

INTERVIEW OF PAUL FELECIANO BY ERIC SEXTON, 02-11-22  
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Eric L. Sexton: Today is February 11, 2022. I'm Eric Sexton, Governor Affairs Consultant, Foulston Siefkin Law Firm, formerly of Wichita State University. With me is former Representative David Heinemann who is our videographer for today. We are in the Senate Chambers at the State Capitol to conduct an interview that is part of the Kansas Oral History Project, the collection examining the Diversity of Voices in Public Policy Making in the Last Quarter of the 20th and 21st Century.

In these interviews, we'll learn about policy development through the eyes of those who are directly involved. Today we are honored to interview the Honorable Paul Feleciano who served one term in the House of Representatives—

Paul Feleciano: Two.

ES: Two terms in the House of Representatives and then was elected to the Kansas Senate serving from—I hope I have this right—1977 to 2003.

PF: '76.

ES: '76 to 2003.

PF: Correct.

ES: In addition, he continued his public service by serving on the Kansas Parole Board and a variety of other activities. While on the legislature, he served as the ranking Minority Member of many, many important committees, one of which being the powerful, powerful Senate Ways and Means Committee. During his tenure, he had an important role for making key policy decisions that moved our state forward as well as the state, our Regent Universities, and South-Central Kansas. I will not do any more talking about his great efforts because I want to leave that to the Senator to talk about. Thank you again for agreeing to give your perspectives to our oral history project. Paul, can you introduce yourself and let us know why you want to do this interview?

PF: Eric, first of all, it's a pleasure being here in this beautiful [Senate] Chamber that I had the privilege of serving for a number of years. But it's also a pleasure because of two individuals, you who I had the pleasure of working with and the lovely lady behind you who I had the pleasure of working with her on a number of issues.

I decided to do this because I think it's important for the people in the State of Kansas to understand how the real legislative system works, not only in Kansas, but across the country. And I've had the pleasure of functioning both as a state representative, as a state senator, as a president of one of the largest Hispanic organizations in the country, the National Hispanic

Caucus of State Legislators. So it's an honor for me to be here to share with you the spirit of the legislative process and how it worked in Kansas during my tenure of thirty-one years.

ES: That's so awesome. Thank you very much. Now I want to give everyone a little bit of background on our project. The Kansas Oral History Project is a not-for-profit corporation created to collect oral histories of Kansans who were involved in shaping and implementing public policy. The recordings and transcripts of these oral history interviews are accessible to researchers, educators, and other members of the public through the Kansas Historical Society, the Kansas State Library of Kansas, and on our website, <https://ksoralhistory.org>. Funding for this project is provided by volunteers, individual donors, and Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization connecting communities with history, traditions, and other ideas to strengthen civic life.

To give you a preview of what we're going to be doing today, our agenda for today's interview is a little bit of discussion of background and early life for the Senator, entry into public service, his motivation to pursue a public service career, and then talk a little bit about the policies he was involved in, and then those accomplishments, and then wrap up from there.

And let's just jump right in now. Senator, if there was one thing you want everybody to know about you, what should that be?

PF: That I care. I care for people. I care for the citizens that took the time and the effort to go out and vote and allow me the opportunity to serve them four years in the House and the balance of my tenure in the Senate. And to me, that was important.

It came about quite honestly, I was born and raised in the ghettos of New York City, in Manhattan. I came to Kansas with the Air Force. I fell in love with a beautiful lady that's sitting over there, getting ready to celebrate fifty-six years of being married.

ES: Isn't that today?

PF: Why did you do this? February 26th. February 26th, it will be fifty-six years.

ES: That's awesome.

PF: But the issue was that I felt like not enough was being done in Kansas. As I left the Air Force and went back home, she came back after me. We got married February the 26th. I went to work at Beech [Aircraft Manufacturing]. Then I went to work at Prudential. But I also worked at Shakey's Pizza Parlor. I don't know if you recall that chain.

ES: Yes.

PF: I loved the banjo playing and the piano music. It was just fascinating. I worked as a bartender, and there was a gentleman named Bob Madden. Joan probably remembers that name. In that year, they had just finished reapportionment, and I'll be as quick as I can here.

ES: No.

PF: They had carved out a brand-new Senate seat for Bob Madden. His seat was a Democrat district because it was working class people he represented. I was always harassing him about, "You're not doing enough in this area. You're not doing enough in that area. You're not doing enough for education and our kids. What are you doing up there?" And so he said, "Paul, after we get through cleaning, can you take half an hour and meet me?" I said, "I would love to."

So I did. We went to his office, and I'll never forget it as long as I live. As we walked downstairs into the office, there was this giant of a man. He said, "I want you to meet my leader, my Minority Leader, Pete Loux." Now, if you ever met Pete Loux, he's huge.

ES: Yes.

PF: He's about 5'8, 5'9, baldheaded, and he looked like he could—

ES: A big voice.

PF: Be a sumo wrestling individual. I said, "Well, it's a pleasure to meet you. But why am I here?" And Madden said real quick like, "Paul, I'm sick and tired of you badmouthing me as to what I'm doing or not doing. We're going to give you an opportunity to run for the House of Representatives, and I'm going to run for the Senate." And Pete says, "Let me interview him first. Let me visit with him."

We sat down. We talked for like forty-five minutes. And he said, "I love what you're doing. You've been with Prudential five-and-a-half years. You door knock. You make phone calls. You call on people. That's exactly what we need. But you're going to need \$5,000 to run your campaign. You're going to need a \$50 filing fee, and you're in." I said, "What does that mean?" He says, "Well, you'll be a State Representative." I said, "I don't have \$5,000. I don't even have \$50 to file." He said, "We'll take care of it."

To make the long story short, we did it. They laid out the campaign for me. I ran. In fact, in 1972, when I ran, I was looking through my stuff last night. I came across this piece. I don't know if you remember Pennypower in its day.

ES: Yes.

PF: I didn't have a big budget. So I printed five of these, and I sent one every week, the last five weeks of the election. This was the first piece. Look how young, what a good-looking young man I was.

ES: You were a fine-looking man, fine-looking.

PF: So I ran. I won, and the rest is history. I developed a fascination with it, but I'll never forget one thing that was brought to my attention. It was the night of the inaugural. I forget who I was talking to, but he said, "You know, Paul, you're a fascinating person. You need to talk to one of the deans of the Republican Party and the House of Representatives." I said, "Who's that?" He said, "Clyde Hill from Yates Center." I said, "Clyde Hill. What does he do?" "He's an attorney, but you'll enjoy visiting with him." I said, "Where is he?" He said, "He's at that table over there." I said, "Thank you." I looked at my wife. I said, "Excuse me, honey, I'll be back in a few minutes."

I took off, and I sat down next to him, introduced myself, and I tell you, it was the best experience of my life because he was very simple as far as what he wanted to share with me. He said, "A couple of small lessons, Paul. Don't burn yourself by going down to the well of the House too often. When you give your word to someone that you're going to support that bill or that amendment, stay with it. Don't ride the fence. Take a vote, either yea or nay because if you say you don't know, they'll pressure you until Hell freezes over."

ES: Right.

PF: "And then earn the respect and realize that there are two parties. Do not neglect the Republican Party because after all, Paul, we are in control." I said, "I got you. I've taken more than enough of your time. Thank you," and I left.

ES: That's awesome.

PF: I tell you, I've never forgotten that because I realized, the other thing that I realized was that as a Democrat in a Republican-controlled state, you couldn't get anything with your name on it unless it was with a group.

ES: Yes.

PF: So I learned to work with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, earned their respect, and I was able to get so much done by simply communicating one on one. What was different then than now is that you could sit down with a colleague and visit with them and share with them your thoughts and ideas as to why you were doing something and say, "Look, help me, and I'll help you."

ES: That's awesome.

PF: "At a future date." And they would say, "Sure. Why not? We'll do it."

ES: That's awesome. I want to delve into what you just said a little bit more about this notion that is again, you came and you were elected. They came and reached for you. How did your heritage, ethnicity play a role in your running as well as once you got here, what kinds of experiences did you feel that you encountered as a result of that?

PF: Excellent question. I came from a single parent. My father abandoned us when we were rather young. There were myself and two sisters. My mother worked two jobs to put bread on the table. I lived in subsidized housing. Times were tough. There were times when I would go to bed on an empty stomach. So all of the attributes that I saw in my district as I went door to door and talked to people, I saw in myself. I recall, born and raised in the ghettos of New York City, and I said, "If ever I had an opportunity to do something, I would do it."

My mother told me two things. She said, "Never forget where you came from and always reach back and reach out and help someone if you can." And I did that. And I was able to bring my compassion, my emotion, my thoughts behind this as to what it would take to make things happen.

But, you know, the other exciting thing of serving in this legislature is the giants that we had serving. I mean, from Bennett who was President of the Senator, from Norman Gaar who sat over there who was the Majority Leader. I mean, all of the Presidents of the Senate, the Republicans, were dynamite—Talkington [Robert]. I remember flying to Europe with Talkington. We were flying in a small plane, and his feet stretched halfway down the plane. It was so funny, him and Barkis [Marvin].

ES: Barkis.

PF: Pete Loux, Pete McGill. These two individuals—Steininger was the Minority Leader. These individuals were so powerful and so fantastic that what they did, what did they do? They were problem solvers. Wes Sowers was a senator from Sedgwick County, a hell of a tennis player. He was in charge of penal reform in the State of Kansas that completely reformed the penal system in the State of Kansas. We have mental health reform. Heinemann and others played a role in that in the House of Representatives and brought it over to the Senate. Why we have the Menninger brothers here. We had some of the world-famous people coming to Topeka, Kansas for mental health. So we did the penal reform.

Governor Bennett, Johnson County, you would say, "Why would he care about water?" I mean, I remember the first meeting that I had with him that I said—Shelby Smith was the lieutenant governor. I said, "You drink it with your meal, or you drink it with scotch. What is there to say?"

Let me tell you, because of Governor Bennett's vision, he appointed a two-year task force, twenty-six members. The first year, we adopted twenty-eight bills.

ES: And you were a part of that task force?

PF: Yes, I was part of the task force. We entered those twenty-eight bills. I think sixteen or seventeen passed. The second year, the same thing. We created the Groundwater Management Districts. We created the metering to some extent, and then they went by the wayside because the irrigators did not like that at all.

ES: Right.

PF: First in, first out rights. Highway reform.

[Governor Mike] Hayden. I was watching his interview the other day. They talked to him about wildlife and parks. Well, Hayden was responsible for bringing us into the 21st century with highways. But I'll never forget, he wanted, his session, the Department of Transportation brought a ten-billion dollar project, and I said to his staff, "What's in it for Wichita?" All the money was going to Johnson County. So I said, "Unless you're going to give Wichita something, we're going to control six votes. But I'll get back with you." Because I hadn't talked to Bill Morris, and I hadn't talked to my other colleagues. So I assumed that I could control those votes, but there were five of us.

So I went back and I said, "Morris, you've got to be with us. We need [Highway] ninety-six. We need Wichita, El Dorado, Wichita to Hutchinson. We need Kellogg across. I need just a little piece. There's a segment that they forgot to give me on the 235, it's on to Seneca. That's only going to be two million dollars. You can afford that out of a billion dollar deal." "Okay. We'll see what we can do." To make a long story short, it didn't happen because I said, "We can't do that. Not this year, maybe next year." I said, "No, sir."

So the Governor called me down. Hayden called me down, and he said, "What's it going to take?" I said, "It's going to take you giving us this."

ES: Right.

PF: I had counsel with the City of Wichita and the County, and this is what they wanted. It didn't happen. So we didn't pass the bill. Remember that, Heinemann?

ES: So again you developed those relationships, working together.

PF: In the background. We stopped the bill. Hayden was just livid with me. But we stopped it. During the summer, he called me and he said, "I'd like for you to come down, but can we talk

by phone?" I said, "Yes." "What do you need?" I said, "I'll fax it to you." We sent it to him. He said, "I think we could do that."

Horace Edwards, which was the Transportation Secretary, and we sent it to him. I'll never forget two week later, there's a knock on the door. There's this Highway Patrol guy, like 6'4, with his full uniform, and he said, "Is Senator Feliciano here?" "Yes." "This is for you." The new highway bill.

So we had a special session, and it happened. It became law. KU wanted a School of Medicine branch in Wichita. They couldn't get it done. A new building would have cost 50 million dollars. The Democrats controlled the courthouse, the City Hall, and the County Commission. Tom Scott happened to be the County Commissioner. I said, "Tom, you've got a county hospital that's sitting there vacant. What are you going to do with it?" He said, "We're probably going to have to tear it down." I said, "Why?" He said, "There's only eight people there. We can't afford to do anything with it."

I said, "Do me a favor. If I could bring you a deal, would you be willing to lease this to the State of Kansas for \$1 for ninety-nine years, and I guarantee you that KU would come down here immediately and spend 10 million dollars refurbishing the facility and in ten years, it will be a multimillion-dollar operation. And, oh, by the way, if you're going to do that, then we need parking because people are going to come, and they're going to have to park their facility." You've got all of these sites. I've already got the map. They're right here. He said, "Bring me a proposal. I can't do anything without a proposal." I got the City; I got the County; I got the KU staff. We put a proposal together, took it to the County Commission. It passed. Today we have a multimillion-dollar complex in Sedgwick County.

ES: Well, Senator, that's a great story of again you connecting your community and your district, working together in that, and then to get that through the legislative process had to have been challenging as well.

PF: Yes and no because if you knew who the players were, you made it happen. Two quick things that fascinated me: This family came to me. They said, "My son and my daughter are both"—is it hemophilia, honey?

ES: Yes.

PF: They're bleeders. "We tried to get benefits from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and they refused to provide benefits on it." And I said, "Oh, my god. They'll die." They said yes. I said, "What can I do?" So I went to Speaker McGill. I said, "I need help with this," and he helped me. He said, "Don't waste your time with me," and I'm not being disrespectful. Go see"—was it Skinner?

ES: Mark Skinner. He's a hemophiliac.

PF: He was a hemophiliac. When I told him what I was doing, he gets up, and he gives me the biggest bear hug that you could imagine. He says, "I'll carry it for you." I said, "No, no, you've got to be a state representative. I'll do it, but you should make sure that you shepherd it through." We made it happen. Blue Cross/Blue Shield now pays.

The other thing, I'm traveling the turnpike back and forth the first week, and I had to go to the restroom. I went into the place. I go into the restroom, and I look up, and I can't use it. I had to go so bad. You had to put a coin into the stupid bathroom, into the toilet seat.

ES: Into the stall.

PF: Into the stall. And so I didn't have any change. So I crawl underneath it, and I did my thing. Two days later, we were at the Capitol, and Pete Loux is holding a meeting, and Jim Lawing is sitting, God bless him, may he rest in peace, he's sitting next to me and he said—I said, "Hey, do you have this problem?" He said, "Yeah, just the other day." I said, "Let's introduce a bill and do away with that." He said, "Let's do it!" So we did. We introduced a bill, and we did away with having to charge to go to the potty.

ES: Exactly. Well, along those lines, when you think about all of the myriad of legislation that you've been involved in, what is the project effort that you are the most proud of, and you see the fruits of that today?

PF: I believe the school finance to me was one of the biggest items that we needed to address, and we had some outstanding, articulate members on both sides of the aisle that truly believed like I did that in order to succeed and be successful in life, you had to have a good K-12 educational system. You had to have an outstanding higher educational system.

So I did everything that I could to make sure that we had the votes to make things like that happen. I thank God that over the years, we fought the battle, and it was always towards the end of the session where you gave and then took a little bit, but we finally—I think we finally got there just in the last two or three years where we were properly funding it, thanks to the fact that it was ruled unconstitutional, and the House and Senate had to come to grips with reality.

The other was a youth advisory center that was put together. Marvin Barkis played a big role in that area, again to change the formatting as to how we dealt with the youth of the State of Kansas, getting back to, is the answer simply to throw them into one of those homes?

ES: Right.

PF: And the answer was no. You had to do things differently. The other mistake we as a state made was closing down our state hospitals. I remember a debate on the floor of the Senate when I said, "You either treat them with integrity and honesty and safety in a state facility, or

you throw them out on the streets, and society has to deal with them” because they’re not going to take their medication out there, and you’re going to have crime. You’re going to have all kinds of problems, and that’s exactly what we’re facing here today.

ES: Isn’t that amazing. I want to go back to your first coming to these hallowed halls and coming to the legislature. Can you remember who your first campaign contribution came from?

PF: Oh, my gosh. I found out real quick that the backbone of my representative district was the labor movement.

ES: Yes.

PF: The Machinists Union. I asked Pete Loux, I said, “Who are key people that I can contact?” and he said, “Two people. Pat Lehman with the Machinists Union, and she knows who the rest of the players are, and then the NEA, the Teachers Union. In your district, there’s a gentleman by the name of Ralph Ross. I don’t know if you remember him.

ES: Yes.

PF: I said, “Okay.” So I did. I contacted them, and I’ll never forget. I had a mailing I had to get out in the last week of my election, an opportunity for the House, 15,000 pieces, and Pat Lehman said, “Do you have everything ready?” Back then, you didn’t have the marvel of today. You had to stuff; you had to lick; you had to seal; you had to put stupid envelopes on it, stamps on it. But I said, “Yes, I have everything ready.” She said, “Have it here at 10:00 tomorrow morning, and we’ll take care of it. Now can you provide food for them?” I said, “How many are we talking about?” She said, “I’ll let you know by 1:00 the next day.”

She did. She said, “How about bringing over thirty or forty pizzas and drinks?” I said okay. I walked into the Machinists Hall. There must have been sixty or seventy people there.

ES: Yes.

PF: And they cranked that out like you can’t believe it. I tell you, I sat down in the chair and bawled.

ES: Right.

PF: I couldn’t believe it. The other was Ralph Ross. He asked me to speak at his class. A political scientist. He says, “Come and talk to the kids. You’ve got so much passion, so much emotion.” He says, “I’ll see if I can recruit some kids.”

Nobody knew me when I was running. So I did. I spoke to the classes. He asked for volunteers, and he said, “By the way, let me give you an incentive, kids. If you work a couple of weekends

for Paul, I will give you extra credit." Hands went up everywhere, and I wound up with like thirty kids.

I said, "I can't give you any incentive, Ralph, but what are you doing next Saturday?" He said, "What do you have in mind?" I said, "10:00 at this steakhouse. We're going to meet there, and we're going to target three precincts." He said, "I'll be there."

ES: That's awesome. That's great.

PF: He knocks on this door. He's on one side of the street. I'm on the other side. This young lady opens the door. She says, "Ralph, what are you doing here? Am I in trouble?" I could hear her say that. He said, "No, I'm over here campaigning for Representative Paul Feleciano. You ought to get your clothes on and campaign with us." And she did.

ES: That's awesome.

PF: That was the beauty of running for the legislature.

ES: That's great. Now let me ask you a more philosophical question. And again now that you've been out, you've served a long time, looking into what we have here today, make some comparison and contrast to your time in service relative to partisanship, ideology, also diversity. What do you see today? You're approaching being an octogenarian. What do you see kind of sitting back as being the sage to tell us about where we ought to be going toward in the future?

PF: An excellent question, Eric. I think back then in the seventies and eighties, the make-up of the legislature, both Democrats and Republicans, these men and few women, unfortunately, were giants. They were articulate; they were caring; they were compassionate. They cared about the State of Kansas. They were problem solvers.

I have four pages of things that we did that I don't want to get into, but we worked as a team. Eric would come to me and say, "Paul, I know you probably can't vote for this, but will you help us with this?" "Yes." And we would do our battles on the floor of the House of Representatives or the floor of the Senate, and after it was over, we would go out and have a drink, and we would go out and have a meal and talk about mañana, about tomorrow.

ES: Right.

PF: To me, that was the beauty of it.

ES: Right.

PF: There was a willingness to participate in that regard.

ES: Yes.

PF: There was no hostility. Every once in a while, I got super emotional, and Anthony Hensley would lean over and say, “Felice, settle down, settle down.” And I would. But when you get into it, the other thing that Clyde Hill said, “Do your homework. Don’t get up and ask stupid questions. Know what the subject is. Master it. Understand it.”

So I see that back then, and as I enter the decade of the 21st century, ’02 and ’03, we started seeing a movement of conservatism, three parties—moderate Republicans, conservative Republicans, and Democrats. The impact was they didn’t want to compromise. And I’m saying, “What am I doing here?” I told my son that one day as we were driving to the Capitol out to dinner. I said, “When the time comes when I drive up to the Capitol and I say, ‘What am I doing here?,’ it’s time to quit.”

I did that. I went to Governor Sebelius, God bless that woman. She wanted to run for Insurance Commissioner, and I said, “I’ll give you all my files,” and I did because I had run against them, and I ran against Sam Brownback. I did that, not because I could beat them because Fletcher Bell was the money man in the State of Kansas. Sam Brownback, three or four million dollars or more. They beat the heck out of me, but on Ron Todd, I came like 46 percent of the vote on less than \$250,000.

I lost my train of thought.

ES: I’ll come back to you. You mentioned, again, you ran for federal office.

PF: I ran for those offices because I didn’t want them spending the money against my colleagues that are running for the Senate or running for the House. It gave us an opportunity. They had to spend money to shut me up. I wouldn’t be quiet.

ES: Right.

PF: And I enjoyed it because it gave me an opportunity to travel the state of Kansas, to meet people that otherwise I would not have met. Let me tell you, western Kansas is just fabulous. We have some fantastic people out there in that first Congressional district. That was fun—a lot of work, a lot of miles, but well worth it.

ES: That’s awesome. Let me ask you, and again because I’m bouncing again because I’m following your lead. I want you to dig a little bit more about those times when somebody thought you were being loud, not cooperative. How much of that do you think sometimes that was ethnicity based, that they didn’t think you should speak that way, should take that on? I think of one of the policy areas that again you were instrumental in starting the Kansas Hispanic Commission.

PF: Yes.

ES: So tie those two together for us.

PF: Well, again, you develop trust. You develop respect by how you treat your fellow colleagues on both sides of the aisle. I got very close to Pete Loux. I got close to Pete McGill. I love the man. He was fantastic. What I did was I shared with him that there was a need for a commission, and he said, "Let's not call it that. Let's call it an advisory." I said, "Pete, you call it whatever you want. Let's just make it happen." He said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. I've got the bill right here." He said, "I figured you'd be talking to me." He said, "If you just change these words, we'll make it happen." I said, "God bless you, brother." I said, "I love you for that." And we made it happen.

I got calls from western Kansas that they were having problems, the Hispanic population in hospitals. When you're dealing with life and death, the problem was, they didn't have translators. I said, "We need some help." The courts. They didn't have translators in the courts, and you're dealing with going to prison, "Did I do something wrong? Did I do something right?" We asked for translators.

We had a Chairman of Judiciary called Elwaine Pomeroy. I don't know if he's alive or dead. He's alive? Oh, I'm so sorry. But Elwaine was fantastic. I went to him and I said, "I need help with this. Can you tell me how to do it? Can you show me how to do it?" And he did.

I was put on Judiciary. I don't know why. But as a member of the Judiciary Committee, I would sit there and I mean stuff was just flying over my head. I didn't know what in the world I was doing. I went to Senator Steinger, I said, "I need to be taken off [the committee] because I am lost." He says, "Felice"—they used to call me "Felice"—"I want you there because I think you could be a check and balance to us." I said, "Then I need some help." He said, "You figure it out." I said okay.

So I called the Dean at the School of Law at KU and the Dean of the School of Law at Washburn, [Jim] Concannon, I think was his name. I said, "I want you to find for me the best and brightest third-year law student because I need an intern, and I need it yesterday. I can't pay them, but I've got two sets of law books. I will provide them a set of law books if you do that."

I helped start the internship program. It was the greatest thing I ever did because, let me tell you, they were assigning to me in some cases, and the President of the Senate called me down, I'm not going to tell you who it was. He said, "How in the world do you have two interns working for you?" I said, "I'm good, brother."

ES: Exactly.

PF: So we made it happen. But I tell you, it put me on not quite of an equal par with my attorneys. I was able to understand fully what was happening in the committee and some of the wheeling and dealing that was going on, and I'm not going to mention names again.

ES: That's right. And again, how many governors have you worked under and with? Can you tell us a little bit, again from the policy standpoints, how did that work with you being a Senator, and you were part of the minority party working with governors to accomplish great things for our state?

PF: I tell you, my first encounter was with Bob Docking. Bob Docking was just a brilliant, brilliant governor. I'll never forget it. We had passed a law that said that if you got three speeding tickets, the insurance company could cancel you at will and you would have no insurance. You'd be out there hanging out loose.

So I said, "What can I do?" I said, "Well, I'm going to introduce a simple bill that says if you get three speeding tickets because they changed the speeding laws, the insurance companies, you can't cancel. I entered this as a bill. I said, "What do I do now?"

I went to see Bob Docking. I said, "Governor, this is your last year in office. This is a bill I'm introducing. If this bill gets to you, will you sign it?" And he said, "Well, it hasn't gotten here yet." I said, "But it will if you sign it." "I'll sign it. I'm going to be a citizen in the not-too-distant future, and I speed." He said, "I got to tell you, I speed." He said, "I'll sign it." I said, "Give me a letter." So he gave me a letter. I put it in my pocket. I come down here to the well [House Podium]. It came out of committee. There was a gentleman by the name of Charlie Durfee, I think his name was. I told him about it, and he said, "I'm over here in western Kansas." He says, "I could agree with this bill. I like it. I don't want my insurance cancelled."

So we get down here, and I'm carrying the bill, and I'm looking around. They're beating the heck out of me.

ES: Oh, wow.

PF: Because the insurance giants are up in the gallery. They're going like this, and I'm saying, "We've got to get this done." So you've got to move the question. So I moved the question, and they, "All those say aye. I believe the nos have it."

But Charlie Durfee had told me, "If you need my help, I'll be there." He was sitting over here somewhere. I'm in the well, and I looked back up here, and I said, "Charlie, you promised me. You promised me that you would help. I guess your word is not good." I was so emotional. Tears were rolling down my eyes, and I started walking away. And Charlie gets up, turns his light on, and the Chairman says, "The Chairman would recognize the honorable"—he says, "Representative Feleciano, my word is my bond." He says, "I told you I would support you." He

looks at his colleagues on this side of the aisle, and he said, "I'm supporting Representative Feleciano on this amendment," and it passed. I mean, it just blew me away.

ES: Would that have been your first bill that you kind of shepherded from start to finish?

PF: That's right. It was a Republican chairman of a committee that made that happen. So you see the importance of the linkage between Democrats and Republicans working together. The gentleman that's filming us, very bright, very articulate, always did his homework. We could work with him, always. And you loved doing it because it was love and passion for the job, and that's lacking today. That is so lacking today.

I sit at home, and I watch the various stations, news stations. It brings literally tears to my eyes. I mean, Jerry Moran, "Sir, sit back there." I served with Jerry Moran. I loved that guy. When I was on the campaign trail for the insurance commissioner in the United States Senate, I worked with him. I campaigned with him. People, Democrats would say, "What do you think about Jerry Moran?" "I think he's fantastic, very articulate, nice looking, a beautiful wife."

But when it comes time to stand up and say, "Democracy is important. The Constitution is important," none of them have any backbone to stand up and be counted in the atmosphere that we're in today. If one man is going to dictate whether I'm going to run or not, then hell, I'll run. You're going to have to work your butt off to defeat me. Excuse me.

ES: Absolutely.

PF: Why be intimidated by it? But there's no backbone anywhere.

ES: Interesting.

PF: And that's sad.

ES: And again you were involved in so many things. I have just a smattering of—casinos, K-Tech, the number of redistricting, and then you've already mentioned school finance. The importance of that start of the K-Tech.

PF: Absolutely.

ES: I know you were really involved with that as well.

PF: Outstanding. To me, that was critical. Why? We are known as the Air Capital of the World.

ES: And K-Tech was the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation.

PF: That's right. And Kansas, Inc. was research, I remember.

ES: Kansas, Inc. was part of that as well.

PF: And from that, we did a spin-off, and we created NIAR, National Institute for Aviation Research. I mean, that was the heart and soul of Sedgwick County in the state of Kansas to generate jobs, good-paying jobs, to generate the opportunity to grow the industry and keep them alive and flowing.

There's an opportunity where you saw where the money was being spent and how it was being spent and what came of it. The Star Program that we passed, Ben Vidrickson, another classic individual.

ES: Yes.

PF: He was a guru when it came to economic development, anything for economic development.

ES: You know, by the way, real quick, just so people understand, he talked about Ben Vidrickson, he was a Republican, again working with the senator on the Democrat side to make these kinds of things happen.

PF: And I hope when my Democrat colleagues see this, if they see this, that they don't say, "What about Democrats? He worked with Democrats." Well, we had our own giants. We had Arnie Berman. We had Franklin Gaines. We had Jack Steineger. We had Richard Gannon from out in western Kansas. Funny stories that happened.

Richard Gannon was on Ways and Means with me. He was always there for Gus Bogina, the Chairman of the committee. He says, "Gus"—we're in a conference committee. We're back in his office, and he says, "Gus," he was very polite, very dignified. He said, "Gus, I'm always giving you my yes vote. I'm always giving you my yes vote, and all I've asked is for a lousy \$50,000 for a little project that I have in my district, and you can't seem to help me."

And Gus had a short fuse. He said, "What in the blankety blank blank is the matter with you? I've given you so much." He takes his watch, tears it off, and he throws that watch against the wall, and it shatters into a million pieces. After he did that, he said, "Oh, my god, that was the watch my wife gave me."

So Gannon says, "I'm sorry you did that. You didn't have to be so emotional. All I wanted was \$50,000," and Gus—I mean, how do you stop from laughing? Gus started to laugh and he said, "Okay. I'll tell you what. Get out there and help me find the pieces, and maybe I can put it together again."

But it's things like that. My colleagues, I didn't have problems with my colleagues, but I knew that in order to get things passed, I needed the vote of the majority party, pure and simple.

ES: Yes.

PF: You mentioned the governors from Docking to Bennett with the water and all of the other things, John Carlin, our two-term governor, the severance tax with John Carlin, school finance with John Carlin, Corporation Commission. He appointed Pete Loux to be the Chairman of the Corporation Commission. The Rural Electric Co-ops wanted to move the power plants, the nuclear power plants from under the jurisdiction of the KCC.

ES: Oh, wow.

PF: And Pete Loux said, "We're not going to have any of that." So we stopped that.

They were going to build a gasohol plant, but they would have to bring a slurry of pipeline from Gillette, Wyoming into Wichita. I said, "That ain't going to happen. We have the Equus Beds." *[Editor note: The real issue was the construction of a coal slurry pipeline from Wyoming to Kansas, not a gasohol plant.]*

ES: Yes.

PF: What was the other one?

ES: We have the Ogallala. We have the Equus Beds. We have all of the groundwater management.

PF: I wrote an editorial, and I sent it in. The director of the Economic Development in Wichita said, "These senators are nothing but a bunch of idiots. They don't understand economic development." And I said, "Oh, really?" So I got the headline, and I clipped it, and I put it on every senator's desk. The bill got killed. It didn't go anywhere. We stopped it.

Bill Graves. Bill Graves was—what the heck was it?

ES: High and tight. [campaign slogan, related to the trucking business]

PF: High and tight. He did some interesting things. He worked. He was accessible. You could work with him. Kathleen Sebelius was just, what can I say about her? I tell you, Joan Finney, I campaigned with her. This woman was just unbelievably, a heck of a campaigner. She could walk into a room and name every person's name, grandkids, children. When it came to politics, the mistake she made was she surrounded herself with the wrong people, I'm sorry to say. And I was saddened to see myself voting to override probably a handful of her vetoes. It just didn't make any sense to me why she would have done that. But all in all, she came out of it okay.

So we had some, I was surprised when Kathleen appointed Parkinson.

ES: Yes, Mark Parkinson.

PF: That he didn't run for governor. He would have been a fantastic governor. *[Ed. Note: Lt. Gov. Parkinson became Governor for 2 years when Sebelius resigned, but he didn't run for office at the next election.]*

ES: Let me ask you again. You have talked about so many great things, and we're kind of coming to the end of today's session, but can you think of one thing that—"regrets" is too strong a word, but you might have regretted in your political life. Again you know that I play golf a little bit, if you had a mulligan, was there one thing that you'd take a mulligan on?

PF: I don't regret anything that I did in my thirty-one years and six years on a parole board and four years that I bought on my Air Force deal. But I've got to make one observation, and I say this from the bottom of my heart. I didn't know what the job paid when I ran. My wife asked me, "When do you get paid?" because two-and-a-half weeks had passed, and I said, "I don't know. I'll find out."

So I went to see Pete Loux, and I said, "When do we get paid, and how much do we get paid?" And he said very politely, "Well, \$10 a day and \$35 in expenses a day." I said, "Pete, you just lost a member of the House of Representatives." He said, "Why is that?" I said, "Because when I go home, my wife is going to kill me." I said, "I left a good-paying job with Prudential."

If I conclude with anything, it's that the reason I was successful and I cared and I'm here today is because of that woman over there. She was a registered nurse. She didn't make big bucks back then, but we had three kids to feed. We had a house to support, but she made the ultimate sacrifice raising those kids while I was up here.

ES: That's wonderful.

PF: For me to be here to do the job that I was doing.

ES: That's awesome.

PF: I have all of it, that to her.

ES: My last question would be, others that come behind you, what's your advice to folks about, who are interested in giving back and engaging in public service?

PF: Another excellent question. I believe that they need to start at a local level. They need to get involved with City Council members; county commissioners; precinct men and women;

attend, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, attend functions; visit with people in the community, community centers, beauty shops, talk to people; and then get involved in the party and talk to the elected officials that are there because the system is so disgusting right now that people are exiting. They're leaving left and right. We need good people that could come in here and do the job.

There are a lot of problems out there that still need to be solved, and I think with good people working together in a collaborative effort, we could restore integrity back into the system and not the insanity that's there.

ES: That's a great place to finish. Paul, thank you so much.

PF: My pleasure, Eric. My pleasure. David, thank you very much.

[End of File]