Interview with TIM SHALLENBURGER by Alan Conroy, September 25, 2020
Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Alan Conroy: Good afternoon. The date is September 25, 2020 at 1:30, and we're in the House Chambers of the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka, Kansas. I'm Alan Conroy, a forty-year-plus state employee with the majority of that state service working in the Kansas Legislative Research Department, the central nonpartisan research and budget staff for the legislature. Today I will be interviewing Speaker Tim Shallenburger who served twelve years in the legislature. He was Speaker Pro Tem in '93 and '94, and Speaker of the House for four sessions from '95, '96, '97, and '98. Ultimately, he decided not to run for re-election to the House, but he ran for election as State Treasurer of Kansas, and he served in that office from 1999 to 2003. He was elected State Republican Party Chair in 2005. He served as president of the Kansas Development Finance Authority and as a Legislative Director for Governor Sam Brownback, among many other jobs over his career.

I'm conducting this interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, Incorporated, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing legislators. The interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators. These interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Humanities Kansas. The audio and video equipment is being operated by David Heinemann, who actually I believe was Speaker Pro Tem when you joined the legislature. So we have lots of talent here.

Speaker Shallenburger is from Baxter Springs, Kansas. He's a former bank officer, a sales manager, a corporate administrator, and a state agency head. He's married to Linda and has one child. He was elected to the Kansas House in 1986, and served in the Chamber then for the next twelve sessions. He represented District 1, which covers most of Cherokee County in southeast Kansas, and while in the House, he served on numerous committees, Elections; Commercial and Financial Institutions; Gaming Impacts; Pensions, Investments, and Benefits; Public Health and Welfare; Transportation; Calendar and Printing; Interstate Cooperation; Joint Committee on Administrative Rules and Regs; and the Joint Committee on Claims Against the State.

So certainly some interesting committees through the years, and as I was doing the research, I checked with the Kansas State Library, who helped provide a lot of good information. They have access, of course, to newspapers, a newspaper bank kind of a thing. So I asked if they could provide me newspaper clippings on Speaker Shallenburger, which they said yes, they could, but they responded, “Actually there's over 1,100 articles where Speaker Shallenburger is mentioned or is being quoted.” That's a lot of articles. So we pared it down.

So with all that kind of out of the way, let's begin. Why don't you just tell us something about your life before entering the legislature? I saw where you were born in Joplin, Missouri. Do you really consider yourself a native Kansan?

Tim Shallenburger: Yes, yes, I do. Joplin, Missouri is right across the border. The nearest hospital at the time, I think, at the time I was born that delivered babies was in Joplin, Missouri.

There's an awful lot of people who live in Cherokee County who were born in Joplin, Missouri, but that's as far as it goes.

AC: It seems like you've done well for yourself, shaking that off, in terms of those Missouri connections. I'm just curious, have any of your family been involved in politics before you ran for the House?

TS: No. There was no general interest in politics in my family. It's interesting. My mother and father were different political persuasions. My father was a blue-collar Democrat, and my mother was a Republican. I can recall the earliest thing mentioned of politics that I can recall was my mother telling everybody—this would have been before I was born, that she had to go vote for Eisenhower to keep the Stevensons from getting elected president. Apparently, Adlai Stevenson ran against Eisenhower. I don't know.

But my earliest recollection of politics was when Johnson ran after Kennedy had been—of course, I was of the age where I watched the Kennedy assassination and all the stuff about that. But there was no particular interest in politics.

AC: Do you suppose that seed of perhaps maybe working with both sides maybe came from your parents? You saw the openness that maybe each side had some value to it?

TS: Well, they weren't partisan, of course, towards each other. There was no “I'm a tough Republican,” “I'm a liberal Democrat.” That didn't exist. I actually ran for the legislature because of a local issue. It had nothing to do with conservative or liberal or pro-life or pro-choice. It was a local mining issue, an unreclaimed mine land problem and the health-related problems that caused me to run for the legislature. I went to a public forum that the incumbent legislator from my district was holding, and I asked a question of her. Her name was Pat Weaver, and Fred Weaver—it was Fred Weaver who had been appointed by Carlin to the Board of Tax Appeals. Pat was his wife. She took his job.

I went to a public forum and asked about a newspaper article that was written in the Wichita Eagle called “A Legacy of Neglect.” It was about the unreclaimed mine land in Cherokee County. And Fred turned around and looked at me. He said, “Don't be asking those questions in public.” I was like, “Wow. What's up?” He said, “It makes people in Topeka look down on us if they think we're poor and we have bad health problems.”

It kind of offended me, and I filed to run against her. Then she didn't run, and I ran against the County Attorney, a good person. These were all good people. The County Attorney, of course, if you were a County Attorney for very long, you have more enemies than friends, and I won. When I got elected, I held the most Democrat seat that any Republican held in the House. It's flipped now. It's not Democrat all there now anymore, but it was blue-collar labor union Democrats at the time I won it.

AC: I think in that primary a gentleman by the name of Bill Handshy, you beat him 72 to 28 percent?

TS: That was the primary.

AC: And then, of course, Ken Lynch.

TS: He's now a judge. He did much better than I did.

AC: Fifty-eight to 42 percent. But you were elected six times. You must have been doing something right.

TS: I was a good campaigner. I got elected six times, and I had primaries most of those. I never had a free ride. I was Speaker and had a primary. Handshy ran against me more than once.

AC: Thinking back to that first election, which was again that year, I think there were like seven Constitutional amendments that year, two in the primary, five at the general election, and a lottery setting limits on property taxes or classifications, those governance of public schools, a levy on tax betting and wagering. Of course, six of the seven passed. The one on school governance did not pass.

TS: It was an interesting time. I knew nothing about any of those issues, nothing. I knew nothing about anything when I ran. But when you're a candidate, you go to all the forums, and you go to all the events, and the Farm Bureau dinners. While I was at all of those events, somebody would be there to talk about classification and reappraisal. Somebody would be there to talk about parimutuel wagering, and I kind of picked up some interesting feedback along the way on those. There was a lot of stuff on the ballot.

AC: I think that was the Republican primary were Gene Bicknell lost, or did that come later? Lost to Bill Graves.

TS: It would have been later. But Gene Bicknell might have been on the ballot that time. He ran twice. He ran against Jack Brier—Mike Hayden became governor. When I got elected the first time, Mike Hayden just got elected governor.

AC: You ran; you got elected; you came to Topeka. Do you remember the first time you came down to the Well to talk about a bill, if maybe your co-legislators hazed you that first time down? It looks like your first bill was related to migratory waterfowl habitat stamps. That was your very first bill—

TS: Is that right?

AC: That had your name on it.

TS: I really do not remember that at all.

AC: I'm sure somebody told you it was a good bill.

TS: I'm sure the lights lit up, and I got the full treatment, but I don't recall. I do recall carrying for the optometrist an optometry bill that was way more important to them than I knew. For years, every time I'd see an optometrist, they'd talk, "There's the guy that carried our bill." It must have been a no-brainer because they let me carry it.

I recall carrying a tax—the only tax I ever voted for was in my first or second session, and Reverend [Richard] Taylor, who used to be a fixture around the Capitol, caught me out in the rotunda, and he wanted to know if I'd carry a tax increase for liquor and all the moral reasons that you should carry it. He had me convinced. I come in and carry it. It went on. Wow. Everybody's smiling at me. The next day, the bill died. It was a bill they didn't want anyway. I helped load it up so they could kill it. I learned. Every time I did something like that, I learned something.

AC: Kind of looking over things, you sponsored 268 bills, resolutions, or concurrent resolutions over your career, over those 12 years. Just kind of reviewing them, some of those resolutions honoring names like Joe Mikesic, Irving Niles, Wanda Fuller, Ambrose Dempsey, some of those individuals. I did see you had a couple of resolutions honoring the Baxter Springs Little League Baseball and the 1988 Little League All Stars, also from Baxter Springs. They must have been a good baseball team.

TS: Baxter Springs had a really good Little League baseball program for a number of years. I would guess that we probably have won divisions and regionals more, and they're not done by state necessarily, but I bet we've won it more than anybody in Kansas. We have a great Little League ballpark, too. I recall when I ran the first time, and I won, immediately here comes [Representatives] Bob Vancrum and Joe Knopp, who were both running for Majority Leader, down to visit me. I thought they just wanted to be friendly. I didn't realize what was going on, but I took them to the Little League ballpark and showed them around because it's such a good facility.

AC: That is neat. Through your years, those committees, but Elections, Transportation, Public Health and Welfare, but never Appropriations, never Federal and State Affairs, I don't believe, or Taxation.

TS: Those were the three I asked for. I never voted for a winning Speaker until I voted for myself so I never got any of the committees that I wanted. I didn't want Public Health. It ended up being a very good committee to be on, but I didn't want it, and I didn't want Elections, but it was very informative. Some of these committees seem more glamorous than others, but they're really all pretty important.

AC: That would be like the Pensions Committee.

TS: Well, the Pensions Committee, that is dry. But, no, I never got Appropriations. You need a little tenure to get on Appropriations, but Tax, I always wanted on, but never got it. I didn't vote for their—that's how you get those.

AC: There's a connection between who you vote for.

TS: And where you used to get an office window. That all used to have a bearing on it.

AC: I noticed then just in terms of Speakers, since you mentioned Speakers, [Jim]Braden; [Marvin]Barkis, the other party; and Robert H. Miller. I guess under Miller you were Speaker Pro Tem.

TS: Right.

AC: So maybe just some thoughts from the policy-making standpoint, if there was differences between Braden as Speaker or Marvin Barkis as Speaker or Robert H. Miller as Speaker, just their style or direction or priorities.

TS: They were all different. I have watched the legislature since I've left and kind of hung around here for a number of years. They're all different. All Speakers are different. They all have very positive things and very negative things. What I tried to do was to learn from the negative what not to do. I never knew how it really should be done right because there's no book on how to be Speaker.

Braden was very businesslike. He wanted to keep the train moving. I don't recall that he even had opposition. When I got elected the first time, I don't even think he had opposition, and he didn't have opposition the next time. He didn't have to campaign for it, but he was very businesslike. The problem with him was you could get under his skin pretty easy. I had some friends, if they wanted to get under his skin, they knew that if they just slowed the clock down and not let him get to lunch or not let him get out of town for a meeting that he'd get riled.

Barkis was a Democrat. The Democrats haven't had many opportunities to elect a Speaker. He tried to get a lot done. He had a governor. [Joan] Finney got elected governor. He became Speaker, and he had a lot to try to get done. He was going fast and furious. His problem was he didn't pay attention at home, and he got beat in his own election.

Bob Miller was a very ethical and good person, a person I beat. I don't know if anyone has ever beat a sitting Speaker before. He was a little bit introverted. The reason he didn't win, I think, is he was a little introverted. He had a very small clique of friends. He didn't go out and eat and drink. He wasn't a partier, and he didn't got out and slap people on the back. He was business minded, and he had a little bit of a stutter, so he didn't like to preside. The two years I was Speaker Pro Tem, I probably presided over the House 90 percent of the time. To a freshman

legislator, if I'm presiding over the House, I'm just like the Speaker. I kind of used that to help get elected Speaker.

They were all good people. I think everyone had good intentions. Barkis probably worked the hardest, but he didn't live long in it.

AC: How did the Republican Party then make that switch and function for those two years then that Marvin Barkis was Speaker?

TS: It was an interesting time. Joan Finney had become Governor. She was more conservative than her caucus, than the Democrats were. Barkis was more liberal than her. Finney got overridden in more vetoes probably than any Governor ever. That's because she would sign bills that the Democrats didn't want. Also the margins were razor thin. I don't recall, but it was probably 62-63 or 64-61. The margins were razor thin. You couldn't get anything done without a little bit of help.

Democrats have always been a little more united. They all stick together, and Republicans have always been—there's a half a dozen that want this, and a half a dozen want that. We have a core of 80 percent of them, and then you lose 10 or 20 percent all the time. Nothing too radical happened while Barkis was Speaker. School finance, but it really wasn't a partisan issue.

AC: Do you think that was more the district, urban versus rural, or the size of the district kind of split more along those lines?

TS: Yes, it was split more along those lines, as I look back at it. Also , we had just gone through some really ugly tax times. As you recall, in '86, when I got elected, classification [of property for tax purposes] was on the ballot. It was the classification amendment and the property tax fiasco that occurred because of the unknown that got Mike Hayden beat and got Joan Finney elected.

Then when she redid school finance, she really loosened the burden at the local level on property taxes for schools and shifted them to the state. That was her purpose. Her purpose in school finance was to get a property tax break. Barkis's purpose was to get more money for schools. They did both.

AC: Is that an issue that we the state are still wrestling with these days?

TS: I think legislators like to think that school decisions are local. The legislature pays the bill. It's hard to divide the two out. That will never go away. That's just the nature of the beast.

AC: I did notice in that race for Speaker, when you defeated Speaker Miller, it was 45 to 34. Al Lane got one vote. I guess it wasn't a necessarily razor thin—

TS: It wasn't close. It was surprising.

AC: Any doubt though when you went into that room to vote?

TS: No.

AC: Were you feeling pretty good about it?

TS: Yes. I watched people count. In my very first election, and these people are alive, so I'm going to tell the story now. I hope they don't read. In my very first election, there was a race for Majority Leader. It was Joe Knopp, who was an attorney from Manhattan, and Bob Vancrum who was an attorney from Johnson County. They were both running for Majority Leader. You're told when you're in the legislature and you're going to vote, not to tell somebody that you're going to vote for them if you're not going to, and don't make a commitment you can't keep, and be careful what you say.

So I was very careful to Bob Vancrum not to tell him that I wasn't going to vote for him, but he thought I was. I did tell Joe Knopp I was going to vote for him. So we're having the election. As a freshman legislator, you fill in the holes. The incumbents all sat in their regular seats. I filled in a hole. I sat next to Bob Vancrum. They're sitting there, counting their votes, and Bob Vancrum lost by one or two. I voted for Joe Knopp. He looks over at me. He said, “There's got to be some liars in our midst.” I saw his list of yeses. He had my name on his list. I never did tell him that he had me counted wrong.

I tell that story because I learned if you're going to count votes, you'd better count votes right. You have to get a commitment. I had commitments for all my votes when I ran for Speaker. It was really untimely for Bob Miller. I know he probably looks back on it, and he's probably not my best friend. It was very untimely for him. Bill Graves had just become Governor. I had told everybody I wasn't going to run.

AC: I think I read an article on that.

TS: Miller made me mad in an LCC meeting. He just made me mad, and I flew off and decided I was going to run. I came back to the Pro Tem's office and told my assistant, “Send out the letter.” By then, Graves had plucked all of the help, all of the lieutenants that Miller had to be on the transition team. [Representatives] Keith Roe and Rochelle Chronister and people that were his helpers had been put on the transition team. They didn't have a chance to go out and work. We kind of left him in the lurch for Speaker. There again, I think he let his staff try and get him elected. You can't do that.

AC: Just curious. By chance, do you remember the issue in that LCC meeting?

TS: Yes, it was a piece of software. The Legislative Research Department wanted to buy some software. I asked if it was compatible with our printer. We had really a unique printing system back then. You had to have specific software to talk to the printer, to print the bills. The reason

it came up is that we had had trouble. We had been having trouble the year before with that printing, and I just asked the question, if it was compatible with the printer. Miller looked over at me and said, “If you had come on time and read the documents, you wouldn't ask stupid questions.”

I thought, “Wow.” I got up, and I walked out of the room. This is a true story. Jim Allen, who was a lobbyist around here for a number of years, a state Senator I think.

AC: Yes.

TS: Grabbed me by the arm and said, “Timmy, don't do something stupid,” and I said, “Jimmy, I'm going to do something stupid,” and there we went.

AC: Really when I think about it, in terms of the twelve years that you were in the legislature, six years, and then you were Speaker Pro Tem two years, and you were Speaker for four years. I guess in this institution, where a lot of times, longevity, people don't get those opportunities until after maybe decades of service in the Chamber here, to me, that's kind of meteoric. Six years, you're Speaker Pro Tem. Eight years, you're Speaker from Baxter Springs.

TS: Yes, from Baxter Springs.

AC: From a Democrat County, or at least at that time.

TS: At that time. [Journalist] Martin Hawver used to say—what did he say—“Who the heck is from Baxter Springs?” It was kind of fast. I thought so, too. There again, it was just circumstances. Politics is timing. It means a lot. I probably shouldn't have gotten elected Speaker Pro Tem.

AC: How did that happen?

TS: It was a fluke. It really was a fluke. Wanda Fuller, who was a relatively liberal Sedgewick County woman, was running. I had friends. I kind of ran with the Young Turks. We called them rebels, but they weren't all young. There was a bunch of kind of rabblerousers that I ran with. They wanted me to run for Pro Tem. Why would I do that? I said I would, and then Bill Bryant got in. I think the Reasonable Cowboys talked Bill Bryant to get in. Bill Bryant clearly had more votes than Wanda or I. In that first round, we had to get some of my people to vote for Wanda so that Bill would drop out first. It was really close. You may have the votes there. It was really close, but we had given two or three votes to Wanda so that Wanda would survive the first round because we knew Bill's people would come to me, and Wanda's people would have gone to Bill. We got Wanda to win the first round. I got Bill's votes. I think Wanda got more votes the first ballot than she did the second. That was tricky.

AC: I guess it was a bit of a gamble, too.

TS: Yes. If I wouldn't have won, I wouldn't have been Speaker Pro Tem. I would say it all pays the same. The Speaker Pro Tem did pay a little more.

AC: I think I found a pamphlet put out by the Republican Party, it was the history of the Republican Party in Kansas. It talked about this period from 1992 to 1998 as a conservative insurgency. The conservatives asserted themselves and kind of took control. Would you see yourself as one of the masterminds or one of the leaders of that insurgency?

TS: I don't know. It's really bizarre. When I ran for Speaker, they tried to make me out as a liberal. Bob Miller would tell people, “Look, he votes with the Democrats more than he votes with the Republicans. He votes for the labor unions. He votes with trial lawyers.” He was telling people. I would have freshman legislators, newly-elected legislators call me and say, “Wow. They say you vote with the Democrats.” I did. I couldn’t deny it.

Then I get elected, and the conservatives have taken over. I did get elected because the conservatives had taken over. That is true. I didn’t know that had happened. I hadn't been that involved. David Miller and I, another interesting personality, had gone around and recruited candidates to run for the legislature.

AC: And you helped him with that?

TS: Yes. He did most of the recruiting, but [Representative] Melvin Neufeld and I would go speak to them, how do you do a campaign, how do you do a campaign plan, how do you raise money, stuff like that. A lot of those people got elected. I didn't know who they were or that they had gotten elected. So I didn't know until when I announced I wasn't going to run for Speaker, David Miller called me. He was very upset. He said, “We go out and get these people elected, and we're going to have the same leadership and the same stuff.” I said, “I don't think I can win.” He said, “You need to count your votes better.”

We just started counting votes. We didn't know who a lot of these people were. Then this happens with Bob Miller, and I ran. Clearly they were more—I won handily.

AC: That movement of the conservatives, did that sort of chart the course really going forward for the next, ten, fifteen years in terms of conservative persuasion?

TS: I think the Republican Party became more conservative. It became more conservative in the nineties. If you're going to be in front of the crowd, you're naturally going to be a little more conservative. I've never considered myself an ultra-rightwing conservative.

AC: Are you a moderate?

TS: No. I think I am moderate, but I think moderates are liberals. It's all just—I'm a good Republican. I've never voted for a Democrat at the state or federal level. I'm not one of those endorsing Democrats as a Republican. They're not Republicans. Frankly, if you're not endorsing

senators and governors, you might as well just be one. I'm not one of those. I'm not as rightwing as they made me out to be. But the headlines were, “Conservatives Takes Over the House.”

We really didn't have an agenda. That's the other thing as I've watched these other speakers. They would have little agendas. They would have bills they wanted. I remember Jim Braden would have a bill or two. He was an insurance man, and he would have these bills. He would tell us in caucus we'd have to vote for this. It wasn't a partisan issue. It was a bill that dealt with insurance. We'd just vote no to agitate him.

I didn't have an agenda. I learned, if you had an agenda, and we really ran everybody's bills. The Democrats got a lot of votes when I was Speaker. If they wanted a bill—Tom Sawyer was the Minority Leader. We would meet with him regularly. If he said, “I want to have a bill, a hearing on this bill, and I want to have a vote on it,” they'd get it. We had good enough numbers that they didn't pass a lot. I often wondered what would happen if I was Speaker in Medicaid expansion. It seems like Medicaid expansion, and I'm not a supporter of it, has enough votes to pass any day of the week. The leadership has done a great job of bottling that up I’m not sure I would have bottled it up. That wouldn't have been my style.

AC: Was that a strength in terms of leadership of being wed so much to a particular bill or issue and kind of let the body decide and then you'd go from there?

TS: I came to this world up here believing that a majority should rule, and if given good facts, they would make good decisions. The legislature is—I can say this. I was Speaker—is kind of idiot-proof. It really will prohibit terrible things from happening. You have the Governor. You have the Senate. You have the House. Something that's horrendous isn't going to go all the way through unless it's just bulldozed through, unless the Speaker wants it, the President wants it.

But given fair hearings, we had lots of bills that I thought were going to pass or amendments that I thought were going to pass that I didn't like that didn't pass because we persuaded people right here not to vote for them, not in some caucus room or threatened chairmanships or stuff like that.

AC: So you let the committee process play out. You let them have their day, have their hearing, have their say, I guess.

TS: The only time I influenced it was the conference committee. I learned that lesson, too. Let them have their votes on the floor. Go to conference committee and fix it. So, we fixed a lot. We'd have to negotiate with the President of the Senate because there were things I didn't want that the House would have passed. There were things he didn't want that the Senate has passed. We'd give both of our sides away.

But it was fair. The one thing I get told was that I was fair. I tried to be. I didn't have an agenda. I really wasn't trying to do anything. We had good numbers. It really helps if you have eighty

members of the House and sixty-five of them believe the same thing. You're in pretty good shape. If you've got sixty-three or sixty-two and if you've got a big break, there was a time in the last decade that there were probably thirty or forty Republicans that a conservative Speaker couldn't count on. I think those numbers are down now. When you can't count on a third of your caucus, you're in pretty bad shape.

AC: When you were Speaker, the Caucus was more unified then?

TS: It was more unified than it is now. There were probably twenty-five, twenty that you couldn't—twenty, twenty-five. I'd have to go back and count. David, our videographer, might have a count for me. I learned something from him. I do want to say this. Back when I was new, you would actually handwrite amendments. There were no computers. There wasn't even a computer in the building. Heinemann was our scribe.

I remember having an amendment one time. I was maybe a second year up here. I knew that the leadership wouldn't like it. That's kind of why I was offering it. I knew they wouldn't like it. I said, “I've got this idea,” and one of my friends said, “Take it to Heinemann. He can draft it up right for you.” “But he'll tell”—“No, he won't tell the Speaker. He won't do that.”

I went to Heinemann. He wrote up the amendment. He looked at it. “That is the dumbest idea I've ever seen,” but he wrote it up, and it failed. But it was a good one, I'm sure. I'm sure I roll called it and used it in a campaign somewhere.

AC: It was kind of interesting, just looking again at your 268 bills and resolutions. Maybe it was a little surprising. Of course, construction of expressways in '87, a bill of construction of expressways, highways, bridges, issuance of bonds, increasing fuel taxes. An HCR in '87 urging Congress not to use federal highway funds to reduce the federal debt. But then the Older Kansans Senior Care Act.

TS: We got that one through. That was good stuff.

AC: Both parties were involved in that?

TS: Yes, both parties. Carol Sader helped with that. I'm thinking [Kathleen] Sebelius was on that, and [Joan] Wagnon was on that. That was a good one. That actually worked for a decade or so. Not all of them did.

AC: And just some of the other ones, abortions, crimes, prevailing wage for state public projects, a sculpture on the grounds instead of on top of the Capitol building, I noticed was one.

TS: My predecessor Fred Weaver had opined against the pagan god on the Capitol. I did that for him. I got screamed at over that one. [Senator] Ben Vidrickson came over and spun my chair around. “What are you doing over here?”

AC: Let's see exclusion of coin-operated car-washing services from sales tax, state employee fiscal bonuses, Constitutional amendments on spending, Constitutional amendment limiting the state lottery to Instant, Keno, and lottery games. Death penalty. Discretionary forty-year mandatory sentence, imposing term limits on Congress, juvenile justice reform act.

TS: That one didn't work so good. Juvenile justice never worked right. I think most of the parts of that have been repealed. It just didn't work. We created another bureaucracy. It just didn't work.

AC: Limiting the powers of the State Board of Education. I guess there's a couple of those.

TS: Bill Graves supported one of those. We had a Constitutional amendment. We couldn't get that one through.

AC: It's been tried a couple of times through the history.

TS: It will never happen.

AC: One allowing voters to propose Constitutional amendments.

TS: Yes, my conservative friends don't like that one. It was something in referendums. It wasn't popular with the cowboys either. Joan Finney liked it.

AC: Yes, I think she did. Then the one, of course, maybe all legislators have this in their history somewhere, but the official state folk dance and the polka as the state ethnic dance. You've got to do those, do you think?

TS: I wouldn't have a hearing on it, and I got in a lot of trouble. They came to the Capitol, and they were mad at me.

AC: The square dance or the polka people?

TS: The square dancers. I think we actually killed their bill is what had happened. I had said publicly that we weren't going to waste our time with stuff like that, and I think maybe we had already killed their bill. I had to introduce another one to pass. Peggy Mast was head of the Square Dance Association in her district.

When I was Speaker, we did away with all of these resolutions honoring people where we'd take forty minutes of every morning and stand up and clap. I think they are doing them again, but there were better ways. We did certificates. They may still be doing it. I don't know how they handle that. We handled it on Friday. We did them all at once. I understand. I've done my share of those, but really, we don't need to be taking time up with the box turtle and the square dance.

AC: That's an example, just in terms of the operation of the Chamber, the House, while you were Speaker, to sort of streamline that. Were there other changes once you became Speaker, trying to maybe improve the process?

TS: We changed the way—these weren't unique, but they were changes from where we had been. They may have been old rules. When I became Speaker, if you were on Appropriations, you couldn't chair another committee. That was a rule that I set. One of the things that I had seen and it had gotten worse and worse was a power of a few people. You'd be on Appropriations, and you'd be the chair of Tax, and you'd be the chair of this. You had twenty people who had all the power. I'm on Elections, and I can't get a hearing on my bill.

There was a lot of grassroots complaining that we were not getting hearings on our bills. We changed the rules. A group of us changed the rules mid-Braden, two years after I got here, when the rebels supposedly came about, and we changed the rules. Those were the kind of things that we changed them to. Instead of 84 to pull a bill out of committee, it took 70. Those are things that we did differently, but there weren't a lot. I can't think of a lot of things that we did that were unique.

AC: Was not being in session after midnight or maybe on Sunday, some of those?

TS: Some of those rule changes may have passed, but I don't think while I was Speaker that we dealt with those issues. I'll tell you what we did do. We followed the calendar. We didn't bless bills. That was a big ones. A bill died when it died, and it was over. We didn't bless them. If it was turnaround day, I told chairmen, "It's the end of getting bills out of your committee. We're done. Don't be introducing more bills, and don't be blessing them."

We never had a ninety-day session while I was Speaker. I was Speaker in very good times. I can't take credit for all of that. They were very good times. We were trying to figure out which tax to cut instead of which one to raise, and we would cut them and cut them and cut them, and the Governor ran for re-election on all our tax cuts. He complained all the time that we did them, ran for re-election on them, and won on them, and the budget kept going up. It's not like we cut anything. The budget kept going up. It was just really a good time in Kansas.

I was Bill Graves's first Speaker. When he got elected Governor for four years, I was his first four-year Speaker. I wasn't his favorite, I'm sure. I had been involved in the Bicknell campaign, and Bicknell did run against him. And Bicknell, if you recall, you have to be old to recall these things, endorsed [Jim] Slattery. I think it was Slattery who ran against him. I told Bicknell not to do that. I said, "Don't endorse a Democrat." He just lost the primary. "Endorse Graves." He didn't do it. I think they blamed me. Graves never started with me as somebody he liked, I don't think. I was engaged in trying to beat him in a primary. But we worked pretty well together.

AC: So while you were here, Hayden, Finney, and then Graves were the Governors you interacted with.

TS: I was Graves's first four-year Speaker, and then somebody followed me, Jennison, I think.

AC: Would you say, I guess the relationship had a little tension at some point, but overall, between the legislative branch and the executive branch, again things got done within the political realm of things?

TS: I think they got done the way they're supposed to. They're different. When I went to work for [Governor Sam] Brownback in his administration, I started understanding—I was the legislative liaison. I had to deal with the legislature. I would often tell the Governor, "Look, that's the legislature's"—"Tell them to do." We didn't always get what we wanted, but I think it's always—we've always gotten along pretty well.

Bill Graves as the Governor didn't like the legislature. I think he was a good administrator. He had good people around him that were efficient, but he didn't like us coming to town. He didn't like fooling with us. He didn't like to deal with us. He just didn't. Hayden, I think, enjoyed having the legislature in town. He'd come through the legislature, but he tried to use the Speaker to get what he wanted. I guess you would. And Finney, she just didn't know what she was doing. She was a wonderful woman, a likeable Governor, very popular, but she didn't know how the legislature worked. Like I say, she was more conservative than the Democrats. They fought a lot.

AC: Then you touched on it a little bit, but in terms of the relationship between the House and the Senate—I was checking. Bud Burke was President, and then Dick Bond. You got to interact with both of those.

TS: We sure did. There are some interesting stories there that I can't tell.

AC: Darn.

TS: Yes, Bud Burke for two years, and Dick Bond for two years.

AC: A difference in those?

TS: Yes. Burke was a lot easier to deal with because you could convince him of things. Burke did not like controversy. He was a good guy. They both were good people. But Burke didn't like controversy, so if you threatened him, you could get him to move a little. You couldn't threaten Dick Bond. He'd move a little all right, right at you. You had to handle him differently.

[US Senator]Jerry Moran was the Majority Leader my first two years with Burke. He was helpful. Then Tim Emert, and he wasn't. It was different, but we got a lot of stuff done both times. There was no radical anything happening one way or the other. There was no left or right wing crazy stuff happening. It was part of the checks and balances.

Bond was much better at getting things done. Bond could control—whatever Bond said would happen would happen, and Burke would try, but he wouldn't always get it done. I learned after about a year of Burke that the reason was Bond was not helping him. You would think a natural ally here is my next-door neighbor. But, no, Bond would be hurting Burke in getting things done. That's just politics.

AC: It all worked out okay. So particularly focusing on the twelve years you were in the legislature, proudest accomplishment, plural or singular? Just some good things? You mentioned the Senior Care Act.

TS: If I had an agenda, we did get the unreclaimed mine land fixed in Cherokee County.

AC: The issue you came to address in the Legislature, you got it fixed.

TS: I think we got the only rural water district in the state that was paid for with state money, too. Gus Bogina reminded me of that. We got that stuff done. I kind of had that finished at Year 6. When I ran for Pro Tem, I thought, "I can leave." I had a good job as a banker, and it's pretty easy work, inside stuff. So I was ready to go home, but I got elected Pro Tem, and that was easy. It's kind of fun to preside. You feel important.

AC: A nice office?

TS: A nice office. A really nice office. You get a little staff. You can help people, and that's good. Then when you're Speaker, of course, a Speaker is a real ego boost. It's an interesting job. It should be term limited. I know we're about to have a speaker go beyond that. It's powerful, and a lot of people don't have any idea of all of the things that the Speaker does.

An interesting story. It was very enlightening to me. It was the day I got elected Speaker. I came in the back door, all by myself, and I'm talking to people as I walked up the aisle. I was Pro Tem, and Miller was Speaker. We sat side by side during that vote. I'm talking to people and working the aisles.

Miller comes out of the office. There's about five press people around him, newspaper people and TV cameras because we're going to have the election. I think the presumption was he was going to win. I really do think that's what the presumption was. We had the vote, and I won, and we carried on our business, and it adjourned. I saw Bob Miller get up and walk back to his office all by himself. And here are all these reporters. I thought, "Boy, how fickle this bunch of people are." They're news grabbers.

And the same thing happened with lobbyists. I couldn't get a lunch for six years up here. It fattened up big when you become a Speaker. It's just a world of ego. I don't want to say "phony," but there's a little bit of it that you really better not take it all—you can't believe it when everybody tells you you're the best Speaker there ever was. Pat Hubbell, a lobbyist for the Railroad Association, I'm out here in the hall. When I came back with Brownback, and we're

standing here talking, and Hubbell introduced me to a couple of people. I hadn't been here for a couple of years. He said, “This is the best Speaker we've ever had.” Doug Mays comes around the corner. “Doug, you're the best Speaker we've ever had.” “Pat, you just told me”—“Oh, I've got to be careful who I say that in front of.” I thought, “That's just the way it is.”

I don't have anything other than people thought I was fair. I didn't have an agenda. We got in and out. We didn't raise taxes.

AC: Any big disappointments? Something that you wished you really could have gotten done or hoped to get done when you were Speaker?

TS: No. There again, I wasn't searching for things. There were a lot of little things. You say, “Was there anything you did?” There were a lot of little things. There were a lot of people we helped along the way that would call the office. We had good staff. They would help people that had little problems. Pittsburg State, I'm not sure the tech center would have got built. It was a bad time. It was the end of my term. [Dave] Kerr was Ways and Means Chairman. He didn't like it. I'd already made half the Senate mad at me. Bond wasn't going to do me any favors. We kind of wedged that one out of here. I held some KU stuff hostage for that, and we got the Tech Center built. That probably would have happened someday, but I don't think it would have happened when it did.

- And we had the bad problem. That was when the president of Pittsburg State was giving our phony diplomas or something. Remember that scandal? It was bad timing when they're trying to get the Tech Center. That's probably one thing we did.

AC: But that Tech Center, oh, my goodness.

TS: It's fabulous.

AC: It's certainly something to be proud of. Let's see. You made it through one reapportionment early on.

TS: Yes.

AC: Any difficulties there?

TS: Yes. I was in a different Senate district. They were aiming at me. I could have run for the Senate and had my county and Crawford County. My senator was a guy named Phil Martin. But when they reapportioned me, they put my—they literally went to the street in front of my house, literally, and put me in with Umbarger, which was way the heck out west from me. I think Chanute. They blew that one. I wasn't interested in the Senate, but I thought it was interesting that the map had the street in front of my house as the line. My neighbor across the street couldn't vote for me. My mother and father couldn't vote for me. My mother-in-law couldn't vote for me.

AC: She would have, wouldn't she?

TS: I think she would have. My father-in-law, he was a better Democrat than I am a Republican, but we survived those. Those can be nasty.

AC: I guess ultimately the process worked. You got a map.

TS: It works. I'm not sure how perfect it is. I think the best map Kansas has had in recent years is the one that judges drew. It's fair. You shouldn't start drawing your maps by protecting incumbents. The Republicans make a deal with the Democrats, "We're going to protect our incumbents." People have moved. Populations have changed. The judges just made district lines. I think it's the fairest map we've had. It's up now.

AC: The judges didn't look for which street an incumbent lived on.

TS: Didn't even ask. I was involved early in the Brownback years with that one, with the last one. We had the votes to pass the Senate map, if two Senators would have just done two things that wouldn't hurt them. They just wouldn't.

AC: That could have made the difference ultimately from—

TS: I remember one Republican Senator told me he couldn't vote for it until [Anthony] Hensley told him he could. It's awfully hard to fix that. The judges drew it. I think it's fair. And it's up again.

AC: That's right. It's time to do it again.

TS: Good luck on that.

AC: It won't be long. I guess again just thinking about the institution of the legislature, how policy is made, over the twelve years that you were in, do you think the institution—things got better or the process improved over that time?

TS: I don't think it's any better or any worse today. It's different. The people are different. There's more money involved in politics, which is a bad thing. Incumbents have a better chance of getting re-elected. It's the same stuff. Politics is a pretty old tradition, a business. You know the story. It's always going to be about the same.

AC: Some of those pages, particularly when you were Speaker, and of course, those ones out of the Kansas legislative directory book that lists contributions by organizations. As Speaker, I notice the length of the listing from those organizations—it was like a page and a half.

TS: And that's not fair. I didn't turn it down, but it's not fair. I didn't use it all. There again, the minute you're gone, they give it to somebody else. It's just the nature of the beast. I do think money is corrupting. One of the things I did when I was in the legislature, Sawyer and I, I think it was before I was Speaker. I might have been Pro Tem. Bob Miller bragged about this bill. We passed some campaign finance reform.

I remember being a legislator, and I had a lobbyist come up and ask me—he was a phone company. There were lots of phone companies. He asked me how I was going to vote on a bill that day. I said, "I think I'm for it," and he handed me a check. He said, "We never got this campaign contribution to you." I thought, "Boy, that reeks." The bill said you couldn't take campaign money during session. That was something that came out of that. We set the limits which have been changed, I think, since then.

I don't think you need a high limit because you're just going to spend—it's almost like getting a pay raise. You just spend more, and you don't have anything more to show for it. We just run the cost of campaigns up by doing that. I actually supported way back then—Sawyer and I supported public financing of campaigns, but that will never happen.

AC: I guess you remember how much you spent on your first campaign when you ran in '86?

TS: Did you look it up?

AC: I couldn't find it. I only could get back so far. I couldn't get to '86.

TS: It was maybe $2,000. I got one political contribution from a lobbyist. He was a friend of mine who lobbied for the Empire Electric Company. It's only got one county in the state, and it's Cherokee. He gave me a $200 check.

An interesting story, since we're talking about stories. I'm running the very first time, and I come to Topeka. I got lost. I'd never been here. I ended up in Osawatomie. I come to Topeka, and I go in to see the Speaker's office. You've got to remember Hayden was Speaker, but he was running for Governor. I can't remember the guy, Mark Skinner was the guy who worked for him. He said, "We're going to have an event down at Rochelle Chronister's house." Rochelle was a major player for years up here in Neodesha, I think it was. "If you'll bring your campaign plan and your budget over there, then the House campaign committee," or whatever it was, "will help you."

I get in the car. I go to Rochelle Chronister's meeting. Mark Skinner and her are taking people into her kitchen, and they're going over their campaign plan and their budget, and they're giving them a check from the House PAC. I thought, "Well, at least I'm going to come up with something."

They go along. I had ridden over there with a guy named Slick Norris. He had been a school principal in Oswego. I stopped at his house and we drove. I went in to meet with them. I have a

plan. I have a budget. They said, “Well, you've got a real Democrat district down there. Good luck.” I said, “How much do I get?” “We're out of money. We've written all of our checks.” “Wow, shucks.”

I go back out. The last person they were going to talk to was Slick Norris. I said, “Slick, you've got a problem. They ran out of money.” “Oh, my god. Just our luck.” Slick comes out with $1,000. I thought, “I'm going to remember that one.”

I called Eric Rucker. Eric Rucker was the executive director of the Republican Party. I called him. I said, “Eric, I'm running down here against a Democrat, and I need some help.” “Good luck. We don't do that.” “Well, you're the Republican Party.” “Yes, but that's probably a lost cause.” I said, “Well, don't ask me for nothing.” I hung up and won, and I've always remembered. Rochelle, I didn't owe her anything. I didn't owe Mark Skinner anything. I didn't owe Jim Braden anything.

Pete McGill, here's another story. Some of these people are gone, so I can talk about them. Pete McGill, the one thing Skinner told me was, “Go over and see Pete McGill.” He's a lobbyist. He helps lots of Republicans.” So I did. Before I left town, I went over to Pete McGill's office. I'm trying to think of where it was.

AC: Was it in Merchants Bank ?

TS: I don't know. It was a long time ago. He's puffing on his pipe, and he said, “Well, you're running against Weaver down there.” “Well it's Weaver's seat.” “A Republican hasn't had that in twenty years, not since the One-Armed Bandit”—I can't think of his name. Bill Fribley. Anyway, he said, “I'll see what I can do.” He never did anything. There again, a week after the election, a few days after the election, I saw Pete McGill. “Hey, you never helped me.” “You didn't get that money?” “No, Pete.” It wasn't a week later, he brought me a handful of checks. He rented me late, I guess is what happened there.

AC: Wow. You mentioned you were Legislative Director, Legislative Liaison for Governor Brownback during his term in office. Did you see any changes, differences in the legislature as an institution when you were Speaker, when you were in the legislature versus sometime later when you worked for Governor Brownback?

TS: No, it seemed to all work the same way. I came back in 2010 and left in '02. No, it really didn't. It was about the same. Back in '10, when Brownback got elected, many of the same people were here. Now they're gone. The Speaker was [Mike] O'Neal, I think, who had served with me, and[Melvin] Neufeld was here. There were still members that I knew. I worked about the same way.

There were a lot more committees. They have created more and more committees, I guess to give everybody a title.

AC: Does that help the institution?

TS: No, I don't think so. They have about four or five committees that do most of the work. I don't think it helps to have a subcommittee of a subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

AC: I mentioned there's one required question I'll ask. I'm going to ask that to you now. Again, it's part of the Oral History Project. Personal identity is loosely defined as gender, age, race, class, sexual or gender orientation, marital status. Did you ever experience during the times that you were in the legislature where you believe your personal identity influenced your ability to pass policy, work with fellow legislators, or provide constituent services? Then the follow-up question is, do you ever think you were given committee assignments or tasks that you believe were functions of your personal identity, whether it be gender or philosophical? Maybe that conservative.

TS: The first part is no. I didn't see any—of course, you've got to realize, in the eighties, times were a little different. I'm not sure they were better, but they were different. I do think the committee assignments are based—I think a Speaker, and I'm not sure that I did this, but I probably would have thought of it, would try to balance the committees—rural, urban, male, female, depending on what the committee is. You try to get lawyers on Judiciary and stuff like that. I think they take that into consideration, but I haven't seen—when I was here, it wasn't talked about at all.

There are a lot more women in the legislature than used to be. They're probably close to 50 percent. I don't know. I haven't noticed anything.

AC: On the personal identity, then maybe as a conservative, moderate, liberal, whatever the hat is—

TS: I say you do that. You try to balance your committees so that you get when you want out of them. I mean, you just don't throw it open. You try to stack them to a certain extent. If you're pro-life, then you probably want the committee you're going to send abortion legislation to reflect your views. You put your pro-life friends on whichever committee you're going to do that. I think that happens. I think that's happened, has always happened.

Issues have changed. I use pro-life as an example, but you're pro-gambling, or you're pro-tax, or you're anti-tax. You're pro-highways or anti-highways, a spender or not a spender. I think you do try to balance your committees out. You don't have to make them slam dunks.

AC: Is that maybe one of your toughest jobs as Speaker, when you made those committee assignments?

TS: It really is. It's probably the most important thing you do, really. The Speaker makes the committee assignments, the office assignments, floor seating assignments. You think about all

of that. You don't want to park somebody next to somebody who, if they're persuadable, you want them to be persuaded your way. I have seen some real mistakes over the years there. I tried not to make them, but there have been some mistakes made there. The committees are the most important thing you do.

Committee process is used in the legislature. If you're going to use it, you better make sure your committees are reflective of your body. You don't want to put everybody who thinks green is red on a committee and show them a color chart. It doesn't work. You balance them, but you try to get them the way that you prefer them. It doesn't always work.

AC: During that time though, that committee process worked for you as you saw it?

TS: Yes, it did, and it works. It generally works. The problem that you have as a Speaker or a President or anything is if you want something to happen, and you don't have the votes to do it. You either have to be a bully, which I refused to be. I didn't have the problem very much. Or you have to let it happen. I always believed you're better off—if you can get sixty-three votes for something in here, that's what people want. They're all elected. Just became I'm Speaker, I got elected by the same 20,000, 40,000, whatever it is. What is a House district?

AC: Probably about 28,000, 20-some thousand?

TS: Twenty thousand. I got a county as anybody else. It doesn't make any difference. The Tax Chairman isn't more important to the function of this as a member of the Elections Committee.

AC: Would you ever see yourself returning to elected office?

TS: I am the Mayor of Baxter Springs now.

AC: I didn't know that. I failed in my research. When did that happen?

TS: I don't know if I can see myself returning to that. That happened in November.

AC: Congratulations, Mr. Mayor, another title.

TS: They moved city elections to November, remember? I was unopposed, and everybody wanted me to run. It seemed like something I could handle. Let me tell you, it's easier being Speaker in the State House than dealing with my neighbor's dog barking, and they didn't pick our trash up, and I'm going to lose my front end in this pothole. It's government at local at its best. That's for sure.

Actually I've thought about—I just don't see where I'd fit in. I can't imagine that I would ever run for it again. I'm getting a little too old.

AC: A lot of wisdom though.

TS: Oh, yes, a lot of wisdom.

AC: I guess for somebody though in Baxter Springs that might come up to you and say, “Hey, I'm thinking about running for the legislature,” what advice would you give that person about running?

TS: I'd tell them to run, or I'd tell them not to run if I didn't think they had a chance. I think elections are healthy. I don't think there's anything wrong with having competition. I think it's real dangerous—this isn't really answering your question, but it brought something into my mind—I think it's really dangerous when people upstream try to tell you how things should be. I know I got upset this year when the Republican Party chairman tried to get people out of the Senate race. I think [Susan] Wagle and[Dave] Lindstrom and half a dozen, Hamilton, tried to get them out of that race. Gosh, why? What's wrong with letting people vote? I think their fear was [Kris]Kobach would win. Boy, wouldn't that be terrible. The guy that gets more votes than somebody else wins the election. That's the way it's supposed to work.

Democrats are notorious for it. They just pick somebody now. I don't think it works. I think they're about to find out that they're not going to win their district with their hand-picked candidate. They're not going to win the Senate with their hand-picked candidate. You need to go through a little bit of fire and brimstone before you get elected.

I encourage people to run all the time for stuff. I've tried to get people to run for City Council in Baxter. I've tried to get somebody to run for Mayor, and I wasn't very successful at that.

AC: Anything else that you'd like to touch on? Anything for posterity that you'd like to—

TS: No, it's an interesting world. I've said it probably today. It's hard to prepare for this. There is no—you can read your history books and see how a bill is made on PBS. It's pretty accurate, but it still doesn't—it's not how they're made.

AC: Do you watch PBS?

TS: Yes, I do watch PBS. I just watched something there the other night. I don't think the government should be funding it, but I watch it.

AC: And then the final question, and I know it's a little bit out of your district, but Chicken Mary's or Chicken Annie's?

TS: Chicken Mary's for me.

AC: That's on record now.

TS: It's a little crispier. But there are more Chicken Annie's. If I were running for public office, I would have probably bounced around. But I'm Chicken Mary's.

AC: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker for taking your time and sharing your comments, and being open and providing some insight to the legislative process, the public policy-making process and your years here in the legislature. Clearly you've had a big impact in those years.

TS: We've impacted something. That's for sure. Thank you for your time.

AC: Thank you.

[End of File]

