

NARRATOR: Students in Kansas government classes learn about the three branches of government. the differences between the representatives and the senate. and how laws are passed. This gives them an understanding of the process for making laws. This focus leaves out one important component, the people who serve as elected officials.

[Photos scroll on screen] These 55 women and men have been leading the Kansas Legislature as elected officials. Some became Speakers of the House or Presidents of the Senate. Two became Governor. Others performed leadership roles or chaired important committees. They came from all parts of the state -- 38 were republicans 17 democrats: 33 men 22 women. Their interviews provide insight into their motivations for running for office.

The Kansas Oral History Project has been collecting their unique stories because their voices and actions have shaped our state's character. the Project has interviewed 55 Kansas legislators about their impact on life in Kansas. They continue to influence our lives today and will do so in the future through the public policies they helped create and shape.

ROBIN JENNISON: I had a great life because I got to do what I really enjoyed which was being out there running the cattle. I didn't like driving a tractor, but I did enjoy agriculture and then I'd get to come down here in the winter. My brother would have to feed cattle in the winter while I was here at the Legislature.

GUS BOGINA: I became political, so to speak, by happenstance. In the 1970s I was chairman of the Lenexa area Chamber of Commerce. There were several of us presidents of the chambers who had lunch together once a month or so, periodically anyway, and we were not satisfied with our representation so we decided we must find someone to run. So, we tried and well, we couldn't find anybody who wanted to do it. So, we decided one of us must do it.

Since I was precinct committeeman and chairman of the city precinct committees there they decided that I was probably the most political and I should run. I didn't particularly want to. I didn't think much of it but then I really was not politically involved up to that point in time. I didn't know what it involved and so if I did know maybe I wouldn't have done it.

ROBERT H. MILLER: But anyway, the reason I love being in politics -- when I discovered it in college -- I didn't want to be one of the people that sat around you know reacting to what was on TV, what Johnny Carson, at that time, had been saying on the on the Tonight Show. I wanted to be there when the decisions were being made -- not only how to do things but what we were going to do things about. So, it's setting the agenda.

JANIS LEE: I had decided earlier that I wanted to be in the legislature. I understood how it affected especially our local schools and many other things and felt that it was an opportunity that if I worked hard, I would have a chance. I worked very, very hard, and I was able to beat him. As you say, I got 67 percent of the vote, which was sort of astounding for a district that was a very strong Republican district.

MIKE O'NEAL: I guess I grew up ambitious, and I liked government. I liked civics. I liked history, and I think I knew when I was in seventh grade that I wanted to go to law school.

DARLENE CORNFIELD: Ken Francisco was my representative. I was looking at his voting records and the things he voted for, and I realized we were total opposites. I asked the Party, "Who do

you have running against this guy because I don't think he's very good." They said, "Well, we don't really have anybody. "Well, why don't you run?"

So, I decided to run. I put my name in. Then I was somewhere, I can't remember, I think at a Republican meeting, and I do a lot of cooking and things. One night at the meeting, I stood up and I said, "Well, I decided to run for the 90th District. I don't know much about fundraising, but I do cook." I said, "I'm going to sell pans of lasagna for \$30 a pan." I sold 1,000 pans. So, I was cooking a lot.

NARR: Now that we know more about what motivated these legislators to run for public office, what did they accomplish? What kind of laws did they create? What was their impact on public policy in Kansas? Listen to Senate President Richard Bond from Johnson County Kansas describe his role in the renovation of the state capitol.

RICHARD BOND: When I became President of the Senate in 1996 . . .

JOAN WAGNON: Right.

RB: . . . member of the state architect group, a guy named Bill Groth, G-r-o-t-h, came to see me to tell me about the terrible problems we have in this building and how dangerous it is. Bill Groth said, "You know if you're on the fourth or fifth floor of this building and a fire starts on the first floor you'll be dead in five minutes because this center part of the building will just take the smoke right to the top." There were no alarms. There was nothing to stop a fire. It was very, very dangerous -- no extinguishers, nothing. In addition to that he said, "You know we've got chunks of limestone falling off this building and have come close to hitting people."

The building was in terrible shape. They had at some point -- when they put in air conditioning, I think they did it with a chainsaw and just went in and cut holes in the wall and brought through piping for air conditioning. It was horrible. They shut off some of the stairways on up to the upper levels and so we had major safety and major space issues. And so, after hearing Bill Groth and others, I put together -- well, I went to see the Speaker and I went to see the Governor, and I went to see several of the leaders of the important committees of the Senate and House and said, "Guys we've got to do something."

The Iowa, Ohio, and Minnesota had all finished restoration [of their capitols] and so I got us some airplanes and flew to those three sites. We went overnight to Ohio, but we did day trips to Iowa and Minnesota to see how they did it. And in fact, walking in here this morning, and you walk in the visitor area and here's a map on the floor of the state of Kansas with your county on it. That was an idea I stole from Ohio. And I watched all these kids come in from all around Ohio and they want to stand on their county that's on the floor. And then in Ohio they had a little classroom. And when the kids got off the bus, they went into it and sat down and had a video that said, "This is what you're going to see. This is what the capitol is all about." And I said, "We've got to have that."

Many of these things, we stole from other states. For example, when you and I started here, if you wanted to hang up a picture, all you needed was a hammer and a nail. You'd just hammer it into the wall and hang it up. I hope they still prohibit that because after a few dozens of years

of that, things looked pretty bad. We were able to put together— Dave Kerr was a big help in the funding of that as chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee -- and we were able to come up with a \$50 million appropriation for the first tranche of funding for a new building. I remember my last week as President of the Senate, I had a press conference and said, “Well, 50 million is going to get us started, but this restoration may cost as much as 150 million.” \$330 million later and fourteen years of construction, this is what we've got, and it's really fantastic.

NARR: There are many strategies for getting a bill passed. Speaker Robin Jennison had an unusual idea on how to get the 1999 transportation plan passed and it worked.

ROBIN JENNISON: That was interesting because what we did—all governors do it. Nothing against Governor Graves, but when they present their budgets to the legislature, there's some hokey numbers in their budgets. They all do it. Governor Graves did it, too. We had a meeting that was Governor Graves and President [Dick] Bond and me talking about the highway plan. The governor said something, “I'd like to do this, but it's not something that I'm going to fall on a sword for.”

JIM MCLEAN: And it wasn't in his budget, right?

RJ: It wasn't in his budget at that point. So, we decided to do it, but he wasn't going to help much basically was what it was. He'd had a good four years. I think he'd just gotten re-elected. It wasn't going to do anything for him. Anyway, so I told him, let me pass it over to the House first. I think President Bond actually [said], “We'll run it out of the Senate.” I said, “No, let me do it in the House first.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Because I'm going to pass it without a tax increase.” Governor Graves said, “How are you going to do that?” I said, “I'm going to use your numbers.” He said, “Well, that won't work.” I said, “It will work as good for this transportation plan as it did for your budget.” So, we did. That first transportation plan that came out of the house had no tax increase. I think it was a seven-year plan, but I can't remember the years on it.

JM: You obviously allowed some bonding in that.

RJ: No, no bonding.

JM: Pay as you go.

RJ: It was pay as you go, used his numbers. The idea was that we would pass it the first time that way and get votes, which we did.

JM: So, then it would have a little momentum.

RJ: President Bond, he had [Senator Ben] Vidricksen over there. You knew they could pass a transportation [plan].

JM: He has a highway named after him.

RJ: So, we passed it that way. It goes over to the Senate. They pass a more reasonable transportation plan, and it goes to conference.

JM: So, you're acknowledging that the bill you passed wasn't all that reasonable.

RJ: Oh, it wouldn't have worked. It didn't need to work. You just needed to get enough votes to get out of here, and we did it. Then the Senate passed a plan. Then we went and really negotiated from there between our plan and their plan and got one ready and passed it. We would have passed it because it was good for Southeast Kansas. Governor Graves got a little nervous about it, but that's how we passed it, the '99 plan.

NARR: One of the most significant and far-reaching pieces of tax legislation during Governor Mike Hayden's term was an amendment to the Kansas Constitution allowing the Legislature to classify property for purposes of property taxation. Here senator Fred Kerr, Pratt recalls why classification became the solution to protect homeowners and farmers from huge property tax increases.

FRED KERR: I do know that as far as reappraisal goes—and it was controversial, and it was difficult—but the case was made that our appraisals across the state were out of balance, and so whether it was the [Kansas] Board of Tax Appeals or the courts, we had to change. We had to reappraise. And John Carlin was right: When it comes to homes and farmland, what the market price is doesn't connect with the value, and so that I think was his argument, and it [was] correct, that there needed to be a classification, that those two properties needed to be assessed (taxed) at a different, lower level than other properties. So there was good reason for that, and there was lots of negotiation [about], of course, what those levels should be, both for farmland and homes, and so we did arrive at what—a compromise. And as you say, it was put on the ballot, and it did pass. As far as the reappraisal goes, it's obvious that when a reappraisal goes into effect, there are going to be some gyrations, and so the people that are on the wrong end—in other words, get taxed higher as a result of a reappraisal—don't like it one bit. And I'm sure that Governor Hayden knew that would be the case. But once we had gone through all the process, which was I guess a several-year process to do—to do the reappraising—and then, of course, the classification was kicking in—I don't think it made sense to delay longer. It's time to get it done, put it into place.

NARR: Senate President Steve Morris, Hugoton, Kansas described his efforts to solve a pressing problem the lack of trained engineers in the state. His efforts resulted in keeping Kansas-trained engineers working in Kansas.

STEVE MORRIS: As you mentioned, the majority of the legislators' time is spent trying to put out fires that are burning at the time. There's not a lot of time or resources left to do much forward thinking. In 2007 maybe, I became aware of the engineering shortage in Kansas. At that time, the major engineering firms in Johnson County in Wichita were a couple of thousand engineers short. Stuart Bell who was the dean of the KU School of Engineering at the time was visiting with me. By the way, he's now the president of Alabama University.

JOAN WAGNON: Oh, really?

SM: Anyway, he mentioned to me that he had one of his current graduates, a female graduate that started out at \$100,000 straight out of school, which I was pretty impressed with. We talked about how we should try to address the problem. I decided to invite him and John English, the dean at Kansas State University, and the lady, I don't remember her name, from Wichita State Engineering School. We met several times and ultimately developed a plan to try and address this. Kansas was losing a lot of their engineers. Firms were hiring engineers from other parts of the country, East Coast and West Coast, and those folks, once they got settled, a lot of times they didn't have a lot of loyalty to Kansas. So, they'd leave, and she'd have to get somebody else to retrain them. So, we thought it was best if we could try to keep and train our own engineers. We felt like K-12 schools needed to do a better job of promoting engineering. So that was part of the project, trying to get counselors to be up to speed on what's involved in engineering curriculum. This comprehensive plan took a couple of years. This

was during the recession. We didn't really have money to do anything until I think it was 2011. Governor Brownback wasn't very thrilled with me. So, I asked Senator [Carolyn] McGinn to take the lead and get it through Ways and Means, which she did. She did a good job doing that. We passed a ten-year, ten-million-dollar-a-year program that was meant to do some capital projects for all three universities and then basically changing the whole engineering atmosphere in Kansas. The ultimate goal was to provide 65 percent more engineers in this state by the time the ten years was over, and I think we've already reached that goal.

NARR: You've just heard some examples of leadership some in trying situations. How does this kind of leadership develop what qualities of leadership did they have? How did they move up into leadership positions? Part of the answer is when newly elected representatives and senators arrive in Topeka, they serve on one or more committees. They learn how the process works. They become familiar with the issues and observe the qualities of effective leadership in their colleagues. A number of the project interviewees held one or more leadership positions.

Here are some of their observations on leadership.

DENNIS MCKINNEY: When I became leader, ... I'd seen some Speakers who maybe tried to flex too much muscle from time to time or tell people what to do. I always tried to remind myself every morning I couldn't fire anybody. I worked for the caucus. You'd better be careful, be a good listener, and be careful what you say.

DAVE KERR: It's kind of the same things that it takes to be a community leader. It's being willing to listen to various points of view, and in the end, being both polite and willing to take the lead. You're going to take a few slings and arrows when you take the lead on issues. You need to be well grounded before you take that lead. You need to understand the issue well and be prepared to defend that position, not defend to the point where if you discover that there's new information that you should have taken into account that you're unwilling to come to a different conclusion, but you have to be willing to absorb a few slings and arrows.

NARR: Governor Mike Hayden in his oral history interview compared speaker Pete McGill and Speaker Wendell Lady as legislative leaders.

MIKE HAYDEN: They each had a different style. Pete was one of the last of the dinosaurs. He was the old-time speaker. The power of the speaker in those days was awesome. The rules were such that the speaker essentially could rule with an iron hand, and that's not all bad because you got things done, but it wasn't very collegial in that respect. Pete was of the old school. His motto was, "We've got a lot of hay down." In other words, get the job done. His whole idea was "We're going to keep the trains running on time. We're going to come here. We're going to do our business, and we're going to leave." He was of the old school.

Wendell, he's the only person to ever lead the Republican party in the House for six consecutive years because, of course, he was minority leader for two years and speaker for four. Nobody else had ever done that in state history. So that tells you something about what kind of leader he was. But he was, of course, a lot younger. He was a lot more visionary. Pete was of the old school, which isn't bad, and he did it his way. Wendell, he spread the power, so to speak. He relied heavily on his committee chairs and expected them to do the job. Once in a while, he'd

say, "This is what we're going to do." Pete McGill said that every day, "This is what we're going to do." Wendell would say, "All right. What do you think we ought to do?"

I learned from both of them. There is a time when you have to take the gavel, and you have to say, "This is it. We've had enough. We're going to move ahead." There's other times when you have to let everybody have their say. So, I learned from both of them.

JIM MCLEAN: The Majority Leader has to keep this place running day to day to day, has to be able to whip votes, understand who's where on what issue. You really do need the full faith and confidence of your caucus at least, right? But how do you achieve that when you win by such a close margin?

TIM EMERT: First of all, you try to be fair with everybody. I tried. I was kind of a no surprises kind of a guy. I hate to say not everybody in the Senate was a no surprises. I think if you be open and honest—we had three parties in the Senate. There was no doubt about it. We had thirteen Democrats, thirteen conservative Republicans, and we had thirteen moderate Republicans, and we had that one person. Consequently, on many issues, I had more in common with Anthony Hensley [Senate Minority Leader] than I had with many of my caucus. That's how you got things done.

. . . It was a juggling act because he's [Speaker Jennison] got to take care of his people. We ran a lot of races across the rotunda to visit with each other. Sometimes it was very frustrating because—sometimes we felt like we went over and had our conversations, and we agreed on something. By the time we got back to our side, it had changed. And maybe it's good because then you meet some place in the middle. Maybe we were too radical on some things. We wanted to do things like maybe spend some money that they didn't want to spend and wanted to support education more. Education was always something that we argued about.

MARVIN BARKIS: I ran for the agenda chairman. That got me in front of the group all the time. When I got the job—the previous guy read every bill, discussed everything. I created a one-page thing that I gave to every minority leader. Their job was to report on the bill. I didn't have to read any bills if I didn't want to, but Bill Reardon would do education, so they all participated. And one of the things I did from very early on and had thoughts about if I ever become a leader, I want to share the power.

NARR: Today's program has focused on the people who made up the Kansas Legislature and who served in the last part of the 20th century. Their interviews document what they had to do to pass legislation or create programs to help the people of Kansas.

The composition of the Kansas Legislature has changed significantly since its early days. As the legislature becomes more diverse in its membership, it will continue to evolve reflecting the philosophy and experiences of its body. The Kansas Oral History Project is committed to capturing the experiences of its leaders and its rank-and-file members and making those transcripts and videos of interviews available to the public.

For more information go to the website KsOralHistory.org.