

Interview with Senator Nancy Parrish by Patty Clark, October 23, 2020
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Patty Clark: Today is October 23rd. It's 3:00 p.m., and we are in the Senate chamber of the Kansas State House in Topeka. I'm Patty Clark, and today I have the privilege of interviewing former Senator Nancy Parrish who represented Senate District 19 in the Kansas Senate from 1980 until 1992. I will be conducting the interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, Incorporated, a nonprofit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators, particularly those who served from the years of 1960 to the year 2000. These interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators. The interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council. The audio and video equipment is being operated by David Heinemann.

Nancy is originally from Cedar Vale, Kansas in Chautauqua County, the southeast, south central part of the state. She received her bachelor's from Kansas State University, her master's in Special Education from KU, and her law degree from Washburn University. After her service in the Kansas Senate, Nancy was appointed as Secretary of the Kansas Department of Revenue, serving there from 1992 until 1994, and then Governor Finney appointed her as judge for the third judicial district in Shawnee County. She has served as Chief Justice of that court from 2005 to 2013. While in the Senate, Nancy served on a variety of committees.

Nancy Parrish: That's true.

PC: I reviewed this, and there are a wide variety. Those included Ways and Means, Education, the Judiciary, Assessment, and Taxation. Nancy, first, let's talk a little bit about—you came to the Kansas Senate filling your husband's seat.

NP: That's correct.

PC: And your husband was a Democratic icon all unto himself. Talk a little bit about that transition, and how you then established your own identity as a Kansas senator.

NP: Well, I'm not sure I fell into that immediately because I think it takes a little bit of time. Certainly I was one of two women out of the body of forty people. The other woman was Senator Jan Meyers who was wonderful. She had been there for a while. I don't know how many years she had been in the Senate, but she was chair of a committee, and she was very well established, very well respected.

As far as I know, I think I was the first female Democrat senator that anyone could figure there had been at that point in time, and it was different being just two women in the Senate at that point. I remember some early interviews, one that I asked to do over. I didn't know you couldn't do that. [laughs] I said, "I don't really like that cut. Could you ask me those questions again?" and they did. I don't know if I felt that I was a full-fledged Senator just initially. In fact, I went to law school while I was in the Senate. The timing was not, I guess, my forte.

I served the session of 1980, and that was the one that was fulfilling the end of my husband Jim's term, and then I ran for Senate on my own at that point. My opponent was a credible

candidate, Colonel Bill Albott. He had been a former director of the KBI and a former superintendent of the Highway Patrol. He was quite formidable except that I had a real good Democratic district. That certainly helped, and I worked. I went door to door. That was not new to me because I had done an awfully lot of door to door for Jim when he ran for the House and then again for the Senate and even before that, the cousin that was in the legislature from Chautauqua County, I had done some door to door for him. So that wasn't new.

But I decided after I won that election and served the 1981 session of the legislature, that I would go to law school. I had previously, as you mentioned, been a teacher. I was teaching out at the state hospital kids that were emotionally disturbed. I really, I think, wanted to build some credentials. At that time, there were a number of attorneys in the Senate, unlike now. At that point in time, we had a lot of great senators, and they had law degrees. I thought, "Well, I'll go to law school." It wasn't until later that I learned that maybe some of my background teaching emotionally disturbed kids might serve me well dealing with members of the legislature, but I thought going to law school would be good.

My husband and I had a foster child at that time, who we later adopted. We were looking to have a child. We were notified that there was a baby available to adopt. So two days after I start law school, we have a brand new baby that we are in the process of adopting. So my baby, who is almost forty now, went with me through law school and as I was in the Senate.

So it took a while to feel like I was really part of the body. I was in awe of Norman Gaar who was the Majority Leader my first session. He fell out of favor after that, but in the 1980 session, he was Majority Leader. I was fascinated because we would have the calendar, which you assume would be the order of the bills that were going to come up on that particular day, but not so with Norman Gaar. He had set the order on the calendar because he was the Majority Leader. He had certain things that had to be passed before he would let other things come up before the Senate. It was always kind of interesting to watch both the dynamics and I think the strategy that Norman had at that time, plus he was a really bright guy.

I remember a high point in my first session, the interest rates were double digits then. This is in the early eighties. I was trying to, I think, attach an amendment regarding the usury rate, and I got to debate Norman on the floor of the Senate. Of course, I lost. I don't even know exactly what the substance of the amendment was. I just felt, "Maybe I'm kind of a big girl now." I was thirty-one, I think, at the time. I did feel certainly intimidated at times by the process, learning the process, and the fact that there were people that were very smart and very educated.

PC: Was there a mentor or two that helped you with that process education that you could turn to?

NP: Well, Jim was available some although he was working out of Dallas during some of that time because he went with Brock Hotel Corporation to work out of their new office down in Dallas. He wasn't around. I don't know if I can point to anyone that necessarily—Ruth Wilkin might be as close as anyone because she was in the House of Representatives at that time—not

that I sought her out. I should have sought her out more. I do remember, from time to time, I think I had talked with her about various issues.

And my office was particularly lovely. It looked like it was the storage cabinet for the concession stand. I had the lowest seniority at that time, and perhaps it's still this way. The new people get the worst offices. I was right across from the concession stand. I don't think it's an office now, but that's where my office was.

PC: So you were very, very active in education issues and school finance, and you worked very closely with Senator Joe Harder.

NP: I did.

PC: Talk about that collaboration. Talk about the outcomes of that collaboration, lessons learned from that collaboration.

NP: I very much respected and admired Joe Harder. I thought a lot of him as I did with other members who were on our conference committee when we had an education conference committee. He was a kind person. I never felt like he was treating me any differently than any of the other members of the Senate. I think he worked very collaboratively with other people, and certainly that's an important lesson to learn.

PC: Contrast that with more recent school finance debates. What are the takeaways?

NP: I don't know that I had success when I was on behalf of my caucus a lot of times, trying to add money to school finance. I don't know that I had any more successes because I admired and respected Senator Harder. Yet I don't think that there was—certainly at that time, there was no animosity. I think people really were fairly friendly to one another. If there were problems, I may have been oblivious to them. I wasn't aware of those issues.

Here, looking from the outside, because I'm not on the inside anymore, it does seem like there is just the lack of that friendship and camaraderie and just the respect for one another, and that issues seem to divide people in such a way that they just can't even get along. I don't know. Maybe that's just what we see on the news or what we think it's like, but certainly I've felt that we—you kind of knew how certain things you were going to do were going to turn out, what the votes were going to be. There were party-line votes then. I mean, that's no different. But every now and then, there were some times that we were able to—

PC: Partnerships came to pass.

NP: Partnerships came to pass. One that I remember was with Senator Dick Bond who I had a good relationship with as well. This was later on. This was not my first session. He came into the Senate later. I don't remember what session it was. We had a bill requiring some mandatory coverage in insurance policies, and he was carrying the bill, and I was trying to add drug and

alcohol treatment as coverage that insurance companies need to offer, mandatorily offer, not just at discretion with that particular insurance company.

Dick was carrying the bill. I remember, surprisingly, I won. I got my amendment on. He looked a little bit crestfallen at the end of the debate. It happened that—I guess the Honeybee Queen or something like that was in my district. I'd been presented with a jar of honey. As a peace offering, I took it over to Dick that day and talked with him, and we were fine. It didn't carry beyond that day.

PC: As mentioned earlier, you served on the Judiciary Committee.

NP: I did.

PC: Then you were appointed as District Judge.

NP: Yes.

PC: How did your experience, your work in the Judiciary Committee influence your positions as a judge.

NP: Well, certainly, you learn about certain bills and the legislation. In my role as judge, a lot of times we're looking at cases, but you do need to look at the statute first. That was something that I think it helped me because I knew how to read statutes. I knew how to look up statutes. I think that was helpful.

When I went for my interview as a judge, I was given a softball question about that, "Wasn't that going to help me a whole lot if I became a judge, having this experience passing the laws and being familiar with certain statutes?" I think I answered it this way at that time. "Sometimes I can remember the versions that didn't pass better than the ones that did pass." You always had to look them up anyway.

PC: Let's take that just a little bit deeper. Judges from time to time do have to interpret statute.

NP: Yes.

PC: What advice would you give to legislators today in terms of writing law that would help in terms of interpreting law, if that law ever has to be interpreted?

NP: Oooh. I'll probably get myself in trouble with that question.

PC: How can they bring clarity to their statutory writing?

NP: Certainly the language. We have to go first to just what the plain language is in that statute. That's what a judge would look at first. Currently, and for a lot of years, I've served as a member

of the Pattern Instruction for Kansas (PIK), the committee that prepares instructions for judges to use to instruct jurors. Currently I'm serving as the chair of that committee. We agonize at times, sometimes writing instructions to jurors using statutes because we don't want to vary far from the statute itself, yet sometimes it's unclear what the legislature meant by certain statutes that they've passed, and so it becomes quite difficult to make sense of certain statutes.

I don't know that I have to on a day-to-day basis interpret statutes nearly as much as our appellate courts need to, but certainly we do from time to time. I was just looking at a statute today and how the district attorney had charged an individual with a crime and what all of it had meant, and whether they had charged it correctly, and what the statute actually meant. Certainly it is a task that happens.

How to improve it? I don't know. I think the Revisor of Statutes does an amazing job. They have to interpret what laypeople want them to accomplish. Many times this is in the wee hours of the morning, trying to get bills out, amendments written. I think they do a really pretty good job, but there could be improvements.

PC: For our video and audio audience that has the opportunity to listen to and view these interviews, talk a little bit more about that role of Revisor of Statutes. What do they do? What are their responsibilities? How does it impact implementation of statute?

NP: Well, the process when I was in the Senate was if an individual legislator or a committee, for that matter, wanted to introduce a piece of legislation, then the individual legislator would make a request to the Revisor of Statutes and tell the Revisor what the problem was and what you wanted to change in a statute, or maybe it was a new statute that you're wanting to create, and then they would draft the piece of legislation, which would be introduced and would be presented to a committee, and then if it got out of committee, then it goes to the floor.

Also in committee or on the floor of the House or Senate, an individual legislator can offer an amendment. The amendments are drafted, and for good reason—if legislators had to draft them themselves, this might be very difficult. It might not be in the right place. It could not do what they intended to do. So the Revisor has a large role, too, sometimes at the last minute, drafting an amendment to a piece of legislation. They play—

PC: A critical role.

NP: A critical role, absolutely. A critical role.

PC: You also served on the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the Assessment and Taxation Committee.

NP: Yes, not at the same time though, two different terms.

PC: What were the policy challenges that you faced on your service of those committees? What were the policy challenges facing the state? How did those decisions affect the financial stability of the state?

NP: Well, Assessment and Taxation, I was on first, and during that period of time, there were a lot of bills to exempt certain types of property, not-for-profits, for example, from property tax. So that didn't affect the state budget, but it certainly affected the county and city budgets. During that time, it was kind of difficult because there were lots of advocates for a change to add a particular exemption. However, there were usually not many opponents, maybe a County Commission, maybe or maybe not, or someone for the Association of Counties who would come in and oppose those bills.

We also went through a time trying to get rid of some of the sales tax exemptions, which would have benefited the State of Kansas. I remember a bill when Governor Finney was governor where it started out with really getting rid of all of the exemptions. And one by one by one, or maybe some of them were bulk, they were taken out of the bill. By the time they were all taken out of the bill, the bill didn't raise any money whatsoever. I think that certainly was a problem.

I guess moving on to Ways and Means, certainly Ways and Means was structured then and I assume now that there are subcommittees for various agencies. You got very well acquainted with the people in that agency, the secretary of that agency or the head of that agency and their budget people. I learned their budget pretty well. You had some, I think, impact on what you recommended, and whether you would change the governor's proposed budget or leave it pretty much as it was.

[Senator] Gus Bogina was chair of Ways and Means. I still see Gus maybe four or five times a year. We go to lunch. I have such a warm feeling for Gus Bogina. He's, I think, ninety-two now. He's an amazing man. He was kind of like the gruff teddy bear type when he was chairing Ways and Means. There was one time I know that he did get furious. He had left the room for a while, and I think [Senator] Wint Winter was Vice Chair of Ways and Means, and we went ahead and did something to a bill that he had not planned for us to do and Gus was not happy with it. I thought he was going to take all of our heads off. He was really not very happy about it.

But I've got to say, he got over it. We've been very good friends for a lot of years. He married Nancy, who had worked as the executive secretary, administrative assistant, first for [Senators] Jack Steineger and later for Michael Johnston. She was a Democrat, and then she marries Gus. There was confidentiality. We always heard about that. Whatever she knew, she wasn't sharing with Gus. When Gus was still in the legislature, Nancy was still working at that time for Michael Johnston.

PC: So you mentioned the subcommittees on Ways and Means. What subcommittee did you serve on?

NP: You may stump me on this one. I am trying to remember which ones I served on. My bigger memory was when I was Secretary of Revenue, when I met with the subcommittee on Budget. I'm trying to remember. I'd have to look back. I don't have strong memories about that. We had meetings with them, but I don't recall.

PC: Let's jump to your time as Secretary of Revenue. Governor Finney appointed you. Talk about that experience. I'm assuming your legislative experience informed that work. How did you work with the other members of the Cabinet? How was Governor Finney to work with as Secretary of Revenue? Talk about that experience.

NP: I'm trying to think about what I can say and what I can't say.

PC: What are the history lessons from all of that?

NP: Going from the legislature to being a secretary of an agency, the first thing I learned was I don't refer to the legislature as "we" any longer. At one point in time—you still were part of that body, and you talked about "we," but, no, it was "the people across the street" or some less flattering kind of terms were used because the agencies were trying to figure out statutes and trying to write rules and regulations. That was one thing that I learned right away.

I really enjoyed the experience at Revenue, lots of good people, strong people. I learned a lot. I had never had a computer. This was when Macs first came out. There were Macs throughout the Department of Revenue. So I'm learning how to do emails and do a lot of things that I hadn't known, and then learning just a lot more about the tax system and how it works.

I think one of the times I'll mention, and it's similar to an experience that I had when I was in the legislature. There was one time that there was a meeting between myself as Secretary of Revenue; the Secretary of Administration, Susan Seltsam; and the Budget Director at that time was Gloria Timmer—three women. We all marveled at the fact that there were three women in these positions, and we were, as far as we knew, the first women who had served in those three positions. We were talking again in high-level stuff. This was not your everyday kind of conversation.

I mentioned it was similar to an experience that former Representative and former Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagon would remember when there was a committee meeting that a group of us had—I think it was about children's issues. I don't know whether it was the Corporation for Change or some issues regarding children, and we couldn't find a place to meet, and we realized that all of us were women. So we met in the women's restroom. I'm not sure whether we violated the open meetings law at that point in time or not. Joan may have more memories about that to fill in some of the details, but it felt a little bit like that when I was at Revenue when Gloria and Susan and I met.

It was an important time. It was a wonderful experience. I got to see how some of the legislation that I had been involved in, how it affected people a little bit more directly in some

ways because as you apply the legislation, and people struggle with some things, certainly it gave you a greater understanding of how the various agencies struggle with what the legislature does from time to time.

PC: Did your relationships with your former Senate colleagues help or hinder or perhaps a little bit of both when something needed to be accomplished within the Department of Revenue?

NP: I would have to say the only one I remember where I really felt that it helped was when I wanted an amendment, and I went directly to Gus Bogina, and he made it happen. We were trying to get a new—basically a large-scale computer system to try to collect taxes, and we went in with a proposal that if we could do this, we would be able to generate a lot more in tax revenue because we would enhance our ability to collect taxes, and could they fund it with the idea that in the long run, we were going to be bringing in more taxes. We had kind of an intricate way of presenting that. He, kind of late in the session, added it in. I may have relied somewhat on the relationship that I had with him before. I think that he thought it was a good idea as well.

I don't know that I felt that it hindered my ability to deal with the legislature. We had a few big issues but not big issues—military retirement being one of the biggest ones, and the Department of Revenue had won in the court system. Folks that were representing military retirees who wanted their military retirement exempt under the laws of the state of Kansas, decided since they had lost in the courts at that point, and there were still some appeals that could have occurred, they had decided to take it to the legislature. None of my relationships could stop that.

PC: You mentioned the triad of women that were serving in those various capacities of leadership. Let's bridge to a question about personal identity. We're going to loosely define personal identity as age, gender, race, marital status, class, sexual or gender orientation. Did you experience during your time in the legislature any occasion where you believe your personal identity influenced your ability to move policy forward to work with fellow legislators or provide constituent services? Do you think you were ever given committee assignments or tasks that you thought were a function of your personal identity?

NP: Yes. I can say that. Two examples that I would give, well, one. A member of the Senate on the other side of the aisle came to me. This was, I think, my very first session there. I was so delighted that someone wanted to come talk to me. They wanted my vote, talk about some issue, and instead the question was, "Do you know any good babysitters in Topeka?" I was a little crestfallen when I found out that that was the reason.

PC: That was the question to be asked.

NP: That was the question, yes. The other one was when committee assignments came around. There's a negotiation for various committee assignments. I won't mention a name here. Jack Steineger was the Minority Leader, and he could decide who was going to be on what

committee. I was not happy. This would have been my first full session of the legislature when I had been elected in '80 and started serving in '81. I didn't like the committee assignments I had. I thought that I could have had some other assignments. I went to Jack, and he said, "I know you have a new baby," I think is what he said at that time, or "You have children." I don't think we had the baby at that time. "You have children, and I just thought you wouldn't want anything late in the afternoon," kind of like as a woman, you have other responsibilities. "I thought I'd just give you a light committee assignment," and I wasn't very happy about that. When the time came along to select a new Minority Leader, I did not vote for Jack.

PC: Those are great stories, and thank you for sharing those. We've talked a little bit about your service in the Senate. We talked a little bit about your service as Secretary of Revenue. You're one of the few people that has had experience in all three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial.

NP: Correct.

PC: I'm assuming you have a lot of thoughts on those various types of service. Did the Founding Fathers get it right when they separated the powers? Just share some insights because you are in such a unique position, having served in all three.

NP: Oh, wow. That's a really good question. I don't know if I can do justice to the question. I think the Founding Fathers were very wise because there is a need for a balance of powers. The roles are very much different. That's for sure. As a legislator, in a lot of ways, although you can certainly support what your constituents wish you to do, want you to do, even maybe if it's not the best policy in Kansas, you may vote that way. You don't have to, but certainly you're close to that. If you don't, and there is an overwhelming group of people within your district, then you may not be back. So certainly it really affects that, your ability to remain as a legislator. So you're really close to what your constituents want, if you can determine that. I think sometimes we don't have the best way of really knowing what constituents really think. Questionnaires or polls are not necessarily going to be very reflective of that.

Revenue was kind of different. It was really business. There was a different experience, one I very much enjoyed. Being a judge, certainly we have to a lot of times make decisions that if you just had to do it based on your feelings about what's happening, you might make a different decision, that we have to follow the law. You get constrained about what the law is. You're applying the facts to the law. It's a real different situation, but one that's necessary. Many times, judges can end up irritating, angering a lot of people because of different decisions that are made. There is some discretion. It's not totally driven by the law. I do think it is a very good balance. Does it get skewed from time to time? I don't know. I'm sure it does.

PC: Looking back, what helped you as Secretary of Revenue from lessons learned as legislator? What helped you as a district judge, having been an agency head and a legislator?

NP: First, at Revenue, certainly relationships with people in the legislature and understanding how legislation gets passed. Some of the legislation that gets passed, not all of it's named by a person, but sometimes you have memories of why that particular piece of legislation was passed. You could put a name on it. So and So's constituent from Wyandotte County, for example, had wanted it. You have these strong memories of why the legislation was introduced and passed. So I think the relationships certainly and just the knowledge and the process I think was very helpful at Revenue, knowledge of the law somewhat helpful from time to time.

Coming to the courts, I don't know that I think that my time at Revenue helped me until maybe I became a Chief Judge. I did have responsibilities over employees at Revenue and dealt with a lot of issues. I remember all of our staff had to go through harassment training, sensitivity training, and just other things that came up. There's a lot of employee issues. I had some of those same employee issues when I was Chief Judge at the court. Definitely had I not had that experience, I would have been floundering, I think. It was a good learning ground, and I did learn a lot of things, learning to work with people, and to trust the people that work for you. We had good staff at the court, and I had a good court administrator. I had two different ones, and both of them were excellent. I think I learned that at Revenue, too. In the Senate, you had your secretary. I didn't have staff. I wasn't a Committee Chair. I wasn't in the leadership except in a minor way. But certainly at Revenue, I did have staff. So you learned to deal with staff and to respect their position.

PC: And their expertise.

NP: And their expertise. Yet, if you disagreed, then you would deal with the issue hopefully in a way that they accepted and understood why you may not have accepted their proposal.

PC: You talked very early in our interview about when you came to the Senate, you had a new foster child. You were studying law at Washburn. Clearly you had a full plate with public service as a benchmark of your career. What would you say to young women and young men today in terms of public service? Why did you do it? Why did you pursue a career in public service? What's advantageous? What's enjoyable, and maybe what's not so enjoyable?

NP: I think I did have a full plate. We did have a foster child at that time, and then we adopted the baby that came to us when I just started law school. It was kind of a crazy time. I think the thing that I liked the best about the legislature, and I think I could say that about Revenue also and the judiciary, is certainly the legislature, I learned a lot. It didn't matter what committee you were on, even if you were studying sewer districts across the state of Kansas in the hot summer in an interim committee, you still learned a lot. I thought that was particularly interesting. I mean, that's not a reason to go into public service, but the relationships that you had with people and the ability to make a difference, to help people, I think that was a high point, and what I enjoyed about being in the legislature.

Being at Revenue, I was only there for two years. So maybe speaking more as a judge, there are some things that you can do that are helpful to people that you do feel good about and to help

people understand the process, understanding why you make the decision that you make and make what is sometimes a very foreign kind of experience for a lot of people—a lot of people don't go to court other than maybe being on jury duty, and it's a stressful time for a lot of people. Any way that you can alleviate some of that fear and help people to understand the process and feel more comfortable with it, I think that gives me a sense of, I think, purpose.

PC: A common thread that has been running these interviews, as we've conducted them with former legislators, is learning, being openminded to learning. Can you think of a time as a legislator or even as Secretary of Revenue, where your learning actually changed your mind about a policy or a particular statute or issue?

NP: I'm sure it has. I think some of my positions, I'm sure, have changed over the years. I'm trying to think of a good example of that. I don't know if I can think of any, just in particular. Some of the things that I cared the most about I don't know that I've changed, education being one. I've been an opponent of the death penalty certainly when I was in the legislature. I did have to take my turn and have a capital punishment case as a judge, and that one was hard.

PC: Talk a little bit more about that experience, if you would, please.

NP: I had always wondered what I would do if I had a capital case. For the longest time, it was like the lottery or the draft, I guess it was. I was avoiding it. I was able to not have a case. And then it was my turn to take a case, and it was a capital case, a young man who had shot a law enforcement officer. That's one of the clear—

PC: The law is clear.

NP: I knew that it was charged as a capital case. However, it ended up, I didn't have to make the tough decision of sentencing someone to death. The way that our system is in Kansas, it would certainly have—had it gone to a jury—it didn't go to a jury because the young man pled to a life sentence. We didn't even have a trial. But had there been a trial, if he had been found guilty, then the jury would have had to decide whether it would be life imprisonment or death. That didn't happen. Had they decided death, then the Court would have had to make a decision whether to go along with the jury's decision.

Since I've been in Shawnee County, I don't think we've had anybody sentenced to death. That would have been a very hard one. There are certain things that you are just—you hold as very important to you. I was probably looked at as more of a pro-choice legislator. One of the cases I had when I was first on the bench, the only one that would have ever really had any issue dealing with abortion was an abortion clinic in Topeka. This was years ago, lots of years ago. This was basically an eviction case because the group that had the abortion clinic allegedly, the landlord said that they had not asked to renew their lease in a timely fashion. It was a legal issue. It came before me. It was moderately litigated, I would have to say, but I ended up agreeing with the landlord. It was not something that—it didn't end up being about abortion, but yet it—it was a little tough. I don't think we've had any clinics in Topeka since that time.

PC: You were also quite involved in education.

NP: Yes.

PC: The work of the Education Committee, the school finance [issue]. We keep coming back to school finance time and again. What advice would you give to legislators to help address school finance and education, not necessarily once and for all. I'm not sure that that's possible, but to get past some of the continual divisiveness about it.

NP: I'm not sure. It's so closely related to how you fund it. I mean, education would be easy if you didn't have to worry about the funding aspect. That's the hard one, and how you're going to fund it, whether it's property tax, general fund money. How are you going to be funding it?

Certainly I was part of the Conference Committee in 1992, when we had a tough time getting the school finance bill passed. It was a combination of issues of property tax, sales tax, and income tax. I think those tax issues seem to be, I think, and they still are, fairly divisive. I think people think a fair tax is something that they don't have to pay, and somebody else may have to pay. There are a lot of good people. I don't think that's true of everyone, but I think that certainly it becomes somewhat divisive, and that gets closely tied to economic development and economics for businesses. There have, I think, been fairly traditionally a split between Democrats and Republicans sometimes on how that's viewed.

PC: Talk about that Conference Committee. Who were the other conferees, the five chairs?

NP: I'm going to need some help on that, too.

PC: Remember what you can.

NP: I don't know that I can remember. It seems like we had a super Conference Committee where we had the tax conferees as well as the conferees from the Education Committee. So it was a supersized one, not just six, if I'm remembering correctly. I should have done some homework before I came here to talk about this. I believe Joan Wagnon was on it, and certainly Joe Harder, Rick Bowden. I'm trying to remember others.

PC: What were your takeaways from that experience in terms of building to a consensus and a decision that was palatable to move through the entire body?

NP: At one point, I think we got close enough that we then needed to figure out who we could pick up to get the requisite number of people to pass both in the House and the Senate. Some of it was really lobbying those individuals and seeing if we could tinker here or there with a bill to make it palatable for someone to support it. The two I kind of remember on the Senate side were Paul Feliciano and Dave Kerr as far as—I think Dave ultimately voted for it. I think Paul did. I remember visiting with them. The folks that were not supporting it, but you felt like if you just

maybe changed it a little bit here or there. I don't know how many times we came back, five, six, something. It was a number of times.

I don't take credit for it all, but there was a willingness to continue to work and to come back again and again. We didn't give up. I think that was really important. It was an interesting time. Even before that, Judge [Terry] Bullock, who later became my colleague in the Third Judicial District, he had the case. I think this was part of the session that he convened basically a settlement conference with the Supreme Court, and we all sat around. I think he kind of held court over there to a certain extent.

PC: Literally and figuratively.

NP: Yes, I don't remember all the details about that. It was a significant time. The case we knew was still out there. This was an opportunity for the legislature to settle the case before Judge Bullock had to rule. I would say that would be a highlight of my experience in the legislature. That plus—one of the things that I—I don't know it now. I couldn't even come up with a lot of the various aspects, but the school finance committee or the formula was fairly intricate. Another person who I always respected and liked so much was Dale Dennis from the Department of Education. He was there through all of this. All of the time that I was on Education, Dale was around. He was definitely the expert in school finance. I became pretty knowledgeable about the school finance formula. You had to, as you were talking about making changes and how those changes affect—of course, we all had the print-outs. You always looked to see how it affected your district. That was important, too, to legislators. They had to look and see what happened with their own districts as we made changes in the School Finance formulas. You knew that certain people were probably not going to be able to vote for the Conference Committee Report if it did damage to the funding that their district had received in the past, or they didn't think they were getting as much as other districts or whatever.

PC: As we wrap this interview up, is there anything we haven't asked you, Nancy, that you wish we would have asked you?

NP: I can't think of anything.

PC: Is there anything you want to share with the audience reflective of your time in public service?

NP: I think that the experiences I had as a member of the legislature are some of the most cherished experiences that I've had in my life. I really learned a lot. I certainly made a lot of friends. I have a fondness for the process. I guess it really concerns me and pains me as to what I think I see from the news right now, not only here in the state of Kansas but also in Congress. I love the process. I think generally it works. During the session, it was sometimes like “The sky is falling! This is going to happen. This bill's been introduced,” and, all of a sudden, horrible things were going to happen.

But by the end of the session, the worst didn't happen. Maybe the good things that you wanted to happen didn't quite happen either, but you felt that there was some fairness in the process. I think we've gotten away from it somewhat with just the—I think they may be calling them “omnibus bills” where everything, all the judiciary bills all go into one bill rather than letting various issues stand or fall on their own, and I don't like that change. It seems like a lot of things get added that have only been approved by one house. Anyone that's been here, you're approving conference committee reports, you don't have the full bill. You've got pieces of paper that don't even make any sense unless you go back and look at the statute or the bill, and people probably, I would guess, don't know what they're voting on a lot of times when they haven't actually seen the bill that just got approved by one house and got added into the Conference Committee Report. That plus just the relationships between legislators—it concerns me that there is not the camaraderie that I had the opportunity to experience.

PC: Thank you for joining us this afternoon. Thank you for all our reflections and your insights and your stories. They've been illuminating, and we appreciate the time that you gave us today and look forward to sharing all of those reflections and insights with the viewers and the listeners going forward. Thank you for being a part of this project.

NP: Thank you for asking me. I've enjoyed it. It's a little intimidating, but Patty, you made it very easy. I appreciate it.

PC: I'm glad. Thank you for joining us.

NP: Thank you.

[End of File]