

INTERVIEW OF WAYNE ZIMMERMAN BY DAVE WEBB, APRIL 13, 2023
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, INC.

Dave Webb: Good day, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome. We're here in the Kansas Senate Chamber today, and this is a project of the Kansas Oral History Project, and it's funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council, and the purpose of it is to interview legislators and government officials who served from the 1960s through 2000. The purpose of this is, and we hope that people will be able to go back and look at it and study these interviews that we're doing to see that government really did work very functionally at one time in the State of Kansas and in all states, and how parties came together and worked with each other to get accomplishments.

My name is Dave Webb. I'm from Stillwell, Kansas. I'm an auctioneer and appraiser by profession and a former member of this body. It's my honor to be here today, conducting this interview with a legend of the State of Kansas, Wayne Zimmerman.

Wayne is from Olathe, Kansas. Today we think of all of the legislators, we serve from districts. When Wayne was first elected, each county had a representative, and there's 105 counties in this state, and so there were 105 representatives, and the other 20 were kind of divided up between some of the larger areas. Wayne is the last surviving member of the people who served when it was one county, one representative.¹

Wayne, we're so happy to have you here today. We're looking forward to lots of great stories from your memories here in the Capitol Building.

Wayne Zimmerman: Well, thank you for asking me.

DW: How long has it been since you've been in the Capitol Building?

WZ: I'm not sure, but many years.

DW: A long time. As you walked through, I'm sure you noticed a lot of renovations.

WZ: I had not been here since the renovation.

DW: This Capitol Building did need it, and they did a great job with the renovations. I'm sure you saw by the cage elevator one of the resolutions when you were in the Senate, to preserve the cage elevator and keep it operational.

WZ: Yes.

DW: Wayne, I want to start—I remember the Zimmerman family from basically about all my life, what I call Santa Fe or the 150 Highway or 135th Street.

¹ In *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964), this Court held that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment includes a "one-person, one-vote" principle. This principle requires that, "when members of an elected body are chosen from separate districts, each district must be established on a basis that will insure, as far as is practicable, that equal numbers of voters can vote for proportionally equal numbers of officials.

WZ: Martin City Road.

DW: Martin City Road before that. There were three farmers in the Olathe area—the Zimmermans, the Hacketts, and the Cochrans. You all kind of worked together from what I remembered to make things happen. Of course, today, there's not any farmland left on that area.

WZ: Almost all gone.

DW: Almost all gone. You're exactly right. And I remember, I went to Olathe Middle School and High School. I remember seeing your dad out with these little Ferguson tractor, I think it was, working the ground back and forth. And then later in life, as I farmed some of that land, he would come right along with me. We had great visits.

So you grew up in Olathe. Did you go to Olathe School or Stanley School?

WZ: Olathe. We were halfway between Olathe and Stanley.

DW: Right. And you probably went to the John P. St. John School before it was Olathe.

WZ: That's correct.

DW: That's where I started in the Olathe schools was in the old John P. St. John. It was the last year there was a class there. Your folks, you were just halfway in-between, and of course, that was a long ways into town at that point in time.

WZ: Five miles, five-and-a-half miles to the high school.

DW: And there wasn't a stoplight to worry about and all those things at that point in time.

WZ: That's right.

DW: You went to Olathe. You went to K-State after that.

WZ: That's correct.

DW: So pick up your life from that early era high school into K-State, the Air Force. Tell us about that. We'll get started there.

WZ: In high school, I was in the vocational agriculture program. The instructor was one of the outstanding vocational ag instructors in the state, and he was a K-Stater. Actually he left Olathe and started an ag department in Friends University in Wichita in 1947. Those of us who went to college all went to Ag School at K-State. He tried to get us to come to Friends University, but we all went to K-State.

DW: If you're going to be in agriculture in the State of Kansas, you want to go to K-State. Then I think there you were in the ROTC program?

WZ: At that time, all able-bodied male students at K-State had to take two years of military training. Then the second two years was advanced training. During the Korean War, the logical thing to do was to get in the advanced program. Of course, the military people encouraged this because they said that the military wanted college graduates.

After the advanced program, you got your commission in the military. In my case, I committed to go to flight school for four years active duty.

DW: I think you said you went to flight school in Arizona?

WZ: In Arizona. I want to tell you, the military requirement at land grant colleges, I was always told was a federal law, but it was not a federal law. It was a state law.

DW: Interesting.

WZ: I assume that the State [Kansas] had to commit to that to get a land grant college. When I was in the House, I was Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee. That was during the sixties when there were a lot of protests and riots. ROTC buildings on campuses were being set on fire, and there were riots.

The administration at K-State decided they wanted that law repealed, and they came to me as Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee to get the law repealed. I didn't want to because I thought that would be the end of the military training program at K-State. They finally talked me into it, and I carried the bill on the floor. It passed, and the next year, the enrollment went up, which is exactly the opposite of what I thought would happen.

DW: Good. So you went to Arizona after K-State to go to flight school.

WZ: I graduated in May, and I had to wait until December to get into a flight class.

DW: What did you learn to fly in?

WZ: I went through jet fighter training.

DW: Jet fighter training, and then flew jets I assume all round?

WZ: At the end of the Korean War, there were no airplanes, and there was not fuel available. It was difficult to even get flying time. You had to fly to get your flight pay. So I flew a lot of different airplanes, mostly as co-pilot, but I was assigned a 326 fighter interceptor squadron at Richards Gebaur Air Force base and was only able to get a jet plane to fly a few times because they just weren't available at that time.

DW: That's very commendable, and I thank you for your service to the country on that. Your parents didn't fly, did they?

WZ: No. Well, my dad had been up a lot of times in a World War I airplane, a Jenny, but he was not a pilot.

DW: And your son flies.

WZ: Yes.

DW: It's one of those things where once it's in your blood, it's there forever. I've enjoyed a forty-five-year flying career myself.

WZ: Do you still have an airplane?

DW: We sold it a few years ago. We just weren't using it as much as we used to. So we did get rid of it. But there is not one that flies over today that I can't tell you what type of engine is in it. It's just one of those things that we all learn.

Tell us what motivated you to run for the legislature and a little bit about the one-county representative at that time. I remember during the sixties and seventies, my mother was a Republican precinct committeewoman, and you would always stop by our house to campaign. I remember that as vividly as can be.

WZ: Your mother and my mother were active in Republican women's activities.

DW: Yes. Tell us a little bit about what made you get into this world.

WZ: Well, I don't know for sure except I can tell you that the first political activity I remember was when my granddad pinned a Landon and Knox campaign button on my bib overalls and told me to campaign. I wasn't very old.

DW: That's a good memory.

WZ: My granddad was very conservative, very much against the New Deal, and sure that that would result in many of the problems that we have today, and he was right. My dad was active locally, like the township board, when the township still had a responsibility, and the school board, and the election boards, and that type of thing-- local politics.

I guess I became interested in running when the Jaycees had a course that was sponsored by the national Jaycees. I think it was called Practical Politics, and I was active in the Jaycee organization at that time and participated in that program, which encouraged people to become precinct committee people and to get involved locally and run for office if possible.

When I filed the first time, an old-timer in Olathe said, "Your granddad did that," and I said, "No, I don't think so." I looked it up in the [Kansas State] Historical Society and found out it was my great-granddad [[Zimmerman, N.](#)] was in the House in the early 1890s, and I had never heard that.

DW: Neat.

WZ: Actually the reason I filed is the retiring House member who was from Shawnee was Jack [\[John L.\] Gardner](#) and George Lowe who was a friend of mine was in the Senate. He was appointed to fill an unexpired term for a member who was killed in a car accident. George called me one day and said, "Jack and I would like to talk to you. Would you meet us for coffee?"

Jack, he was a lawyer, he decided he didn't want to run again, and he said, "We want you to run for the House." I had not considered it prior to that time, but when George was appointed to the Senate, he was told that he could not be a Precinct Committee man and a Senator at the same time. So I was appointed a Precinct Committee man, which I later resigned from because I got elected to the House. George at that time was running for a full term in the Senate, and he was defeated. He did not get elected.

DW: So this would have been 1964.

WZ: Yes.

DW: And the Governor at that point in time was?

WZ: [John Anderson](#) from Olathe, from Johnson County was Governor, and '64 was his last term, and [Bill Avery](#) was elected. Bill Avery only served one term. At that time, the Governor's term was two years. [Bob Bennett](#) was the first to serve a four-year term as Governor.

DW: Correct. Prior to that during that time, the Lieutenant Governor who ran on their own presided over the Senate chamber here.

WZ: That's correct.

DW: So 1964, one county, one representative.

WZ: I've never understood why the federal court said that the state legislature had to be apportioned on a one-man, one-vote basis, but the federal system is one House on area, on state, and the other on population. The make-up of the legislature under the old system was somewhat different. Most of the legislators were financially successful, mostly retired farmers. I remember one of the Western Kansas House members said, "The only reason I come is because my wife likes to live in the [Jayhawk Hotel](#) in the winter."

Many of those people, of course, they voted, and I think they voted right most of the time, but they really didn't participate. Many of them did not participate in floor debates or committee work. So when we went to one-man, one-vote, that was a major change. The legislature then became made up of a lot of college-age young people who did not have a family, had no obligations, had never held a job, never paid taxes. So the make-up was much different.

DW: Right. And our videographer today, [Dave Heinemann](#), does that comment probably ring home to you? You were one of those young people who came in in the late sixties after the change of that. You had moved to the Senate by the time Dave was in the House, if I recall.

WZ: I thought that the old system was not bad. The make-up was different and maybe didn't represent the population in the state the way the one-man, one-vote does, but I don't think it was all bad.

DW: I don't think we'd ever get to go back to that though.

WZ: No.

DW: They have some fierce redistricting battles today. A lot of them end up in the courts, but that's the world we live in today.

WZ: The reapportionment in '66 was a real big battle. That was the first apportionment on the one-man, one-vote basis.

DW: And some of those rural counties all of a sudden, there might have been two or three counties together.

WZ: Six.

DW: Six counties sometimes. Today, it's not uncommon to find a dozen counties together in western Kansas. But you think here's six counties that had six representatives, and we're going to have one. That would have been a lot of discussion during that time.

WZ: A lot of change.

DW: Probably not a lot of friendly discussion of some of that.

You mentioned the Jayhawk Hotel. That was the hangout of choice during that era, wasn't it?

WZ: At that time, that was more or less the headquarters of activity.

DW: Yes. Tell us about some of your legislative accomplishments in the House, some things you remember that stand out in your mind from the House.

WZ: Well, probably not anything very important, but I remember school funding. Education funding was a big item. The teachers' organization, then the KSCA before the NEA, was becoming more powerful. One day I was walking in the Capitol after lunch with Bill Avery, Governor Avery, and he said, "I want you to be on the Joint House Senate School Finance Committee." I was on the House Education Committee. He said, "I want you to be on the Joint Committee to develop the new foundation finance plan." I said, "Governor, if you want me to do that, I will, but I take this to mean you think I'm expendable because I think whatever we adopt,

we're Republicans. The KSCA is Democrat. Whatever we adopt, they're not going to like, and we're probably not going to be re-elected."

Well, he didn't get re-elected. I did. That's one of the things I remember from the House.

DW: I know you walked over to the House and looked over at that chamber before you came over here today. Your granddaughter was telling me about one time when you were presiding over the House, you worked forty bills—

WZ: Forty-some bills in an evening session.

DW: Did that evening session kind of drag into midnight? Did you get it done before then?

WZ: I don't remember the time, but it was late.

DW: I'm not sure that many times they can work forty bills today in a day. That would have been a great thing to remember and to especially preside over it.

Did you ever get into any battles over the rules during that time and debates over those things?

WZ: In the House, the tradition was that all lawyers were on the Judiciary Committee automatically. I served with four representatives from Johnson County, and three of them were lawyers. They complained to me all the time that the Judiciary Committee had trouble getting a quorum to their meetings. There were so many of them that none of them took the responsibility.

So I introduced a resolution to allow other than the lawyers to be on the Judiciary Committee, and that was a very controversial thing. I was not a friend of lawyers at that time. I think two years or three or four years later maybe they had to adopt that resolution because there weren't enough lawyers in the House to make a committee. So they had to do what I had proposed at a later time.

DW: Interesting. Just a very few short years ago, and you're right, there's been lots of attorneys, both in the House and the Senate over the course of the history of the Kansas legislature, and it was just a few years ago that there was only one attorney, and he was a non-practicing attorney from Wyandotte County, still in the Senate today, and it was the first time that the Judiciary Committees had no attorneys on them. It just shows how all those things shift over the years.

WZ: If you look at the roster in the sixties, they were real heavy with lawyers.

DW: Yes. And a lot of them saw that as a way to promote their business at home in that area, and that was very true.

So you said you were in the House for two terms and then out, and then back to the House?

WZ: I was out for four years. I decided after two terms I couldn't afford to do it anymore. You may know the pay. In '65, it was \$10 a day and \$15 expenses, which wasn't important to me at

the time. When I ran, I didn't even know it paid anything. That isn't why I ran. But after two terms, I thought I needed to try to make a living.

DW: I remember when I came, it was \$27 a day. By the time I left, it had gone to \$35, and we just thought that was a huge raise. It is a huge financial sacrifice, especially trying to raise a family, be employed, be successful at home. It is a huge financial sacrifice at that time that most people don't understand, but it truly was.

Your business was insurance and banking mostly in your professional career. That is correct? It was originally Patrons Bank, which became Bank Four, which became somebody else and somebody else. But Patrons Bank was a staple of Olathe and Johnson County for many, many years.

WZ: It was the only bank in the state ever organized under the cooperative laws, and the law was later repealed.

DW: Interesting. I was unaware of that.

WZ: It was Patrons Cooperative Bank, and the Patrons name comes from the Patrons of Husbandry to the Grange.

DW: I'm very familiar with the Grange Organization. I didn't understand that's where that was—and was Sam Perkins there when you were there?

WZ: Sam was there.

DW: He was an institution there at the bank for many, many years.

WZ: My great-grandfather was the first president of that bank when it was organized as a co-op.

DW: Interesting. Does your family still by chance have any of the original stock certificates?

WZ: No, not that I'm aware of.

DW: It would have been beautifully engraved, I'm sure, during that time. So you were out of the legislature for a while.

WZ: For four years.

DW: Busy with insurance and, of course, a young family.

WZ: Yes.

DW: Back on the campaign side, did you get to help draft your kids into campaigning?

WZ: Yes. Actually, my daughter attended some of the campaign gatherings, and afterwards, everyone said, “She’s the one that should be running.”

DW: I think that’s probably accurate for most of us in that era. When you left the House, was it Art Gabriel who took your seat?

WZ: Yes.

DW: From De Soto. Art was a longtime friend and a great American. He was also in the banking industry.

WZ: That’s right. He was president of the De Soto Bank.

DW: De Soto State Bank. I’ve kept in touch with some of his family over the years. They’ve been to auctions.

WZ: His son was Arlen.

DW: Yes. They’ve since sold that bank, like lots of banks have. So you came back to the Senate. You decided to run for the Senate. Again, I remember you coming to our house and campaigning for that and having Zimmerman signs on our driveway. Ironically, at that time, of course, you served the entire county as a representative, but then the Senate was districts by that point in time.

WZ: That’s correct.

DW: Some of our districts were very similar at that point in time. So what made you want to come back?

WZ: I don’t remember for sure. It appeared there was an opening. I was still trying to be involved in the process, even though I was away for four years. I went to the president of the bank and I said, “I’m thinking about running. What do you think about that?” and he encouraged me to do it. I was interested in what was going on here. I was happy to have the opportunity to come back.

DW: When you said you visited with the president of the bank, I truly remember in that era of legislative service, lots of people from the banking industry, I remember there was a gentleman that worked on the line at General Motors, and their companies would give them time off to do that. That would be unheard of today. They saw it as a benefit to their businesses. But it was also a civic responsibility that we need to do this for our community. Those things are just gone today. If you were an educator or worked at a bank and came in and said, “I want to take four months off. I still want to keep my job,” you know what the answer is.

WZ: I still worked at the bank, too. I went out there whenever I was not occupied here, I spent my time at the bank.

DW: You were a loan officer, I assume.

WZ: Yes.

DW: And had customers and kept them all—

WZ: Yes, much of it in the ag area. Agriculture at that time was still pretty big in Johnson County.

DW: Yes. It was a thriving industry. The lenders were active in it. You're exactly right. It was a very lucrative business base for the bank. You had people who had a great work ethic who would come back and pay what they could, if they could pay the whole time. I'm sure you've had some of those you've had to deal with over the years, too.

WZ: Yes.

DW: When you came back to the Senate, I think you said your seat, the configuration was different then.

WZ: Yes.

DW: Your seat was over on that side of the aisle. Tell us about coming back to the Senate after being gone for a few years and coming back. Who was President of the Senate then?

WZ: Bob Bennett was President of the Senate, and he later ran for Governor, of course, and was elected. I had a pretty big committee load in the Senate. As you probably recognize, I'm sure you do, the same number of bills were handled in the Senate as are handled in the House, but there's a difference in the number of people.

DW: Yes.

WZ: Here are the committees I was on.

DW: As committee assignments, he was Chairman of the Commercial and Financial Institutions which obviously was the banking industry.

WZ: Banking and insurance. Savings and loan.

DW: He was on Agriculture and Livestock, Ways and Means—they always say that's kind of like doing your taxes every day, being on the Ways and Means Committee.

WZ: I think they call it the Budget Committee now.

DW: Yes. Elections and Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment. I got to serve on that one year, one term. That's really all that anybody should serve on the Reapportionment Committee is one term.

WZ: Yes.

DW: Yes, you were very active.

WZ: I was also on Post Audit and the Ethics Commission.

DW: And you still get the same amount of pay for all this.

WZ: Yes.

WZ: Bob Bennett was President of the Senate, and I knew Bob pretty well because he ran for the Senate the same time I ran for the House the first time. I think as a result of that, he may have appointed me to more things because he knew me, and I was available.

DW: Right, and he knew your work ethic, and that you would see to it things got done.

WZ: Bob was a very fair person to work with. As you remember, that was soon after Watergate. There was an effort in every state to pass ethics legislation and campaign reporting requirements. I was on the Elections Committee. Of course, since that was an objective of the leadership to get that kind of legislation passed, I was expected to support it, but I didn't. I opposed it because I said that it was unworkable.

The committee chairman who was a friend of mine, Arden Booth, [Lawrence legislator] got very upset with me.

DW: From Lawrence.

WZ: Arden went to Bob Bennett and said that I was not cooperating and not supporting the proposal. So Bob called me in and said, "Arden says you're not playing ball," and I said, "Well, Bob, I think that proposal is unworkable, and I'll not support it in its present form." I said, "You put me on the committee; you can take me off if you want to." He said, "Oh, no. you do whatever you think is right." So I continued to oppose it.

When Bob completed his campaign for Governor, he came to me and said, "You were right. We cannot figure out how to report and satisfy the Ethics Commission, the staff of the Ethics Commission." He said, "I want you to go on the commission and see if you can straighten it out." So I was on that commission for a short time.

DW: Interesting. Did you get it straightened out?

WZ: No. They're still having problems.

DW: They still do have problems. You're exactly right. You talked about Bob Bennett then. He ran for Governor. I believe Don Concannon, it was a bitter campaign. I remember that.

WZ: It was kind of West against East.

DW: I remember Bob's beard got to be quite a controversy in that. He wasn't going to shave his beard off.

WZ: Well, I can tell you a story about that. There was some question about whether Bob should keep his beard when he ran for Governor or not. At that time, beards were not acceptable in rural areas of the state, in particularly the western part they thought.

DW: Yes.

WZ: So Bob's wife, Olivia, came to me one day on the Senate floor and said, "You've known Bob a lot longer than I've known him. Do you think he should shave or keep his beard?" And I said, "Olivia, have you ever seen him without his beard?" She said no. I said, "Well, he should keep it," and he did.

DW: That's interesting. Just last week, there was a legislative shrimp peel, which again Dave Heinemann has been very active in, when you talk about Bob Bennett, [Ross Doyen](#), who you served with in the Senate, his daughter was a ventriloquist, and we found a picture with her down at the Governor's Office with Governor Bennett and her ventriloquist dummy doing a skit. It was great. We shared that picture with her.

WZ: Ross Doyen was Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee when I was on it. Ross is one of two people who I recognized when I came to the House. He was a student at K-State the same time I was, maybe two years ahead of me. There was one other K-Stater here, Ed Boyd, from Larned. I recognized him. They were the only two people I recognized when I came to the House.

DW: Interesting. Ross, when I was in the House, of course, he served in the Senate, but he kind of took me under his wing, just to give me a lot of great advice and counsel. I really appreciated it. Of course, I got the honor of serving with him in the Senate. Ironically, we became lifelong friends. There was not a week that went by that we didn't visit, or I wouldn't fly out to Concordia and see him or meet him in Salina for lunch or something like that. I still visit with his daughter yet to this day. It was just one of those great relationships that formed right here in this building, just one of those great Americans.

Outside of the election reform and you being right that it wouldn't work, you got to be on the staff there, any other significant legislation while you were in the Senate?

WZ: Well, as you indicated, being on Ways and Means was really a full-time job.

DW: Yes.

WZ: All the budget matters came through there. That took a lot of time. I was on the Ag Committee. There wasn't any significant legislation that I recall during that time. The same

subjects that keep coming up now came up then, of course—school finance, ethics, for example, are two.

DW: And as we're sitting here today during the recess of the Chambers until they come back from their veto session, education funding is still out there, and there's lots of questions about it. It's been that way, as you say, probably forever. It's the largest piece of the state budget. You'd like to deal with it first, but it's always done at the last, and I remember serving on conference committees. It was some of the last things you'd pass would be the final education budget. It was difficult then; it's difficult today. As we see school districts today, Kansas used to have a lot of school districts, and then the consolidation, I'm sure you remember, in the late sixties.

WZ: In the early sixties.

DW: Oh, yes.

WZ: Consolidation took place in probably '61 or '63. I can't remember.

DW: It started in the early sixties, yes. Then we ended up with 305 school districts today. That number has gone down to the upper 200 numbers, and it's a difficult situation when you look at rural America. How do we keep education alive in small communities and keep a quality education alive? It's very difficult under the one-man, one-vote rule. Obviously, there's more people that represent the urban areas than the rural areas. So it is very difficult.

Well, Wayne, I have thoroughly enjoyed this time here. When you walked into the Capitol today, what were some of your thoughts?

WZ: I enjoyed my time here. I didn't like to campaign, but I did enjoy being here. Things have changed a lot since then. You may remember that for many years, the legislature only met once every two years. Then I think it was during John Anderson's time, I can't remember the dates for sure, but they started having a budget session on the off-numbered year, a regular session on the even year, and a budget session of thirty days on the off year, and that system was still in existence when I came here.

Then the budget session kept getting extended because we weren't getting our business done. So then it became a regular session eventually every year like it is now.

DW: Right. And also when you served in the House, your office was your desk.

WZ: In the House, we only had our desk, no offices, no telephones. There was a post office in the House right outside the door. There was a secretarial pool, but if you didn't have seniority, you didn't get anything done in the pool. I can't remember that I was ever able to use the pool when I was a freshman. I didn't have an office until I came to the Senate. Then I had an office.

DW: If you wanted a letter written, you wrote it.

WZ: That's right. And I didn't write very many.

DW: Well, as we've discussed, you have seen more change than probably anybody that we've interviewed in this entire process, starting from the way that it used to be and then after the court decision where we have districts today. We're just so delighted that you were able to come here today and share some of your thoughts and your memories of this building. Again, as I said earlier, I remember you coming to our house and campaigning. That was always a big deal. It's funny how those little things stick in your life.

WZ: I remember your mother. She was active.

DW: Yes, very, very active, as her parents were. Her father served in the Missouri House and as a County Commissioner and as Sheriff. So she grew up going to campaign events all of her life. That's just one of those memories that just get embedded in you, and you remember.

Wayne, I first want to thank you for your service to the country in the United States Air Force. I appreciate that immensely, and I want to thank you for your service here in the Kansas House and Senate. And as we get ready to close, we have a great democracy, and it's because of people like Wayne who have served this country, served in the state that we have a democracy that's alive and well today.

Wayne, thank you very much.

WZ: Thank you.

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