

Interview of Senator Edward F. Reilly Jr. by Dale Goter, July 2, 2019
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Dale Goter: Today is July 2, 2019, and we're here in the Senate chambers of the Kansas State House. I'm Dale Goter, a retired journalist of thirty years, spending many years here in the Statehouse covering the Legislature. I'm here to conduct an interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project. Our guest today is Senator Edward F. Reilly Jr. He was a former state senator, serving in the legislature from 1965 to 1992. Senator, thanks for joining us today.

Senator Edward F. Reilly Jr.: Thank you, Dale.

DG: We're doing this interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, and that is a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing former legislators, particularly those who served from the 1960s to 2000. These interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council. I'd also like to give some credit today for the background work done by two former staffers for the senator, Mary Torrance and Mary Galligan.

Senator, we're going to cover a lot of ground today because you were here a long time in a remarkable era in Kansas politics and in Kansas history. Give me a little bit of your personal background, who you were when you came here, what you became as you stayed through that period of time, but primarily, what got you into this business?

EFR: Thank you, Dale. I, of course, grew up in Kansas, born and raised in Leavenworth. I attended schools there and went on to the University of Kansas. I had the famous seat mate of Wilt Chamberlain in my geography class, which I've never forgotten. During my days at the University, I don't even think I thought a lot about politics. I did get involved in some of the Young Republican activities with a gentleman who I knew named Tom Van Sickle, who also served in the Legislature. We became very good friends. He really encouraged me, too, in college, to really think about becoming more seriously involved. I ended up when I was there becoming the young National Committeeman in the Republican collegiate group.

I went on, of course, go back to the business of insurance and real estate in Kansas, a family insurance and real estate firm founded in 1925. I decided when a seat opened up in the Kansas House due to a resignation that I would seek that seat, much to the dismay of my father. At that time, the Reilly Company was a small agency and was just really in need of having its full contingent of four employees.

DG: And legislators get paid so much money. What? Ten bucks a day?

EFR: I'm sure he was thinking he's leaving to go to Topeka and leave him holding the ropes with a couple of other folks. In any event, the decision was made by myself to go ahead and try for it. I was very lucky that the precinct committee men and women of that area decided that I should be elected.

DG: How did you describe yourself politically in that era? What kind of a political bent did you come from?

EFR: I'm not sure that I knew. Of course, I was a Republican. I thought I was fairly moderate as a Republican, not structured in one way or the other in terms of being in a very strong liberal or a strong conservative—those were the days I think when you could say you were a moderate. You'd get away with it. Nobody was going to question you. You're in the middle of the road. You can go either way, depending on the legislation, depending on your own thoughts and philosophy.

I ran. I was selected. I served that one year, and I never will forget. We had a lady named—I think her name was Mrs. Dollie Newell.^[1] District 77, Stafford, R.] She was the only woman in the House, as I recall. I remember a gentleman named John Gardner who was in the House of

^[1] Editor Note. Dollie Newell from Stafford went to the legislature in 1964 mid-term to fill the unexpired term of her husband, Hollace. She was elected in her own right in 1964 and served one term (1965-66). Three women served in the House during the 1965-66 term after Reilly was elected to the Senate: Harriet Graham, D-Wichita; Beatrice Jacquart, R-Santana; and Dollie Newell, R-Stafford.]

Representatives. He was assigned really by the Speaker to kind of look after me and introduce me to the House procedure, which he made very clear early on, "The House procedure for you, Reilly, will be to escort all of the pages to the Dome that are here as guests of the Legislature." Needless to say, that was my assignment. I ended up doing that faithfully. That's probably the reason I have knee problems today.

DG: But you did that for one year as the one session as a House member and then moved on to the Senate?

EFR: Then I ran for the Senate. I never will forget the slogan that my opponent used on me. He was from Bonner Springs, Kansas, in Wyandotte County, a very nice gentleman, but his sign was famous for "Don't Elect A Boy To Do A Man's Job." I was a boy. At that point in time, I was twenty-four years old. I was the second youngest to run for the State Senate. Tom Van Sickle was already here. He had graduated from KU also. We hit it off. We had a background of knowing one another. We were, I think, both of us, instrumental in bringing that young air to the State Senate.

DG: I wanted to note that you went from there, and you had a very distinguished career, but it was a lot of it focused on being chairman of Federal and State Affairs [Committee], which people who follow the legislature know that's the hot button issue committee for a lot of really tough and emotional issues--and we'll talk about some of those along the way. You also served as Vice chair of elections. You were on the Congressional and Judicial Apportionment Committee, Public Welfare, Banking, big issues in finances in those days as well, and Arts, Cultural Resources Joint Committee. It was a handful, but we're going to talk about those issues that arose and the stories that go with them. But when you look back at that era, the themes that emerged that changed the face of Kansas in a big-picture perspective, things like perhaps education. What sticks out in your mind as that overtone that filled those days?

EFR: There were so many hot issues that developed and evolved. There was pressure as always on the state for finances. Finance was always a big issue. As we hear in government, both state and federal, there's always a lack of the necessary funds and resources to do what every politician or public servant wants to do. That was always an issue. That triggered a lot of the main hot button issues that ended up—I had to deal with in the committee that I was chair of, and in order to seek funds and be able to develop more revenue, we did turn to things that were obviously quite controversial. Those were the lottery, the pari-mutuel [wagering], the gambling, the horse and dog racing, all those issues which then required in most all of them a constitutional amendment which was not easy to acquire. You obviously had to have majorities in both the House and Senate to get them submitted to the people, the argument always being, of course, that the people should have a right to vote on those kinds of issues. We were able to get that accomplished, but not without a tremendous amount of debate, and a lot of controversy and some ill feelings from some people.

DG: We're going to get you to talk about more of those specifically. A couple of other areas we want to get to from the outset though. Media. I was a reporter back then some of those years before the end of your career.

EFR: Right.

DG: Media was different then. There were a lot more reporters. When you look at that, how did you view the media then? Were they fair? Were they honest? Was there fake news back then? how did you get along? How is that compared to today?

EFR: Having been editor of my high school paper, I had some familiarity with journalists and journalism. I thought in those days at least, and I can't speak real honestly about today because I know we have people being criticized in the media for this and that. In those days, I thought that those who were here in the Legislature that I was acquainted with and had associations with were very upfront, very honest about the way they reported the news and very fair about

reporting the news. I don't think I envisioned that they were real partisan, one way or the other, but they focused on just putting the news out to people to make their own decisions.

DG: Did you sense that there was a power base there? It doesn't seem to be here today. I think of the people like Lew Ferguson, Elon Torrance with the Associated Press; they were dominant in the media. They were kind of like the gurus of the place. Roger Myers with the Topeka Capitol-Journal, my predecessor, John Marshall, some of those folks. That seemed to be a unique feature, that they had so much status amongst legislators.

EFR: They did, and I remember them all very well. I remember the fact that you could go to any one of those names you've mentioned and discuss with them issues. If it was in confidence, people always say, "There's no such thing with the press, in confidence," but I don't agree with that. I do think that in those days at least that I can attest to, if you ask them not to discuss it or print it, you didn't read about it. They held that confidence and confidentiality.

Maybe in looking back at that and looking at today, a lot of trust has been lost, I think, with journalists. I think it's a shame because that's who we count on really for the news. I think other than the fact that so many people are on the computers and texting and so on and getting their news from other sources, I still rely on the newspapers. I still rely on going on the TV and trying to analyze between stations.

DG: You're not doing a Twitter account right now?

EFR: I'm not doing Twitter. I'm scared to death of getting on Facebook and everything else. Those are technologies of today that the young people use to get the news.

DG: When you look back to that era and that model of journalism, was your public, your constituents, were they getting that information? Was it broad-based?

EFR: Yes, no question. My constituents in the Wyandotte, Leavenworth, Jefferson County areas that I had, they relied on their newspapers, whether it was our local paper in Leavenworth, the Kansas City, Kansas folks, the people out in rural Jefferson County. I really think that they relied, and certainly we as candidates relied on it. We placed our ads and so on, asking for support in those papers.

DG: Okay. We could talk about the media for a long time. Let's move to the character of leadership. Back then, that's a big deal now obviously. It's always a big deal obviously, but what did it take in that era to be effective as a leader? How did you look up to and respect? How did they get it done?

EFR: I think they got it done because of their being forthright about dealing with the issues and dealing with individuals. Your word was really your bond. I think when they told you, whether it was the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives that this or that was going to happen, they were supportive of it, it happened. You could bank on that occurring because their word was good. I think that's another thing that's been lost today in the public arena. There's a lot of—I won't say “counterfeiters,” but I think there are a lot of people who are really not honest about dealing with other folks, and they've lost their credibility.

DG: And another feature of that era that we've talked about is the quality of oration in that era. You were remarkable as a—you had a real talent at that kind of [oratory]. There were people, I remember, the Frank Gaines and the Norm Gaar. There was a character of rhetoric, of debate then that we haven't seen, I don't think, since. Did you perceive that, that you folks were—you were kind of competing with each other at some extent for that. You were all really gifted at it.

EFR: I don't know that I would consider myself gifted at it. I really didn't—one thing I did do at least in school, my father demanded it, that I had to take public speaking. He was insistent upon that. He said, “If you can't do anything else, you've got to be able to talk, and you've got to be able to speak to people and be able to convey our thoughts.”

I think that's important. I have a son who's himself, he seems to be loving that sort of thing in school. He's nineteen years old in college, and he loves debate. Maybe he's following in my footsteps. I don't know. I'm not encouraging it, but if he does, he does.

DG: I'd be remiss if I didn't remind people, your reputation was as an impeccable dresser. You were always well coiffed. You looked great. You sounded great. You made a point—I remember a capital punishment debate, you were right back there, and I remember showing up, and I'm pretty sure you had a new suit. You were ready for the moment. That just seemed to describe Ed Reilly as just a quality performer, if nothing else.

EFR: I don't know. I gave it the best shot I could because I knew I had to carry the message and hopefully be effective in doing so.

DG: Who else do you remember back then in that era as standing out as orators?

EFR: So many of them. Bob Talkington was a fraternity brother of mine.

DG: From Iola?

EFR: He could convey his thoughts. Of course, Jack Steineger was the minority leader. He was very eloquent when he got on his feet. Of course, you mentioned Norman Gaar. Bob Bennett who became president of the Senate was superb. We all felt put down by Bob Bennett because he had the vocabulary the rest of us didn't inherit, I guess. He was a very good student and well studied in law and a superb debater.

I tell you another one that was here, too, Paul Feliciano from Wichita. Paul was eloquent in his own way. He could make his points. He used to take me on all the time on the capital punishment issue. He was a dynamo.

DG: [He] Welcomed the crowd. Certainly, I remember him going to northwest, north central Kansas on the low-level nuclear waste debate, a turnout of hundreds of people, and he was in his element. That was a gift that you folks had, and it was good for the journalists. We got a lot of good quotes.

Looking at the Legislature and its makeup back then, male dominated, white dominated certainly, that began to change probably in your tenure, didn't it?

EFR: As I recall from memory, I think the first lady over here while I was here was Louise Porter^[2]. I don't know whether you remember that note.

DG: It was before my time.

EFR: Louise Porter from out in western Kansas. I can't even recall what county she was from. Louise was a very striking woman, tall, very attractive, and she had a real impact on the Senate. She quieted us all down, got us to start treating one another with greater respect. We behaved ourselves a little bit more after her arrival. I think she was the first lady here in the Senate.

DG: When you look back, things are different now, obviously. We had a woman running for President last time. Women are prominent in every level of politics now. When you look at that and you look at what the case was when you were here, how does it change the outcome? How does it change the product?

EFR: Obviously, you're getting a whole different perspective from the female who's taken these positions on, and I think it's very healthy, and I think it's very good for politics. In many ways, I

^[2] Editor Note: Louise Porter from Miller in Lyon County was a Housewife, Rancher according to the legislative directory at the time. She served from 1966 to 1970 as the only woman in the State Senate. She was preceded by two other women in the Chamber, Patricia Solander, R-Osawatomie (1929-1931) and Ailene Beall, R-Clay Center (1960) who filled the unexpired term of her husband, William M. Beall.]

think the temperament of a woman over some of us men lends itself to being able to be more focused and to be able to be more direct, and sometimes get away with some things that we wouldn't have gotten away with by virtue of their being from their backgrounds. I think that added a whole different impact to the process.

DG: That's very well said. Some people today could use that for campaign strategy.

EFR: Yes. Definitely.

DG: Let's turn to some of the agenda things that were prominent. Let's start with capital punishment. I think that's one that defined you in a large fashion in that era. That was a major point of emphasis for you. How did you get involved in that? You're from Leavenworth. There's a prison obviously. So, corrections is a big deal, but talk about how capital punishment entered your agenda.

EFR: It's not necessarily something that I want to be remembered for, but given the responsibility to carry the bill, it came to our Committee, and so I had to defend it. If I hadn't felt the way I felt about it, I wouldn't have defended it. I wouldn't have even accepted the role of taking the bill on. But I've always felt strongly that for those who committed a really heinous event and that the courts and the judge and the jury felt was such that that should be a penalty that was at least on the books. I've never thought that it should just be applied to anybody and everyone for murder, but that it had to be a very, very serious offense, and we've had those.

We also felt that, in many instances, the fact that we had that punishment on the Kansas statute books, prevented a terrible act from occurring, whether it was a hostage situation or whether it was in the case we had on the Kansas City, Missouri side, where they brought a woman from Missouri across the viaduct, and they actually let her out of the car in Kansas. They wanted to kill her, but they didn't because they knew they were coming into the state of Kansas, and we had that testimony from the people who had abducted the woman. I remember

Senator Steineger using that frequently on the floor of the Senate, that particular case, because it was in his area.

You can always turn your attention to say, "We've executed innocent people." I don't think there's any doubt in my mind or anybody else's that we probably have executed innocent people, convicted by a jury of twelve, sentenced, and ultimately later on found out that somebody else did the crime by virtue of all the new technology we have. That doesn't mean in my opinion though, because of that, that we should eliminate the penalty from the statute book. I'm glad to see that when I was leaving, I think as I left the legislature in '92, I believe, that the discussion was on again on capital punishment, and I believe that it was thrown out for a period of time and then brought back again while I've been gone. My knowledge today, you still have capital punishment on the books in Kansas, but it will go through debates.

DG: Every year.

EFR: It will go through continuing, revolving cycle that those issues go through.

DG: You could probably give that same speech this next session, and it would be as relevant as it was.

EFR: I still have the speeches, as a matter of fact. I could. I could repeat them.

DG: As a journalist, we always love those issues that the public resonated with, things like gambling, drinking—let's take the liquor by the drink, which in Kansas history, I moved here in the seventies, and that era of liquor by the drink, when you had to buy a card. There was this convoluted system, and you guys took that on. A major player back then was, of course, the Reverend Richard Taylor. Talk a little bit about what it was like to get that through.

EFR: I remember Reverend Taylor well. He was quite the gentleman, very devoted to opposing obviously. He felt it was certainly a sin issue. He didn't feel it should be passed because it was going to take away from people that really needed the resource, the money, and so on, and it was going to be used for illicit purposes and so on. In any event, we were back to the same old question of finance. Where were you going to get the money? How were you going to fund education? How were you going to run the government? Those issues always surfaced. You only have so many places you can go to get money. That was one of the areas that everybody looked at. They thought this was an issue we need to deal with.

Needless to say, when I was taking on the matter, the private club situation was a disaster in Kansas, a total disaster. Law enforcement couldn't see in the clubs. The windows were shaded or painted or covered with drapes. All kinds of illicit activity was going on inside those clubs.

I remember we took the Governor, Bob Docking, one night to Kansas City, Kansas, to show him just how bad it was. We took him into a place that, as I recall, the name of it was the Copper Kettle. It was across from the Townhouse Hotel in downtown Kansas City, Kansas. When we finally got in, after going through all sorts of procedures with the doorman, who didn't want to open the door, and finally when I explained to them, "We have the Governor of the State. We have his security people," and, of course, you can imagine their reluctance once I did that. They didn't want to open the door under any circumstances.

I said, "You know, if you don't open the door, then we'll have the ABC here tomorrow to shut you down because the Governor wants to come in." So, we went in, and sure enough, he got to see for himself what was going on. We'd been talking to the Governor about the fact that we had to do something really serious with the club situation, and that's how a lot of that evolved, and, of course, we went on then to pass the club law and to get rid of the private clubs, and as you say, the cards, and all sorts of other things they were trying to do to get around the law.

DG: Let me go back to Richard Taylor for a minute. He had a very strong Methodist constituency. It was always the perception that he could make a phone call, and overnight you all got phone calls then. He could energize the constituency, and he ruled. Is it true that when it passed, partly it was because he left the state to go to Nebraska? That's the story that I remember.

EFR: No, he was gone, as I remember. You're right. You're recalling my memory. He was out of the state, and I think didn't have the force behind getting the legislators to stop to vote or to vote no. The finance issue was driving the issue, too. Once we were able to explain to them what was going on in the clubs, I think they did understand that you couldn't allow it to go on. People were getting injured, hurt. I don't remember whether we had people getting killed in some of those places, but no doubt in my mind, there were probably some incidents.

DG: But there was no Twitter then. There was no Facebook. Richard Taylor was the equivalent of a one-man Twitter account back then.

EFR: He and Reverend [Fred] Holloman who followed. Those gentlemen were really committed to—

DG: He was chaplain of the Senate for many years. That was constituent lobbying, I guess, civic lobbying back then at a level that I don't know that we've seen since.

EFR: We haven't seen it probably, no. It really was. When you talk about groups that lobby today and trying to get people to support their cause, those gentlemen because of the constituency they had, they could command a tremendous amount of support from the folks.

DG: You mentioned the money pressure. Of course, that led to the interest in a lottery, which nobody really understood at the time was going to lead probably to casinos. But, nonetheless, that was a big moment in history.

EFR: Well, there again, we were lobbying ourselves to not only have Kansas be the first horse and dog, but also the first riverboat. We even had a riverboat on the Kansas river that was run by a gentleman in Kansas City, Kansas, as I recall, and he was willing to develop his ship and have it be one that was basically a casino going up and down the river, but we couldn't get that included because the horse and dog people were fighting with one another. Otherwise, we would have had all of those. We would have gotten the jump on Missouri as far as having all three in place. But in the meantime, we got the horse and dogs passed. Within a few years of that, Missouri was able to develop the riverboat gambling and the casinos and so on. It's amazing how those things go around, and it's amazing that we couldn't convince our dog people in Kansas to go along with the issue.

DG: But you did open the door, and down the road, now we have casinos. We have the lottery.

EFR: We have everything.

DG: The opponents back then said you were taking the state to hell in a handbasket.

EFR: Oh, yes, sure.

DG: When you look back, can you identify that there is a social cost to loosening up liquor laws?

EFR: No question about it. There is no question about it, and I have to say I don't frequent the casinos, but the one that's in what was my district in Wyandotte County now, the Legends, which we would like to thank Senator Steineger and myself and Gaar and some of the other Wyandotte County legislators were really responsible for the development of the Legends. If we hadn't done all of the things we did, there wouldn't have been any Legends, in my opinion. Kansas City Kansas would not be what it is today.

From the standpoint of the social issues and the factors in what it caused us from passing these kinds of things, no question that it can lead to really some unfortunate things in people's lives.

DG: So, there was a price that was paid, maybe not well identified, but nonetheless, one that was there.

EFR: I feel sometimes very sorry when I go into some of those places to see some of the folks that are there. But on the other hand, when I speak to some of them, they say to me, "Well, what else do we have to do in life? This is something that we enjoy doing." You look back on it, and you don't feel maybe as guilty when you have people tell you that.

DG: On a higher plane, for you personally, there are probably things in your mind you thought you'd like to see have happen in the state that would improve it for the citizens. These are things that are kind of forced on you, a financial necessity. What kind of educations—let's take education for one. I'm sure that was one that you had a great interest in. It was a big deal back then and still the same.

EFR: It was a big deal then and still today, and it will be a big deal tomorrow in terms of "Is Kansas trying to keep up with its neighbors and everybody else?" in terms of what it's providing. I don't know. I can't tell you today what we're paying per student cost. I have no idea, but it's going to continue to go up because it's just part of the process. I think we always prided ourselves in saying we have great universities, and we've had a great educational system in our state. I think many of our students have gone on to become well known and well placed in society. So that's an issue that every legislature, no matter what time or what period of time is going to have to address and deal with.

DG: It strikes me, and I may be wrong, but it seems like back then, the dynamic of teachers against school boards was much more prominent. In this current era, it's been the school district suing the state for more money. That dynamic of teachers and issues like due process,

job protection, that seemed like an ongoing thing. Did you sense that back then, that there was that kind of conflict?

EFR: No. I did not, really.

DG: They were making it up as journalists, probably.

EFR: I don't know. I really did not sense that. I had strong, strong support from all of the teachers. I realized they could command in their own group a tremendous amount of weight, too, in terms of whether they support you or not, but I never did sense that myself.

DG: Some of the less glamorous issues, local government, the lobbyists for the city of Wichita for an eight-year period at the end. We got a sense of the change that had taken place, about the attitude of state legislators and local government. It went south, but it seemed like back, a guy named Ernie Mosher was the head of the League of Municipalities back then was noted as a great interaction person with legislators. It seemed like there was a much stronger, cooperative relationship between legislators and local government.

EFR: Not being here for the past twenty-five years, I don't know whether that's changed dramatically or not. I haven't had an opportunity to really visit with any of our legislators since I've been gone. When I was here, we had a tremendous association with our local officials and our city managers. Well, we didn't have a city manager at the time I was here, but with our mayor and commissioners. I still have the mayor and commissioners from my hometown area visit Washington every year when they come to visit with members of the Congress. They always make it a point to get together with me and discuss local issues that they're having a difficult time with. I'm able to only give them a perspective from the days of when I was in the legislature, but I do think that there is still the need certainly for the legislature to be involved intimately with the local officials and understand the problems locally. I'm hopeful that that will

continue. I'm not optimistic that it should. Things have changed, as you say, and the technology has led to a lot of different things occurring today.

DG: You talked about the financial pressures and why you did those things. Every year as a journalist, it's always the worst year ever. It seems like the state is always facing a budget crisis, and yet they somehow get through. Talk about how when you had to sit down that start of the year you always were strapped for money for the most part. There were a few years that were pretty flush. I think the Bill Graves administration had a couple of those, but for the most part, Governor Docking in your era was austere but adequate, "We're not spending anything." What was that like?

EFR: I think Bob Docking, and I even go back remembering meeting his father, George Docking, when I was just ready to get out of KU. They were bankers. They were conservative. I think they were focused. They were focused on balancing the budget. I know I introduced one of the bills that dealt with fiscal notes, providing fiscal notes for the legislature so that we knew what the cost of whatever the program was that was being introduced. This was a real step forward in having some idea what programs would cost.

DG: I didn't realize that.

EFR: That was under my tenure. The fiscal notes issue was passed, and so I think, as we've said, we're always going to have that financial issue in front of us, and it takes really prudent, sound management, in my opinion, to deal with it. Most people don't even want to talk about it, of balancing the budget. They don't even want to acknowledge that they should balance the budget. It's unfortunate, and we have the same problem, obviously, in Washington, DC. Everybody wants to spend, spend, spend, and everybody has an idea what money should go for, but they can't come up with the idea of how they're going to pay for it. That continues today. I think it's still an issue with Kansas, and I know you're recovering from some of the past mistakes that have been made.

DG: There was a time in the early eighties, towards the end of your tenure probably, when the phrase was “eco devo,” economic development, and you could pass anything you wanted as long as you put a little tag, “This has this impact.” The Redwood-Krider report [*Kansas Economic Development Study Interim Report*, Anthony Redwood and Charles Krider (January 1986)] came out about then. Everything was about economic development. Was that smoke and mirrors? Do you think at the end of—a few years down the road that the state did take a more serious approach?

EFR: I believe they did take it much more seriously. I believe you had some entrepreneurs step up that took advantage of it. One in particular was a fella named Fred Braun who started private companies and actually in my district, utilizing prison labor. He felt very strongly that people who were incarcerated should be employed in one way or another, either in or out of prison, and he had the ingenuity to bring in three bankrupt companies that today, I might add, are flourishing in the state of Kansas, and it was all the result of the whole focus, too, of that economic development press, if you were, a push. Fred took advantage of it.

To this day, we are actually training prisoners in Leavenworth, Kansas in three separate industries, and they are making things that most people won't even believe. In fact, I tried to get the President to come back and see that program because I think when you talk about rehabbing people, letting them get out of prison and have a job and be able to have a profession, it's critical to the future of turning some of these folks around. I would encourage people who haven't been to Leavenworth to go check out those three plants.

DG: Perhaps that one of the things you laid the foundation for back in that era, and it did turn into something that had you not taken that action, we wouldn't be as well off.

EFR: I'll tell you one thing. Those prisoners would not be out working outside of the prison walls if we hadn't passed the necessary legislation to allow the Department of Corrections to do that.

DG: There was another financial issue that, as a reporter, I barely understood it because I'm not a banker. It was multi-bank holding companies. It was a huge issue. It was a lot of money going to all candidates then. Do you recall that? Do you remember why it was so important? Did it change the face of the financial institutions in Kansas?

EFR: I don't know. I really don't. By the way, I was in banking. We started a state bank in Lansing, Kansas. It was the only city in the state of Kansas that did not have a bank for its size. It had a bank, but the banker went south with all the money at one time. It was years and years and years, there was no bank. We established a state bank there. But when you asked the question about the multi-state banking, I don't know what impact that had. I don't really recall it.

DG: It's kind of an inside thing.

EFR: Yes.

DG: One of the other hot button things I wanted to get to was guns. There was gun legislation back then. It seemed not to be quite as the third-rail issue that it might be now, that people get so afraid of. What's your recollection of how Second Amendment issues played out in the era?

EFR: Well, I'm a strong proponent of the Second Amendment, the right to carry and bear arms. When I was in the legislature, actually even when I came, I was a deputy sheriff in Leavenworth County. I carried a weapon most of my life. I had a permit. I went through some law enforcement training. I went down to Hutchinson to do the law enforcement school down there one time. The Kansas Peace Officers Association had a school down there one time. I went to that. I went back to Washington while I was associated with the United States Parole Commission Justice Department. I was a Deputy US Marshall. I got a permit. I went to the

Marshal school. I carried a weapon primarily for personal protection back there because of the job we were in. So, I'm a strong proponent of it.

When I was in the Legislature, as I recall, we had people that were driving around with rifles mounted in the back windows of their pickup trucks on the farms. Certainly, the issue was up for debate, but you didn't have what's now the law in Kansas, which is open carry apparently. So, you've really gone a long way, I guess in terms of legalizing the right of people to bear arms. I think Kansas stands out as one of the—I don't know what other states allow that.

DG: It's a little unique probably.

EFR: It is unique, I think.

DG: But there's a history in this building, in the House Chamber, in the hallway behind the speaker, there's a bullet hole in the ceiling, and it was from that era when—

EFR: Somebody wanted to make a point.

DG: Took guns in there. When they remodeled the building, they took that away. I thought it was kind of a historic icon and should have stayed. But obviously guns have always been prominent in the Legislature.

EFR: Yes.

DG: Maybe I think not as political as it is today.

EFR: Right.

DG: I know that we were in our early discussion talking about prison reform. That's something I know you're very familiar with by virtue of Leavenworth being a prison town. In that theme of "The more things change, the more they stay the same," you were talking about the—I think you called it a "thirty-year revolution," where things just keep coming up. Talk about how that issue presented itself, and what it's gotten us to.

EFR: As I said, I think about every three decades, we see a change, whether it's at the national level—I don't know about here in the State Legislature, but whatever we do usually in Washington obviously impacts the states. There's always money tied to it. My tracking of the history of it, and I'm trying to write a book myself now on the issue of criminal justice, and kind of where we are, where we were, and where we're going. It's a thirty-year process. We're back now—we're taking the position that we want to let more people out. We don't want to lock as many people up. They want to try to rehabilitate people, and all of this sounds wonderful, when you're trying to sell something, but at the same time, it goes back to the money and having the money available, the finances available to do the things that you're talking about.

You can have a concept, and you can throw it out there for debate, but you need to know how you're going to fund it. Kansas is like everybody else. I've understood from different sources now that some of the programs we push through and got through in prison reform have been cut back because of finances. They've cut out some of the funds for those. They're just cutting out their face out of spite to do those kinds of things because it's not adding to help bring people out of the institutions.

DG: I should have had you talk about this a little more at the beginning. You had a life after the legislature, obviously. But the foundation of what you—the lessons you learned in the Statehouse, what have you done with that? You mentioned you're writing a book about criminal justice. I'm sure that background is useful there, too. How did that play?

EFR: I'm just trying to take what I've learned, what I've developed to my knowledge being a member of the Legislature, which was a great honor and privilege and take that and try to share with others, which will help them to become better educated in what we did, why we did it, and what they might want to consider about doing based on their own public service. So that obviously put me in another position after I basically walked away after thirty-some years in the insurance and real estate business into more public service, which led to Washington, going on to the federal parole commission. I remember Senator Dole saying, "If anybody should be chairman of the Parole Commission, it should be Ed Reilly from Leavenworth because he has the knowledge and the background, being from Leavenworth, the home of the first federal prison, to do it."

Fortunately, we did it. I'm proud to say that we didn't have too much in the way of problems during the course of those eighteen years in that position. I owe it all, I think, to the knowledge I developed going back, really right here in this chamber, having the exposure I've had and so on. Between here and the House, it's been a marvelous educational tool for me.

DG: And that's part of the reason we're doing these interviews is that there is this wealth of knowledge that you had. It sometimes tends to get lost. That's most of what I've had on my agenda to cover, but I'd like you to take a second to think about—when you go back, missed opportunities, failures, glowing moments, if you had to do it again what stands out?

EFR: If I had to do it again, I wouldn't change a thing. I really wouldn't. I think that, from my standpoint, I feel that I've tried to do the best I could with the knowledge I had and my background in education, and I would love to think that by virtue of establishing some civic engagement funds at the University of Kansas, and at the Dole Institute, that those will encourage young people in our college today and the university today to pursue a public service career to get into politics. Hopefully, I'm optimistic that things will change. Again, the days that I can recall of people being able to get along and really work together for the benefit of the people they represent, their constituents. I mean, that's the whole reason you're elected.

People want to put you there with the hope that you're going to represent them and do what is in their best interest. I think we've lost a lot of that. I know people say that that's what they're doing, but if you can't get along with your colleagues, then you can't work together to accomplish what you want to accomplish, then you're in a stalemate.

DG: That's a profound lesson.

EFR: I'm fortunate that I'm still here. I'm on another course now. I don't intend to retire. I certainly don't consider myself retired. I'm on a lot of boards and other activities in Washington. I try to keep up with Kansas. I'm a member of the First Kansas Society back there. We're very active. We're getting ready to honor Bill Self in Kansas when I go back on the 17th as Kansan of the Year. It's nice to look back and certainly the days of Bob Dole, [Sen. Nancy] Kassebaum, and all of these others that have been in the Congress have brought a lot of Kansas talent to the nation's capital, and a lot of the people that I run into there today have come from Kansas. They've been in positions in government, and they've had a real impact on our nation. So, it's the training that I think they got back here in the state of Kansas that have elevated them to that post.

DG: Well, you are certainly one of the faculty for that training module.

EFR: I've got to keep teaching if I can. We'll continue to do it.

DG: I think that gets us through most of that. I'm sure we've just covered—we'll look forward to your book coming out to hear more about what you think about criminal justice.

EFR: You know, we started out at one time—is Lew Ferguson still alive?

DG: No, he passed last year.

Interview of Senator Edward F. Reilly Jr. by Dale Goter, July 2, 2019

EFR: We talked one time, he and I, about doing that book, finishing it. So, I'm plugging along, doing very well, and I have a lady that's working with me, helping me. She was Chairman of the Florida Parole Board. We're trying to get some finishing touches put on the thing, but it will deal with kind of memoirs, but it touches on all aspects of what we've been talking about. It talks about things we did in the field of corrections and so on.

DG: It will be companion reading for those who watch this video.

EFR: But the message is hopefully that it teaches them something, that they can use it, whether it's mental institute or—

DG: It's been an education for me, and I admire what you've done and that you're still making a difference. So, thank you for joining us. For the Kansas Oral History Project, I'm Dale Goter.

[End of File]