Resources, Local Government, where he was chair, Taxation, Appropriations, Economic Development, Governmental Organization and Elections. He was also the chair there. Then Interstate Cooperation, Calendar and Printing, and some joint committees, Pensions, Investments, and Benefits, a very good

committee, a Joint Committee on Frontier 2000, and a Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. He served as Majority Leader before being elected Speaker, and then he ran for Governor in 2001 and ultimately serving on the ticket as the Lieutenant Governor candidate with Wichita Mayor Bob Knight. Ultimately Speaker Shallenburger and Lindstrom won the ticket in the primary, and then Kathleen Sebelius won the general election.

Let's go wind the clock back and let's go back to start with about you telling us something about your life before entering the legislature. I noticed you were born in Warrensburg, Virginia.

KG: Missouri.

AC: Missouri, I'm sorry. Warrensburg, Missouri. So was that a well-kept secret? Do people know that you were born in Missouri?

KG: They do. I don't talk about it. I moved to Manhattan when I was four.

AC: So you grew up in Manhattan.

KG: It was close enough, you know.

AC: Then I noticed you got a degree in English from Kansas State.

KG: I did.

AC: And your goals or what you were thinking when you got that English degree? Anything for sure?

KG: I just was attracted to that curriculum. I've always been a reader. I think I thought that most of life's endeavors center around what drives people, humanity in the English curriculum. Most people think that's for fuzzy-headed people, and there are a lot of fuzzy-headed people in—but also it's rich in critical thinking and recognizing patterns, disparate patterns in reading and writing. And that held me in excellent stead, both in private business and in public life.

AC: Right, command of the language, written and spoken.

KG: And it's all about people, what drives them.

AC: That's right. So was your family involved in politics in any way before you ran for the city commission or for mayor and ultimately the legislature?

KG: Yes, my maternal grandfather served two terms as Henry County clerk in Missouri from 1936 to 1944, and my grand uncle—

AC: I'm sorry. Do we know his party of affiliation?

KG: Everybody in Missouri at the time except about twelve, thirteen people were Democrats. He was a Democrat. My grand uncle was heavily involved in statewide Missouri politics, never held elective office, but he was part of the crew that ran everything in Missouri as Missouri is wont to do. He was like the person that everybody in my mother's generation respected except for the part where they kind of hated machine politics like real, real bad. So my grand uncle and my grandfather did not see eye to eye, and he was a Baptist minister on top.

And then my brother Terry, older than I, served on the Manhattan City Commission as mayor as well ten years before I did. Public service has always been sort of in the family blood.

AC: I guess you kind of grew up, that interest in politics, public service, you just grew up with it.

KG: My mom oddly when we were young—my brother and I were young—made us listen to the City Commission meetings on the radio. Now I've got no idea why she did that, but she did. Of course, we didn't have any idea of what was going on and stuff, but we listened. There must have been some seepage into our brains of some kind or other.

AC: It sounds like your mother was right on top of things.

KG: Oh, man.

AC: So certainly some family connections there in terms of politics, public service. But just in terms of I guess maybe for you personally, was there a mentor maybe in politics or someone you aspired to be in public service that was kind of that role model?

KG: I always thought of myself as a traditional Republican. It was Dwight Eisenhower, and it was Teddy Roosevelt. It was folks like that who I tended to aspire to be like in some form or fashion. I took the Teddy Roosevelt thing a little too far because he would say exactly what was on his mind most of the time, and I suffer from that as well.

AC: He did get in trouble a little bit now and then.

KG: I know. He did. He did. So did I.

AC: Was there anybody I guess in terms of Kansas politics besides Eisenhower and some of those that, just in terms either of in this building or maybe in the Republican party as you were starting to sort of ramp up your involvement that was really a role model, a mentor?

KG: I had a really good relationship with Bill Graves when he was running for Secretary of State. I met him, and we became quite close and thought a lot like one another. So I followed him. Then I was active in his secretary of state race and also in both of his gubernatorial races. So that was sort of a—that was a relationship that I valued, still value. Then I kind of saw myself as a Bill Graves kind of Republican.

AC: So I guess that first time you ran for City Commission, was there some issue? Or was it just you thought it was the right time, or you wanted to make a difference? What sort of motivated you to finally take that leap?

KG: The family culture was, and we were in the lumber business in Manhattan. The family culture was that if you're in business, you have a duty to perform community service. So I did. The notion was ultimately the family and the business would be better off if the City of Manhattan and the broader community prospered, advanced, and became better. So I served on numerous communities. The City Commission race in my mind was an extension of the community service. Then when I became elected to the legislature, I still saw it as an extension of community service. But that was very important to us. So it was a natural step, particularly since my brother had been a city commissioner and mayor ten years before. He and I were always a little competitive. I thought, “He's not the only Glasscock on the planet Earth. I'm here, too.”

AC: That's great. So you had that local service, up close and personal with your constituents, and of course, being in the legislature, of course, bigger, grew, well, maybe not, but I guess by the district. Just a different interaction with constituents, city government versus State House?

KG: City government is collaborative, a five-member commission. It is nonpartisan, and you develop relationships that are closer and more cohesive I think because it is nonpartisan. And it was fun. I had fun being a city commissioner and mayor.

AC: The pothole calls or whatever didn't—

KG: People were very kind. In the city commission, what I learned was that if you had a really good reason for the way you voted, most people would understand. They wouldn't agree with you, but they believed that you had thought it through and had reached a conclusion that was maniacally wrong, but they still respected the fact that you thought it through and reached at least a reasonable conclusion, differing though it may be from theirs.

AC: Did that translate then in terms of legislative votes and legislative action with those constituents?

KG: Yes. I learned that very well. I always conducted myself in a way that advanced that same sort of thinking. Every time I made a vote that people weren't going to like back home, I had a rational basis for it, and I voiced that basis. People are actually pretty nice.

AC: Especially Kansans.

KG: They just are. If they didn't like it—we've got a bunch of meanies out there or anything, although I've been yelled at a few times going door to door.

AC: Let's talk about that first run for the legislature, kind of the campaign or the local support. Did you think when you decided to run for the House for the first time from your district that the odds are you thought you were going to be pretty successful? I mean you had the right people, things lined up?

KG: I always wanted to be first. So when I ran for City Commission, there were three open seats, two incumbents running. So I conducted the campaign, "I'm going to be first." And then I was. When I ran for the State House, I ran against an incumbent, a Democrat woman, Katha Hurt, and I knew it was going to be a grueling campaign, and it was. But I thought that my name recognition and the fact that I grew up in Manhattan and if I worked really, really hard, I could find. And fortunately, I was able to win. I was actually the only—and this sort of speaks to gender equality, which wasn't quite there in terms of representation in the House, but I was the third person in the legislative history that had beaten an incumbent woman. It was hard.

AC: I bet. Although if my research is right, you won 54 percent to her 46 percent. So a lot of door to door?

KG: Oh, man.

AC: That's what it takes, I guess?

KG: You can walk your way into the State House, and that's what I decided to do, and I loathed every step, but it gets you elected.

AC: Yes. Did you have any idea, ballpark, what it costs, that first campaign in terms of dollars?

KG: Yes, I spent an unheard of amount of money. It was $35,000. I raised money. I put my own money in this campaign, and it was like you go to win.

AC: But then you were elected six times. So clearly you must have been doing something right, and your constituents must have—

KG: Well, you hope so.

AC: And just looking through again, you never had a primary opponent I believe in any of those elections?

KG: One time, no, you're right. I never did. You're right. I never did.

AC: 1990, of course, was Katha Hurt, as you mentioned. 1992, the opponent was Joe Swanson, and that was 76 percent of the vote. And then in 1996, it was Robert Littrell, and you won with 72 percent of the vote. So any time over 70 percent, I think is—and then in 1994, there was a Democrat, James Butler. He filed, and he was in the primary, the only candidate on the Democratic side. But then if my research is right, he wasn't in the general election.

KG: No, he decided to pull out. He was just a great gentleman, too. I mean, I loved the guy.

AC: So out of those elections, I mean, after the first one, having really only two opponents on either side, the other, you were unopposed—again some validation there of the effort you were making and what your constituents thought of you.

So you roll in Topeka, 1991, the Democrats have control of the House.

KG: Correct.

AC: I always like to look back through some of the names of the colleagues that you were joining in that. And some of these, of course, were here before but that was in the legislature, in the House in 1991. Lisa Benlon, Rochelle Chronister, Darlene Cornfield, Wanda Fuller, Goossen, David Heinemann.

KG: That's right.

AC: Henry Helgerson, Melvin Neufeld, Kerry Patrick, Sandy Praeger, O'Neal, Bill Reardon, Keith Roe, Kathleen Sebelius, Shallenburger, Snowbarger, Teagarden, Susan Wagle, Joan Wagnon.

KG: Joan Wagnon.

AC: Donna Whiteman. So I mean, just the—I think the quality of the people that were serving in the House at that time from, of course, all different backgrounds and all different political viewpoints. It must have been—

KG: These were talented, respectful, good people. It was very impressive to be part of a Chamber and a legislature that had attracted that kind of a talent.

AC: Yes. But you were in the minority party that first time.

KG: Yes.

AC: Was that kind of an eye opener?

KG: Speaker Barkis. It was eye opening. That was the redistricting year.

AC: Yes.

KG: Those are always just terribly messy. So Barkis had all different kinds of maps and stuff. He wanted me to vote for a certain map, and I wasn't going to. So he sent someone to me. The city of Manhattan was in the Second Congressional District. And the city of Manhattan tended to look east, and joining the big first district was anathema to the folks in Manhattan.

So I got this visit on the House floor. The visit was “You're either going to vote for this map, or Manhattan's going to the First District.”

AC: Whoa.

KG: It was the first time I'd been threatened. I looked at the guy and I said, “Nope. It's not going to happen.”

AC: Were they surprised at your answer?

KG: I think I thought they were going to cower me. That was not going to happen. I've been in the lumber business. It's a tough business with contractors. I'm telling you what. You are not going to intimidate me, pal. Ultimately we ended up with a map that was fair to my district, to the people of Manhattan.

AC: It worked out. One question I guess I've sort of developed too is, “Do you remember the first time you went to the microphone to the well in the House to carry a bill? Did that make a mark on you? Do you remember the bill?”

KG: Oh, there's an absolute scar on my soul because of that. I was utterly petrified. I was on some committee. There was this insubstantial bill, and they had me carry it. So the first time, I would have been too scared to go down, I said, “I don't know about that.” So they had me carry this bill, and I was petrified for days before. I went down and sort of mumbled an explanation, “Any questions?” There were no questions. Thank goodness. There were no questions, and I got to leave real quick.

AC: No hazing at that time.

KG: There was a little bit of hazing when I got back to my seat, but it was—that was the first time I carried a bill, and it was scary. But then you kind of get used to it. You go down and blab on things all the time.

AC: Of course some of the committees you served on, Taxation as I said, Energy and Natural Resources, Appropriations, Local Government, any of those—again before you got in leadership, any of those that particularly—I don't know if you have a favorite committee, but that you thought really—substantive issues that you were able to—because really both Chambers, the committee process is so important.

KG: I really enjoyed Appropriations and Tax. When the Republicans took back control of the Chamber in the election of 1992, I served as Vice Chair of Tax and a member of Appropriations. I thought that's about as good as it gets. One of the things that—I really enjoyed Tax because I began to recognize that Appropriations only spends the amount of money that taxes raise. And

so having served on both at the same time, I was able to develop a familiarity with the budget process—

AC: Which served you well later in your legislative career.

KG: Right, and also tax policy and the ramifications of changing tax policy. I recognized that if the state were to have an irrational tax policy, people's behavior would conform to that naturally. So I began to—whatever it is we do, for heaven's sake, let's make it rational so the behavior will be rational. But I really enjoyed both tax and appropriations. At any given time I think there are about fifteen people in the legislature that understands the budget, and I wanted to be one of those. I made sure over the years that I understood state budget.

AC: That's a great knowledge base to have.

KG: It is.

AC: We mentioned a little bit about speakers. Of course, you served under several speakers before, of course, you became speaker. You were majority leader under Jennison, if I remember correctly. The other speakers, of course, as we mentioned, Marvin Barkis, Robert H. Miller, Shallenburger, and then Jennison. I don't know whether the interaction over here in this Chamber, in the Senate Chamber, Senate presidents were Bud Burke, Dick Bond, and Dave Kerr while you were speaker.

KG: That's right.

AC: So you probably had a lot of interaction at that point.

KG: Yes, indeed.

AC: I guess maybe as much as you'd care to comment, just your relationship with the different speakers through that time, particularly while you were majority leader and working with Speaker Jennison.

KG: Yes. I didn't have much of a relationship with Speaker Barkis. He did call me into his office one time over the redistricting and made a second run at me. Robert H. Miller was a fine person, and he treated me extremely well, great committee assignments as I've mentioned.

Then in 1994, the conservatives took over the Chamber. I was what was called a moderate Republican. There were sixteen moderate Republicans left in the Chamber after 1994. There were about seventy-five I think in the Caucus, something like that.

I had a good personal relationship with Speaker Shallenburger, but we were going through those tax-cutting years. What I did, it was under Bill Graves's governorship. I was very close to Graves, and we were concerned that the legislature would cut taxes too aggressively,

particularly in ways that would undercut K-12 education and social services. So my assignment for Bill Graves was to mitigate the size of the tax cuts for I think lots of good reasons. Later during the Brownback years, they didn't mitigate the tax cuts, and there were certainly financial ramifications from that.

So I was doing deals with the Democrats on taxes and a mitigation strategy. The House leadership, the Republican leadership cast me to the back of the Chamber.

AC: Literally?

KG: It was literally. There was like three feet behind me and the back wall of the Chamber. You bump your head when you try to get out of your chair. So that was a very contentious relationship between me and the senior leadership of the Chamber. I formed what we called the Mod Squad. The Mod Squad was the remnants of traditional Republicans in the Chamber. We worked with the Democrats on some things. Most things we were with Republican leadership, but on the key thing of taxes and funding education, we worked it. Speaker Shallenburger was highly agitated with me, but we thought we were doing the right things.

I remember I think it was his third year as speaker, we'd been going at it every day for two-and-a-half years at that point. I was in one of my lowly committee meetings, likely nodding off a little bit, but not actually falling asleep. I got this message that the Speaker wants to see me. It was a fabulous meeting. He said, “You know what? We've been going at it, and it's been a problem for me, and I would rather work with you.” So we did.

[00:30:15.02]

[Fire Alarm]

[00:30:32.21]

AC: Actually we were having a delightful discussion, and the fire alarm here in the State House went off, and so we had to vacate the Chambers for a bit. I do wonder if that fire alarm going off, Mr. Speaker, made you think of when you were in the House, certain days on the House floor, a fire alarm going off?

KG: Most days, it's about a five-alarm fire in the House, yes.

AC: Well, good. Everything is fine, and we're back in the Senate Chamber. Before the fire alarm went off, we were talking about your relationships with speakers before you were elected speaker, and of course, Marvin Barkis, Robert H. Miller, Tim Shallenburger, Robin Jennison, and then you became speaker. Maybe just to pick it up, we had talked about your relationship between Speaker Shallenburger and yourself. I don't know if you want to comment on that maybe a little bit or how that—you were just talking—perhaps the first part when he was

speaker was a bit, I don't know, a bit rocky, a bit challenging maybe, but things changed. So maybe if you'd like, you might just touch on that again, make sure we have that.

KG: Well, Speaker Shallenburger who I got along with famously on a personal basis, we had differences of opinion in regard to policy, and we kind of went at it for two-and-a-half years pretty seriously. It was actually kind of fun for me. It was a serious debate about policy, and we had differences of opinion.

He went through his first term as speaker and then into his second term. I was chairing my Local Government committee, which he had relegated me to from Appropriations and vice chair of House Tax. And I got a note that the speaker wanted to see me, and I thought, “Holy smokes. This can't be good.”

AC: Kind of like getting called to the principal's office maybe?

KG: It was bad, and I didn't have a hall pass or anything. So I went in and sat down. He was very cordial and kind. Essentially his message was, “We've been going at it for two-and-a-half years, and maybe we ought to not do that.” I said, “That would be good.”

For the last half of that session then and his last year, we got along really very well. We worked policy together. There were a group of about twenty moderate Republicans. The balance were very conservative Republicans. And it went very well. The Republican caucus at that point in many ways came together. There were still some differences, but it was an entirely different environment. And it was different enough that when Speaker Shallenburger was contemplating whether or not to run for re-election and then serve a third term as speaker, which to that point had not been done, I actually encouraged him to run for re-election and serve another term as speaker.

When he announced his retirement at the well, he was very gracious, as Tim always is. He said, “You know, I didn't know whether or not I ought to run for re-election and try to serve another term as speaker. Then I talked to Kent, and he encouraged me to do that. So at that point I knew I shouldn't do that.” So he said, “I'm today announcing my retirement from the Kansas House of Representatives.” Of course, the place erupted in laughter. But we got along and subsequently I supported him in his bid for the governorship. We've had a really good relationship I think since then.

AC: Do you think in the Chamber at that time then, once this sort of truce was maybe agreed to, did the lightbulbs maybe go on with the caucus that maybe even though you could have differences, you can still get some things done?

KG: It did. There was just a very harsh divide. I know it's challenging now, but then there were still sort of traditional moderate Republicans in the caucus, not many of us, but that moderate caucus was not wimpish and was very vociferous and tried to stand its ground, and it became a sharp division in the caucus. It was really very, very harsh.

But after that, after that visit, the tenor was different. There were still policy differences. But policy was pursued in a way that was acceptable and appropriate in terms of tenor and in terms of direction. It was a remarkable change, and I think that it frankly laid the groundwork for then the House to be okay enough to subsequently elect me as a Majority Leader and then Speaker. I look back on the harsh days. I was a focal point of like spitballs and stuff. But in retrospect, I think it became clear to the caucus that I was willing to step out and be strong and lead according to my own convictions, and I think that held me in good stead as we moved down the road in the House. Robin's years were really pretty good years in terms of caucus tenor, and my years as majority leader and speaker, certainly differences occurred. But the atmosphere was really very positive, very positive.

AC: That's interesting. So you're able to get some things done. Speaker Shallenburger decides he's going to retire, and then of course, the election. Maybe I could pause there before I talk about Speaker Jennison. So that tradition of two terms as a speaker, of course, we know there's no legal, no House rule. It's just tradition. Of course, that's changed now. Do you think that, if you want to comment, do you think that serves the institution well? Or does the circumstances warrant maybe—

KG: Right. I think with Speaker Ryckman, I think it was probably appropriate, and he was the person. However, I would caution the institution that other states have had speakers that have served for, in some cases, decades. The speakership is a bit of an anomaly. It literally controls everything in the House. A speaker can't make something happen, but a speaker can always prevent something from happening. It's a position that if it's left too long in a single pair of hands, I think it's bad for the State. I think it's bad for the legislative institution, and I think it's our ability to move on, leaders to leaders, I think it has been extremely healthy over the course of the last 150 years in the state of Kansas. That needs to continue.

AC: So Robin Jennison was elected speaker. You're elected Majority Leader. I guess earlier you had mentioned at some point when you were in the very, very back row of the House Chamber—

KG: It was a small, cramped corner, yes.

AC: And then really just in a matter of a few years, here you're Majority Leader. I guess those dark days maybe or those challenging days, how about that, did you ever think then leadership was going to be on the horizon if you stayed your course?

KG: I always wanted it to. When the conservatives took full control of the Chamber in 1994, what I did, what I began to do was to recruit candidates in open Republican seats that were sort of—their thinking was more aligned with my own.

AC: Never incumbents?

KG: Never. I never did an incumbent, no. But what was happening then was House Republican leadership were recruiting candidates in those open-seat primaries. I was recruiting candidates in those open-seat primaries, getting the money, mentoring them all over the state. I did that in the 1996 election and the 1998 election. My experience was—and I worked really hard at it—my experience was that I won about—the folks that I supported won about half the time in the Republican primaries. But it was still a very conservative Chamber.

So when I ran for majority leader, I was running against Phil Kline, the subsequent attorney general of the State of Kansas who was sort of the darling of the far right. It appeared hopeless. I worked really hard. I thought I might have the votes. So we were voting the way you did in the House. It's like you filled out a piece of paper, and you go and drop it in the drop box, and then the clerk opens it up and then reads out the names. I don't know, I needed like thirty-nine or something. I can't remember how many.

&So they started reading out the names, and it's like dah, dah, dah, and then Phil Kline just went on a tear. I think there were ten votes left to be read. A buddy of mine, Bob Tomlinson in the legislature, was sitting next to me, and he kind of leaned over and he said, “Boy, are you toast!” I thought, “I think I kind of am here.” But then eight of the last ten votes went for me, and I want to think by two votes. I think it was a bit of a shock to the system, but I was very fortunate, very grateful.

AC: In those leadership elections, of course, from the outside looking in, it always seemed very fascinating in terms of certain people—would they ever promise their votes perhaps to both candidates? Just some of those kinds of things.

KG: Aw, pshaw, Alan, no. I always figured a 10 percent fib factor. I made everybody look me in the eye three times and tell me, “Kent, I will vote for you for majority leader. I will vote for you for speaker.” Then I totaled them up, and I subtracted ten percent.

AC: It must have worked.

KG: Barely, you know.

AC: So your relationship with Jennison when he was speaker, you were majority leader?

KG: It was great. We got along very well. I thought he was a fine speaker. He was just an excellent person. He has a charismatic personality, and I really liked him very much. We got along extremely well.

AC: And some productive years in the legislature?

KG: Those two years I think were very productive.

AC: Yes, in fact, always getting to do a little research, I think, and, of course, newspapers these days, I think you had even called it perhaps one of the most successful—at the conclusion at one of those years, one of the most successful and productive sessions on record. That's said every time, but it sounded like you really meant it.

KG: I actually did mean it. I thought Robin did a nice job. The caucus followed leadership pretty well. Robin was more conservative than I. The moderates and the conservatives in the chamber each had someone to talk to, and Robin and I worked very close together. In those years, there was never any light between the two of us on issues or how to conduct the House. Not that it would have mattered because I was the Majority Leader, and he was Speaker but—

AC: So any coalition across the aisle, the Democrats and either conservatives or moderates?

KG: There were still splits. Robin got frustrated with some folks in the caucus during his speakership, but I thought those years were really very good years.

AC: Then, of course, particularly when you were speaker, during your term, Senate presidents, Bud Burke, Dick Bond, and then Dave Kerr while you were speaker. Any reflections or thoughts on the relationships or interactions between the two Chambers, going across the rotunda?

KG: There's always friction, and there's a difference of opinion. I think that difference is built into the system.

AC: Is that healthy?

KG: Because the House stands for election every two years, the Senate every four years. By design, I think there is just a different culture and atmosphere in each of the two Chambers, and I think it's healthy. I get along with Bud Burke. I was close to Dick Bond. Dave Kerr and I had some differences, but we had a great personal relationship, I thought.

AC: That's good. I noticed in preparing for this discussion that your name on either bills or resolutions, there were about 238 of them over the course of your tenure, of course, more at the beginning when you were first elected, and of course, when you become leadership—

KG: You don't do that.

AC: Not so many of those. Just resolutions, Irving Niles, Wanda Fuller, Ambrose Dempsey, Don Smith, some of those things that you get to do, and then honoring resolutions, Jon Wefald, Gloria Timmer, you did Rotary, and of course sometimes memorializing Congress to do something or not do something.

KG: Oh, yes. And they pay a lot of attention to those.

AC: Right to the top of the stack. And then lots of bills, of course, on higher ed, K through 12, of course, tax, higher welfare, senior pharmacy assistance program, workers comp, property tax, state match on the K through 12, capital improvement, aid, all of those kinds of topics, and quite a laundry list of bills. But kind of in those—Employment Security Act, military duty requirements for re-employment of certain veterans, important, Milford Lake, all of those kinds of things. Certainly I guess it would be that general theme, I guess, as you look back over those twelve years of service, any of those legislative accomplishments that you really felt proud of. It worked, I guess?

KG: Yes. I think the ones that stand out in my mind are the 1992 state aid to school districts for new construction was a tremendously helpful bill. The state at that point was under litigation, and it was in the courts. Others in the chamber worked the core school finance formula itself, but my office mate and I, Steve Lloyd from Clay Center, worked a bill that would provide for the first time state aid for new construction based on a district's wealth. So there was a formula that essentially was a sliding scale from no state aid if you were a wealthy district to a very, very high percentage of state aid for bonds that were passed at the local level.

At the time, the school infrastructure across the state was in very, very poor shape, and there was no means for many of those local districts, particularly the poor ones, to ever really bring those facilities up to date. So it was a—I really have always felt good about that. I think it changed in many ways the face of K-12 facilities across the state of Kansas. And the school finance formula was passed. It was sent to the courts. The courts then responded by saying, "This looks good, but the litigation will not be dismissed until you pass that school facilities bill."

So then the legislature came back, and we actually passed the bill. I mean, I was like we weren't ever going to get that thing passed on our own. I mean, we came really close, but the court order—I was very proud of that. This will sound real bad, but in my two years of speaker, it was the dot-com bust. State finances were in shambles. My first session as speaker, we adjourned the first session to come back three weeks later to the veto session, the omnibus budget. And during that time, the consensus revenue estimating group met. They lowered the state estimates for the fiscal year by 250 million dollars, which at that time was about 5 percent. We came back, and we cut the 5 percent out, but we didn't touch K-12, and we didn't touch higher education, and I feel really good about that. Sort of another oddity in that respect that I feel good about, even though it will sound kind of strange. My second year as speaker, we were still in financial shambles.

AC: Yes.

KG: Even though we cut that 5 percent out. So at that point, I was not going to be able to avoid significant cuts to K-12 and higher education, and those education matters really meant a lot to me. We were going to have to raise taxes. It was an election year for the House. The first day of the legislative session, Jim Garner, the minority leader of the House, came to see me, and he said, "You know, Kathleen Sebelius is running for governor." I said yes. He said, "Here's the deal. They've been doing polling, and the polling says that if Democrats support a tax increase,

they are going to underscore the fact that Democrats like to raise taxes. So none of us are going to vote." So at that point, I had to have a huge position of "pardon my caucus" to vote for a tax increase. We in the end got it done, but it was quite a chore.

I also oddly—again, Robin Jennison, I'd been on a farm. I eat food. That's about the extent of my agricultural knowledge. Robin Jennison, at the time, confined animal feeding operations were sort of blossoming and growing across the state with environmental issues all around. Those regulations were called "the abortion issue of ag." So Robin Jennison inexplicably asked me to chair a task force to create new policy around confined animal feeding operations, CAFOs, and it was a rich experience for me. We actually got it done, and that policy has remained in place.

We also did—we were beginning the renovation of the state capitol, and it had kind of been sort of flailing a little bit. So I worked with Dave Kerr and others, and we reorganized that effort and the accountability with it, and it really, really helped I think the process of capitol renovation. We had to run a bill because we were going to add a parking garage underneath the Capitol. It was going to cost about 15 million dollars. It turned into this roundhouse debate. People were like, "Well, legislators don't deserve a parking garage" and blah, blah, blah. We were able in the end to get it passed, and it was absolutely the right thing to do.

I'm very proud of the Capitol restoration. It's a beautiful Capitol now and so in need of renovation. It did have one really big disappointment over the years.

AC: That was going to be my next question. Some successes and then one that just didn't get quite across the finish line.

KG: When I was Majority Leader, I had my staff do significant research attempting to find out what are those things that need to be put in place and have empirical evidence to support how to increase high school graduate rates and decrease dropout rates and then enhance sort of the outcomes of low-performing students through the K-12 system.

They came back, and they said in pre-K through 3, if there is significant attention paid to those students that are not at grade level in reading and math, even to one-on-one help, if the reading and math outcomes by third grade are at pace, then you change the trajectory of a child's life. It was clear evidence.

The second thing was that if in those years a student had back-to-back bad teachers, poor teaching, and they struggled—they were strugglers—then by the end of third grade, they could not recover. So if they were struggling and had bad—so then they researched, "How does that happen?" Well, part of the issue there is there's a big fall-out of teachers in the first five years of teaching, and they leave the profession. Well, the counterbalance of that is significant mentoring by successful teachers, and that has a material impact on teachers and a tremendous impact on students.

So I introduced a bill called Years of Promise, and it had a price tag of 20 million dollars to do significant one-on-one with struggling students and mentoring of teachers, and there was a reward for teacher mentoring and for becoming a nationally certified teacher. And it pass the House overwhelmingly, and the Senate would not take action. I thought it was a horrible mistake on the Senate's part. I regretted it ever since, and I tried like the dickens to get Years of Promise passed, but it didn't happen, and it was a grievous disappointment for me.

AC: Yes, but certainly some good successes like you talked about, and particularly when you were speaker, those were difficult, difficult budgetary times.

KG: That was a harsh time. Yes.

AC: So I guess maybe you could even enjoy those two years as Majority Leader when things—

KG: They were a lot easier, yes. One, you're not really in charge, and two, they were just easier years.

AC: That's right. Again preparing for this, and of course, you always get the chance, and I try not to do it very often, but there was one of your quotes that I came across, this was in 1993. Major flooding going on in the state.

KG: Uh oh.

AC: In fact, Representative Joan Wagnon was concerned. The governor [Joan Finney] was actually, I think, in Europe on a trade mission.

KG: That's right. And she was right. Joan was right.

AC: Your quote though was, “I don't know what Governor Finney needs to know about foreign trade, but we can teach her all she needs to know about sandbagging.”

KG: I think I said “in about five minutes.” It was certainly a flippant remark, but Manhattan at that point was severely stressed. We had heavy flooding, and it was in the middle of the summer, and it was just hot, hot, hot, and of course, humid, humid, humid. Every day, I was out doing sandbags and stuff. It was just sort of a remarkable scary time. At one point, the Blue River was anticipated to cut a new channel that would have gone right through the Industrial Park and Walmart and a whole bunch of places in Manhattan. I just got irritated. The media caught me at just exactly the wrong sweaty moment, and I said that.

Then subsequently Governor Finney flew into town. Everybody went out to the airport to greet her. There was like a long line of people, and I was in line. She went down. She was just a very warm, gracious woman. She was going down, and she was telling everybody, bah, bah, bah, and she came to me, and she goes—it was like—“No, ma'am, I'm not doing that deal.”

AC: Maybe here in the remaining time we have, you mentioned Governor Finney, but of course, you kind of touched on it, but your relationship to Governor Graves. You served on his transition team in 1994. You then helped—I think there was a group of the lieutenant governor and Gloria Timmer and the governor's chief of staff put together kind of the budget plan for his second term. Again, one other quote, you said about Governor Graves, "Neither one of us tend to be guys that want to jump off the edge of a cliff. The governor likes to get along with everybody, and that's my personality trait over the years. In a lot of ways, Bill Graves is a policy wonk, and that's kind of the way I've been, too."

KG: I think that's true

AC: You wear that badge, that title, "policy wonk," with pride?

KG: "Wonk" is kind of an interesting word, but I just am that way. People used to ask me why I was in elective office—you take abuse and stuff.

AC: Right.

KG: They asked me if it was fun. I said, "No, it's not really fun," but it was the policy that interested me. Bill Graves was that way as well. He created a culture that was very positive around him. I was fortunate enough to be close enough to him that I helped, that small budget group helped craft six of his budgets. When I was speaker, I no longer obviously did that. But it was a healthy relationship. I thought he was an outstanding governor. He was a person that was focused on results, and he was a person that was focused on not creating division, and I think he got along with all factions in the House and in the legislature. Certainly there is a natural friction between the legislature and the governor.

AC: Sure.

KG: And I think that that's healthy as well. But it was a great relationship. I love the guy. He was just the right person I think for that time.

AC: And I think, too, just your group or association rankings for whatever they're worth. You had somewhere, the Kansas Chamber rated you at 100 percent. KNEA rated you at 84 percent. I think that takes kind of a special person, maybe not those groups will not always go in the same direction, to have high rankings from both of those entities.

KG: I came from a business background. I was very supportive of the Kansas Chamber then and their initiatives. But I've always seen education, K-12 and higher education, as a part of how to advance a state socially and economically. The truth is, the higher the educational attainment of a citizenry, the more prosperous and socially mobile that citizenry is. I think there is no conflict whatsoever between supporting education, both K-12 and higher education, and the business interests of the State of Kansas.

AC: One other thing I did notice in the clips during those tough budgetary years when you were speaker and of course cutting lots of the budget. You talked about the parts you were going to have to cut. There was a tent city that was put up for a little bit out on the Capitol grounds, people with disabilities and were concerned about, of course, what was going on in terms of budget cuts. But I thought it said a lot, at one point, the Speaker of the House, yourself, Representatives Kenny Wilk, Rocky Nichols, and Bob Bethel took donuts and hot coffee out to those people that were out there in their sort of small tent city out on the Capitol grounds.

KG: I had forgotten that. It was certainly a very harsh time. And really the legislature was trying really hard to ignore those folk. So we organized that little group. I said, "We're going to go out and visit with them." So we did. We got coffee and donuts and went out and had a really nice visit with them.

AC: They were surprised to see you, I bet.

KG: Yes. I think they were like kind of shocked, but they liked the donuts and coffee. It was okay. And I think that it helped to create an environment by which they knew we actually cared about them. We heard them. We were willing to listen. We were willing to put ourselves in front of them on a personal basis, and I think that that matters in governance. I mean, it just matters. People want to be heard. They want to be seen. They want to be interacted with on a personal basis, and we were able to do that, and it was the right thing to do. There was some trepidation, but it worked out great. Rocky, Bob Bethel—

AC: Kenny Wilk, what a group to go out with!

KG: Oh, they're just wonderful, truly wonderful people. It was a great experience for me. It really was.

AC: I guess two more questions, and then I think we're at the end of our time. One, this is a required personal identity question that we ask all participants that are doing interviewing. And it's just, so I'll read it. The same question is asked of everybody. Personal identity is loosely defined as gender, age, race, class, sexual or gender orientation, marital status. Did you experience times during your time in the legislature where you believe your personal identity influenced your ability to pass policy, work with fellow legislators or provide constituent services? Do you think you were ever given committee assignments or tasks that you believe were functions of your personal identity? Anything on that line from your experience that maybe comes to mind?

KG: I was branded a moderate Republican. Then just as now, I was branded a Republican in Name Only, a RINO. In the years of Speaker Shallenburger's time in office, for about four years there, I was sort of shunned by the majority of the caucus, and it was not—it was clear that I wasn't really welcomed in caucus, daily caucus. And folks, many wouldn't speak to me in the hallway or on the floor. It was hard. I got slammed to the back of the chamber. Committee assignments went away. But other than that, not at all. I got along on a personal basis I think

well on both side of the aisle. And it was not unexpected that being a moderate Republican and the condition of the House at that point, but other than that, absolutely not.

AC: And then maybe one last question, again just because of time limitations, otherwise I think we could continue to talk. You've got a lot of good information to share. But just so, you're in the legislature twelve years, I guess just as an institution, did it change much during those twelve years, or is it an institution that just keeps plodding forward? In either structure, policy, procedures—

KG: Well, in those years, we went from, in my years, we went from Democrats controlling the Chamber, having a Democratic speakership, to then having Republicans control the Chamber with a traditional Republican speaker to in 1994, conservatives taking firm control of the Chamber. Each of those three cycles, the House changed dramatically. Then the years of Speaker Shallenburger's time in office, it was a very conservative Chamber. It moderated a little bit as I recruited candidates, but it was dominated by conservatives. So those were three very different cultures. And then subsequently with the last year and a half of Speaker Shallenburger's time and Robin's time and then my time, the chamber I thought worked very successfully together.

So there was radical change in the House. One thing that never changes in the House of Representatives, and that is, it is a perpetual cauldron. It is a boiling, steaming cauldron of people and views and attitudes. Some days you wake up, and you look at the chamber, and you wonder, "How in the hell does this work?" Then other days you look up in the chamber, and you kind of go, "Isn't this a glorious place?" And it's always somewhere in between. I think that that truly is the glory of the system, and it is something that's meaningful, significant, and to be valued by people. Many voices creates better policy.

AC: So somebody might come up to you even today and say, "Hey, I'm thinking about running for the legislature." What would you tell that person?

KG: "Do it."

AC: Go for it.

KG: Absolutely do it. There is no other experience in life like it. You get to think and decide upon issues that in real life you never have to think about. I am a firm believer—I think there is no richer environment or experience in life.

AC: Even corporate hog farms.

KG: Holy smokes. I mentioned to my dad I was doing that and he said, "You don't know anything about that!" "Now that you mentioned it, Dad"—

AC: Yes. So twelve years in the legislature, you talked about running for governor. Have you ever entertained thoughts about elected service again? Would you be open to that if the right situation—

KG: No. You know what? I've never met an ex-legislator who wasn't defeated for office or had to leave office who wasn't glad to be an ex-legislator. I mean, it's a great time. It's a valued part of my life, but when it was done—and that's part of the process. Your seat is on loan. It's not your seat. It's on loan, and sometimes it's just time to go on and let the others have their time, their time at the plate. I think that's the marvel of it all. So, no, I've had that itch scratched heavily, and I'm fine.

AC: We've covered a lot of subjects here, topic. Anything that I didn't ask you, any other comments you want to sort of get on the record at this point for those researchers or educators that will be interested parties reviewing this conversation?

KG: You became director of Kansas Legislative Research. That was an accomplishment of mine, that Kerr and I selected you for that position.

AC: I do remember that. Thank you.

KG: It was the right call. You performed marvelously. You are as well today with KPERS. Before we left, I wanted to mention that. It was an accomplishment, and I think Dave Kerr feels exactly the same way.

AC: Well, thank you. Thank you for your time. We concluded our interview today of former Speaker Kent Glasscock who has quite a record of public service, I'm sure still more to come, but for his twelve years in the legislature and his service to the State. Thank you for that public service.

KG: Thank you, Alan.

AC: We appreciate what you've done for the State of Kansas.

KG: You're very kind.

AC: So that's right.

[End of File]