Alan Conroy: Good afternoon. The date is September 16th, 2022, around 1:00, and we're in the Senate Chamber of the Kansas State House 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, a central nonpartisan research and budget staff for the legislature. Currently I'm with the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System.

Today I'm privileged to interview Senator Anthony Hensley who holds the record for serving forty-four years in the Kansas legislature. I believe he started out in 1977. He served sixteen years in the House, and then he had the opportunity to come over to the other side of the rotunda and served twenty-eight years in the Senate. I believe maybe you were House Majority Whip in 1992?

Anthony Hensley: That's correct.

AC: And then, of course, was Democratic leader for the Senate for twenty-four years. I believe that's the longest ever for somebody serving in that position. And over that time, those forty-four years, he had the experience to serve in I believe four special sessions, some longer than others.

AH: Actually, I think it was five.

AC: '89, Hayden. 2005, Sebelius, 2013, Brownback, 2020 Kelly, and then there must have been one more in there unfortunately that I missed.

AH: Yes, I actually brought that list, and I can look at it and tell you for sure.[1]

AC: And I'm going to be conducting this interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing legislators, and the interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators. The interviews are funded in part by a grant from Humanities Kansas. The audio and video equipment are being operated by former House Speaker Pro Tem David Heinemann, and Mary Torrence, former Revisor of Statutes, assisted in the research for this interview as did the Kansas State Library.

So going to the beginning, Senator Hensley was born in Topeka, I believe. In fact, he may have just had a birthday here—

AH: Two weeks ago today.

AC: You graduated from Highland Park High School here in Topeka, and then you graduated from Washburn University with a bachelor's degree in political science, and then later on, of course you were a special education teacher for a long time for USD 501. And then you also then went back and got your master's degree in special education from Kansas State University, and through the years, I'm sure you're involved in a lot of different boards and committees and so forth. Just some of them I noticed, you were on the board of Breakthrough House here in Topeka, the Highland Park Baseball Association, the Kansas American Amateur Baseball Association, the Topeka Baseball and Softball Association—I think a theme there, and we can talk about your affinity for baseball and softball—the Kansas and Topeka National Educational

Association, the Legal Aid Society of Topeka. You were a precinct committee man starting in 1976 for many years. You were on the Second Congressional Democrat Central Committee as chairman, the Shawnee County Democrat Central Committee as chairman, the Kansas Council on Employment and training. You're married to Deborah. You have one daughter, and is it one grandchild?

AH: Three granddaughters.

AC: I always have to think, after forty-four years in public service, your wife Deborah must be a saint to have supported you those forty-four years.

AH: Without any question.

AC: So you were first elected to the Kansas House in 1976, and as I said, you served in that Chamber for the next eight sessions or sixteen years. You represented District 58 that covers—was all of it in Shawnee County?

AH: Yes. And it was the East Topeka Highland Park area of the city and then went out into the Shawnee Heights area.

AC: While in the House, you served on numerous committees, and we'll talk about more about the committees, but Federal and State Affairs, Education, the good old Legislative Educational Planning Commission, the 1202 Commission, Appropriations, Labor and Industry, which you were actually chair of that one, if I believe.

AH: That's right.

AC: Of course, on reapportionment and good old pensions, investments, and benefits as well. And then in June in 1992, you were appointed to the Senate to represent District 19, and Shawnee Douglas at that time?

AH: At that time, it was a lot of Douglas and actually some of Jefferson, and then of course, the bulk of the east side of Shawnee County.

AC: And that appointment was created by the resignation of Senator Nancy Parrish.

AH: Right.

AC: So you took her seat.

AH: Governor Finney had appointed her to be Secretary of Revenue.

AC: So over the twenty-eight years in the Senate, of course, you also served on numerous committees—Education, Commerce, Federal and State Affairs, Health Care Reform, Legislative Oversight Committee, Post-Audit, Confirmation Oversight, Transportation, Pensions, Benefits, and Investments, Investment and Taxation, and Ways and Means.

So all that, quite a lot of information there, a lot of public service. So maybe just going way back, maybe something about your life before you even got to the legislature. I think we talked about you were born and raised in Topeka, graduated from Washburn, clearly active in baseball, softball area.

AH: My parents moved into 2226 Virginia, which was the house I grew up in and actually sold it after my mother passed away, but I lived in that house a cumulative of fifty-two years over the time because after my dad passed away in '81, she remarried, and they built a new house, and I moved into the old homestead.

Growing up, I would have to characterize my dad, Harland Hensley, as a Yellow Dog Democrat, meaning that he would rather vote for a yellow dog than vote for a Republican quite frankly. And so I suppose that's where I got—he influenced me into being a Democrat. He was from Missouri, and I can remember he always said that the first vote that he cast for president was for Harry Truman who was also from Missouri.

AC: Sure.

AH: And he said that everybody he knew was going to vote for Truman, but nobody thought that Truman was going to win. If you remember, Truman pulled a major political upset in 1948. Nobody gave him the chance to win, but he won.

The other thing that I've always said is that I learned profanity because of Richard Nixon because my dad, when Richard Nixon came on TV, there were words that came out of my dad's mouth that we'd never heard before. And the happiest days of my dad's life was when he got married, when his four children were born, and the day that Richard Nixon climbed the stairs to get in the helicopter to go back to California.

AC: Was your dad or mother, either one, involved in politics in a formal way?

AH: Well, Dad was later on. He became the treasurer of the local party. But they really weren't that active until I got active. I taught school in El Dorado right out of college. I graduated from Washburn. I taught school for a year. And then I came back, and we talked it over, and I decided, "I think I'm going to run for the House of Representatives."

So I went to the local County Chairman, a guy named Perry Proffitt, and he lent me the computer print-out of the voters. I didn't realize I could get that at the Elections Office, and me and my grandmother, my dad's mother sat down at the dining room table, and we made out these cards. You could see 58, the 58th District by the voter—we made out these handwritten cards of all of the Democratic voters that I was going to go talk to because I was challenging an incumbent, a Democrat in the primary.

And lo and behold, I won. I just went out and knocked on doors and won the election. I think I had 57 percent.

AC: Was it Ken Marshall? Is that right?

AH: Ken Marshall. I really didn't know him, and I didn't say anything bad about him. I just went out and hustled. Man, that summer, it was hot. It was 100 degrees in the shade. But the more I knocked on doors, I got some very good reception. If people didn't know me, they would know a member of my family. I had three siblings.

As I say, I won. The night that they called the election, I think the one person that was the most surprised that I won was my mother. she kept saying, "I can't believe you won. I can't believe you won." I said, "Well, get over it. I won."

The 58th District was a heavily Democratic district. So the general was a pretty much foregone conclusion.

AC: I was trying to remember if there was even a general election in '76.

AH: There was in '76. I was actually—the only time I was ever completely unopposed in the primary and in the general was in the 1988 election. I had a free ride in both. But I was never unopposed in the general for the Senate.

AC: Deon Kayhill was in the general election in '76.

AH: That's right. That's exactly right.

AC: And here it's interesting, just reading some of the stuff that you mentioned, Richard Nixon, but I understand if the clips are right, that you got to go to, it must have been the National American Legion Boys State.

AH: Boys Nation, yes.

AC: You got to meet or see Richard Nixon.

AH: I actually went to Boys State. It was over at KU, and I got elected Lieutenant Governor. And the reason I did that, I ran for that office was that previously, the Governor, the guy who had been elected Governor didn't get elected to Boys Nation. So it was kind of a traumatic experience, and they said, "Okay, from now on, the Governor is disqualified to go to Boys Nation."

When I heard that, I said, "I'm going to run for Lieutenant Governor because my end goal was to go to Washington, DC," and a guy named Paul Carrter who came back and worked for KU years later, he lived over in Lawrence. He and I were the two US Senators from Kansas, and I did meet Richard Nixon in the Rose Garden at the White House, and they took a photograph of us.

I still have that photograph. I should have brought it today. I showed it to my dad, and he didn't really appreciate it all that much. Nonetheless, it was an honor to meet the president of the United States.

AC: I've got to digress a second. Did you have any Truman memorabilia from any of his campaigns when he ran?

AH: I've got a lot of political memorabilia. Right now it's in a closet in the house where I live, but I need to—I attended five Democratic National Conventions. I need to try to get that out and get that framed as well. I never had an opportunity to do that, but now that I'm retired, I have time on my hands when I can do that.

AC: So as you're starting out or maybe even later on, was there some sort of mentor in politics or somebody that maybe when you were younger, you kind of aspired to be like besides, even though you met Richard Nixon, maybe somebody else?

AH: Well, of course, my dad was a mentor. When I started out, the local County Chairman was a guy named Bob Tilton. He was an attorney here in town. We used to call him Big Daddy because he was a big man. He had experience in AAU Boxing. He was a boxer. But Tilton was really a mentor for me. In fact, in 1978, I did run unopposed in the general, and he hired me to run the voter registration get-out-the-vote effort for the local party.

Of course, that year, in '78, was when John Carlin got elected Governor. And I will never forget this as long as I live, about two weeks before the election, Tilton said, "Carlin's going to win."

AC: Did you believe it?

AH: Nobody believed it. But he did, and we got a really good get-out-the-vote effort for Carlin in Shawnee County.

The other thing, if I could just back up a minute, when I walked into the place in 1977, I was a member of the majority party, the first time in sixty-four years that the Democrats had actually gained the majority in the House, and I always tell people the first vote that I cast in the legislature was for John Carlin to be the Speaker of the House. And then the second vote I cast was for Jim Slattery, who then went on to Congress, to be the Speaker Pro Tem. So I didn't know any different.

AC: Did you get worked over by any of the other candidates much?

AH: Yes, there was a campaign. Actually I think Carlin might have been unopposed. But there were other elections for leadership. But I didn't know any difference. I was in the majority, and we had a 65/60 majority. Carlin, that lasted two years because then Carlin two years later was elected Governor. And then of course, I've served in the House during the eight years that he was actually in office as governor.

I think what happened in '76 was the fact that Jimmy Carter ran well in Kansas because Gerald Ford had pardoned Richard Nixon for the Watergate scandal, and Carter carried—I think he carried about 45 percent of the vote. So that helped. His coattails helped us.

And then, of course, in the Senate, the numbers were 21-19. There were 21 Republicans and 19 Democrats. So ’76 was a good election year for Democrats in Kansas.

AC: You had Martha Keys, Dan Glickman, of course, Joan Finney as State Treasurer.

AH: Right. We had a really good ticket that year and did really well in the elections.

AC: I think I saw in that very first, your first House election, I think you spent $868.

AH: That’s right.

AC: Mainly on postcards and postage.

AH: That’s exactly right.

AC: And maybe new shoes as you walked the district.

AH: That’s exactly right. It was $868.

AC: And then in 2020, I think it was close to $120,000.

AH: Yes, it’s amazing, the cost of campaigns, and how they’ve gone up over the years. And the other things in terms of the history that I always like to talk about is 1977 was the first time in sixty-four years that the Democrats had control of the House. The previous time was in 1913. And in that election, if you recall your US history, the 1912 election, on the Republican side, William Howard Taft had run for re-election, and Teddy Roosevelt didn’t like him. So he formed the Bull Moose Party which split the Republican vote even in Kansas. So Woodrow Wilson, the Democrat, actually won Kansas in the 1912 election.

As a consequence, the Democrats picked up the House, the Senate, and the Governor’s Office. George Hodges got elected governor, and that’s the only time in Kansas history that something like that had happened.

AC: Interesting. I noticed Ken Marshall, he ran against you in ’76. He ran against you in ’78.

AH: Right.

AC: And then Juanita Marshall ran against you in 1984.

AH: Right.

AC: But when you think about those eight elections, of course, getting re-elected every time on the House side, certainly you must have been doing something right for your constituents. They kept sending you back to the State House.

AH: Well, I worked at it very hard and always went out and knocked on doors. When you talk about my wife being a saint, she was as good a door-to-door campaigner as I ever knew, too. She was better than me in terms of being able to go out and meet people and talk to them. She was very, very helpful through the years.

AC: One question I think at some point I always kind of like to ask is kind of that classic question, do legislators represent their constituents or do legislators represent your personal views?

AH: Both, yes, when it comes down to it. Oftentimes you don't know for sure how your constituents feel about a particular issue, and so you've got to do what you think is in their best interest. That's how you vote.

AC: Doing a little research, looking at that, 1977 House membership, the roster of the House, I mean, looking down some of the names, Bogina, Braden, Bunten, Carlin, Herman Dillon, Sandy Duncan, Mike Glover, Mike Hayden, David Heinemann, Pat Hurley, Norman Justice.

AH: We had in the House Democratic Caucus, we had Justice, Love, and Wisdom, all three from Wyandotte County.

AC: Something the other party couldn't say they had.

AH: No. Justice, Love, and Wisdom. Speaking of Herman Dillon, Herman became a real close personal friend of mine. In fact, he and I served in the Majority twice, not only in '77 and '78, but again in '91 and '92. And in '91 and '92, we both became committee chairmen, and Herman was the chairman of the Transportation Committee. He was a Teamster truck driver. So there was no better person who knows highways than a Teamster truck driver. And he actually drove for the Graves trucking line, Bill Graves's father's trucking line, which I thought was real ironic, too.

I also point out to another guy that was with us in that majority was a guy named Darrel Webb who became Chairman of the State Building Construction Committee. He was a pipe fitter. So there isn't anybody better that knows building construction than a pipe fitter.

So we had a lot of working class people that were part of that Democratic Caucus, and we pretty much wore that on our sleeve in terms of how we felt about working people and unions in particular.

AC: You look at Ruth Luzatti, Phil Martin, Bill Reardon, Jamie Schwartz, Jack Shriver, Slattery, Turnquist, Weaver, on down the list. It was quite an interesting group to start out with.

AH: Bill Reardon and I became real good friends, too. Another part of that, he w

asn't in the majority with us, but he came to the House, the Democratic Caucus was a guy named Bill Brady who's now a lobbyist. We all became real good friends and still talk to one another. I actually watched Reardon's interview the other day for this Oral History Project. He's quite a

storyteller. He's got such an interesting background, coming from the political family he did in Kansas City, Kansas.

AC: So you got elected to the House. You're in the majority. I mean, you may have thought this was the way it was always going to be, but do you remember that first time you went to the microphone in the well of the House?

AH: I don't recall exactly what the issue was. I do remember going to the microphone. I was pretty nervous. But I do remember one of the first bills that I introduced. It was House Bill 2110, and it was an act to increase the Kansas minimum wage. As I recall, I've written this down, at that time, the Kansas minimum wage was $1.60 an hour. And the bill would have increased it to $2.65 an hour, and that increase actually did not pass until 1983.

AC: Yes. I think just looking through the number of bills and resolutions that you authored through the years, and if my research is close, you were just shy of 1,000 bills, resolutions.

AH: That doesn't surprise me, yes. Some I introduced over and over and over, too.

AC: I was going to say there were some—

AH: They didn't get anywhere, you know?

AC: I think 1988 was the highest. You had sixty-three introductions.

AH: Wow. I didn't realize that.

AC: I'm sure you kept the revisors very busy.

AH: I did, with bills and floor amendments, too.

AC: So you get in the House. You're in the majority. You're on these committees again during your House career, Federal and State Affairs, Education, Labor and Industry, that 1202 Commission, Reapportionment, Appropriations.

AH: Well, I was on the Redistricting Committee every time that we did redistricting.

AC: Yes.

AH: The first time I recall we did redistricting was in 1979, which seems very strange because we had what was called the Agricultural Census, and we always did redistricting in the last year of the decade, which you'd think you'd use the US Census, but the County Appraisers did the census for redistricting purposes, and then we drew House, Senate, and Congressional maps based upon that census.

Well, that census was abolished by the legislature in the early eighties. So we're coming up on the last year of the decade again in the eighties, and everybody's saying, "How are we going to

do the census?" So we spent I think it was a couple million dollars to let the Secretary of State do a census, and so we had those numbers then for the '89 redistricting.

And then we amended the Constitution to use the federal census so we could then once again do redistricting in 1992. And so we got in synch with the rest of the country. Those were three of the redistricting efforts that I went through in the House. I always kept the same number, the 58th District because I was on the committee. And then two other times, I can talk about those, we did it when I was the Senate Democratic leader. We were able to use—we did it in 2002 and 2012. Those were pretty amazing experiences when we went through that process in those two sessions.

AC: When you think about reapportionment now in both chambers, was the process very similar? Was it 2012 when the Court had to step in and do it? I guess I've always heard that reapportionment, redistricting is probably the purest political thing.

AH: It is as raw partisan politics as you can get. The only difference was in the Senate in 2002 and 2012, it became more of a bipartisan effort than it normally would have. And let me explain what I mean by that. In 2002, Dave Kerr was president of the Senate, and their leadership drew a Senate map that would have collapsed the only Democrat out in western Kansas, Janis Lee's district, and put her in with Stan Clark. So they would have to run against each other in the general election in 2004.

Well, he miscalculated because they were personal friends. So we put together a coalition. It was a pretty amazing coalition of ten Democrats and eleven conservative Republicans because Stan was a conservative, and he had a pretty good following in the Senate. So we had ten of us and eleven of them, and of course, twenty-one is the magic number in the Senate to pass a bill.

Through this coalition, we basically had what I call a good old-fashioned horse trade. Janis was allowed to pick whatever Republican she wanted to run against out in Western Kansas. That's how that district would have been drawn. There was a new district in Johnson County because of the population shift in the state that way. So the Republicans, the conservative Republicans got to draw that new Senate seat in Johnson County. So that was the trade-off.

On—I'll never forget the day because it was Valentine's Day, February 14, 2002, we passed that bill, 21-19 over the objections of Senator Kerr and the more moderate Republicans.

AC: Do you think they were surprised at that?

AH: I think they were surprised, yes. As it turned out, Bill Graves vetoed that bill. It was Senate Bill 379, I think, because I recall the bill number. And what Governor Graves did for us was real beneficial. In his veto message, he stated his specific objections to the map. And so we went back to the drawing board. They were pretty minor objections. They didn't tip the map in favor of one way or the other. So we made those corrections to the next map, and that was brought out of committee. At that time, the map passed on final action 28-12, which then was a veto proof number. Remember you had to have twenty-seven votes to override the Governor's veto. We passed the map then in 2002.

But then in 2012, the tables kind of reversed themselves, and we as a coalition worked with the moderate Republicans in 2012. I've always said I will dance with whoever wants to bring me to the dance. You know what I mean? If it's the conservatives or the moderates or whatever the case may be, I'm willing to work with either side. And that was an advantage to the minority Democrats in the Senate. We could leverage our votes, you know, and work with either one of the two factions.

AC: Sure, because most of those years when you were the Senate Democrat leader, those number of Democrat senators, eight to thirteenish—

AH: Our high-water mark was thirteen. We actually did go down to eight at one point, and people would say, "How could you possibly work with a 32-8 Senate?" My response always was, "You know, it could be worse." At one time, the Senate was 39-1. There was one Democrat in the Senate, and he was the Minority Leader by default. The guy's name was John Potucek. I've done the research on him. He was from Wellington, Kansas. He walked in here—this was after the '44 election. It was Franklin Roosevelt's last election. And Potucek walked in here in 1945 as the Minority Leader, 39:1.

The interesting thing about him is the first bill that he introduced was to abolish the Kansas income tax, which was rather ironic inasmuch as we've had such a debate here in this chamber over the income tax. I don't think I would have voted for Potucek's bill, by the way. But that's the interesting history.

Then over the decades, the numbers grew and grew and grew. At one time, like I say, it was 21-19 in the Senate back in '77. But our numbers dwindled over time. What was frustrating, I would have to go out and try to recruit people to run for the Senate. A lot of people think that somehow the Democratic Party is responsible for that, but the Senate Democratic leader is the main recruiter. So I'd go out and recruit people and ask them to sign on the dotted line and run for the Senate.

We were always at mercy with the presidential election year because we always ran at the same time that there was a presidential election. So as the presidential election went, so did the Senate.

AC: Did you ever have much financial support to offer those potential candidates?

AH: We had to raise money, and we asked them to go out and raise money as well. When I first came to the Senate, we had gone from eighteen—this was in 1992, when we walked into the '93 session, we had gone from 18 to 13. We lost five seats, and there is a reason for every one of those losses. I won't get into that. We had pretty good numbers but went down to 13. As I say, all the time I was in the Senate, that was really our high-water mark, 13. But it could be worse.

AC: That one! So in '92, you took over Nancy Parrish's seat. And that district again, was that eastern Shawnee, Douglas?

AH:&Primarily eastern Shawnee and Douglas. And then later Osage County was added through one of the redistricting years. I think Osage County would have been added in 2012, I believe was when that was added. I ended up with all of Osage County actually in the 2012 redistricting.

AC: Yes. Again, in that general election in ’92, you beat Walt Meyers 64-36 percent. I’m not sure if you even had a primary opponent any time you ran for the Senate.

AH: I didn’t, no. One other thing that I might point out, since you mentioned the fact that I was County Chairman for the Democratic Party here. I was County Chairman in 1982 through ’86, and I like to tell this story because it involves somebody who has been with this Oral History Project, my friend Joan Wagnon.

Our incumbent Democrat in the House in the 55th District here in Topeka was a local attorney who had run into some legal problems, and he was nominated in August of ’82 for the House. I think it was for either his third or fourth term. He informed me that he had to withdraw from his candidacy.

Well, I immediately thought, “We ought to get Joan Wagnon to run for that seat.” It’s the Washburn University seat, and, of course, her husband taught at Washburn University. At that time, she was Executive Vice President or Executive Director of the YWCA. I thought she’d be a perfect candidate.

I called her husband Bill and I said, “Would Joan be interested in running?” because I knew the incumbent was going to withdraw. And Bill said, “Well, I think she would.” I think even the Capitol Journal called—she was out of town at the time—but called Bill and Bill said, “Yes, she’s going to run.” I’m not sure Joan even knew that.

AC: Uh oh.

AH: So Joan comes back into town, and I talk to her. She said yes, she’d run. I remember this like it was yesterday. September the 1st, 1982, that was the last possible day that we could get her on the ballot. So we had to have a precinct election. The precinct people from that district then would have to choose.

Well, she had two or three opponents, but she ended up winning I think by one vote actually. And just to confirm that, I went back to the State Historical Society, and I found the article.

AC: I see that.

AH: “Wagnon Picked to Run in the 55th District.” Now, granted, that was forty years ago, and I told Joan about this the other day. She argued with me. She said, “No, I won by more than one vote,” and I said, “I’m going to prove it to you,” and that’s exactly what this article says. She won by one vote. So I’ll give this to her when I see her again. I love telling that story because that was the role that the County Chairman played when you had those kind of challenges come up.

The other person that I'd like to take credit for recruiting to run for the House was Kathleen Sebelius in 1986. She pretty much decided she was going to without me having to persuade her. It was an open seat, and, of course, she won, and then went on to become governor.

AC: I did notice in that 1992 campaign, there you got up to $33,000 on campaign expenditures.

AH: You're keeping track, yes.

AC: It's creeping up from $868, now we're at $33,000.

AH: Yes, that's it.

AC: But again, as you look at the list of the senators that you joined in this chamber: Bogina, Bond, Brady, Burke, Christine Downey, Tim Emert, Paul Feliciano, Sheila Frahm, Jerry Karr, Dave Kerr, Janis Lee, Jerry Moran, Steve Morris, Mark Parkinson, Marge Petty, Sandy Praeger, Dick Rock, Alicia Salisbury, Todd Tiahrt, Bob Vancrum.

AH: Sheila Frahm, when I came in in '93, Sheila Frahm was the Majority Leader, and Bud Burke was President of the Senate. He was in his second term as President of the Senate. Then, of course, as we know, Bill Graves when he was elected Governor, picked Sheila to be his Lieutenant Governor. And then she went on to the US Senate. She was appointed after Bob Dole dropped out to run for President.

But the person who replaced Sheila Frahm as Majority Leader was Jerry Moran, and I became really good friends with Jerry. I wasn't the Minority Leader obviously then. I was just a rank-and-file Senator, but Jerry always looked at me—he represented Hays and Fort Hays State University, and he always looked to me on how he should vote on state employee issues, and I was very willing to tell him how to vote on those issues, and he followed me most of the time on those issues. He would probably be embarrassed if he heard me tell that story, but I'm sorry, Jerry. That was the way it was.

AC: I did notice through those 980 bills and resolutions, state employee, whether it's health insurance, the van pool, on down the list—

AH: They were very important to me. They were very important to me because I represented Topeka, and there's a lot of state employees in Topeka. In fact, one of my accomplishments in the House that I'm really proud of is the fact that we passed longevity. I introduced that bill in 1988. It was House Bill 2553, and my co-sponsor was a Republican, a local Republican named Ginger Barr. And the two of us were the main co-sponsors. It was Barr-Hensley, and then there were sixty-one other House members that co-sponsored it with us. So sixty-one and two is sixty-three, and that's the magic number in the House to pass a bill. We got sixty-three votes.

And Jim Braden was the Speaker at the time. We went to Braden and said, "We got sixty-three people that want longevity," and he said, "Well, then I'd better run the bill." So we ran the bill. We passed longevity. It was $40 a year up to—you had to have had ten years of service, $40 per year of service up to twenty-five years total. So let's do my math. If you were in for twenty-

years, that's $1,000. So I was very proud that I authored the longevity bill. There have been efforts to try to take it off the books, but it's still on. It's still on the books.

AC: So in the Senate, you were on Commerce, Education, Fed and State Affairs, Economic Development, Post-Audit, Confirmations, Utilities, Health Care Reform, Financial Institutions, Transportation, Kansas Security, Ways and Means, Pensions, Investments, and Benefits. So you really covered the waterfront. Was there any Senate committee that you wished - I guess as the Democrat Leader, you probably could have gotten on one, but were there any subject committees that you wished you would have been on. That's a pretty long list.

AH: I can't really think of any. I was on Taxation for a little while. I served with Janis Lee on that. She was always our ranking D on Taxation. I did introduce a tax bill that I thought was very important. Actually it was related to school finance. In 1997, when I first became Leader, I introduced a bill that would exempt the first $40,000 in valuation on a residential property from the statewide mill levy for schools.

I took that bill to the Senate Tax Committee, and Senator Bond who became president in '97, the same time I became the Democrat Leader. I'll never forget it; he asked me a question. He said, "Now why would I want to give my mother a tax break?" I said, "Well, I'm actually not thinking about my mother. I'm thinking about my mother-in-law because she lives in a house that's valued at maybe $20,000. So she would get a 100 percent tax break on this statewide school mill levy.

So it passed. It didn't pass at $40,000. It passed at $20,000, and ironically, just this past session, they increased that 20 to the original 40 that I introduced.

AC: It took a while to get there.

AH: Twenty-five years ago, yes. So it was a great tax break for low-income people in particular. I was pleased that twenty-five years later, the legislature decided to go back to my original idea.

AC: So talking about all of those committees, and I'm sure there's probably more than one, but just in terms of any way a particular Chair maybe ran their committee or allowed for I guess full and open debate or particularly as a minority party member that you had your seat at the table, and they let you—

AH: Well, let's look at the other side. I was on Labor and Industry over in the House, and I was ranking Democrat. I won't mention the gentleman's name, but I got really frustrated with him at times because he wouldn't allow for any sort of free and open debate. So when I became the Chairman of Labor and Industry, I said, "I'm not going to do things that way. I'm going to let people have their say-so," and I did.

Back then, in '91, '92, the major issue was reform of our workers compensation system because insurance rates on work comp had gone through the roof, and so we had to try to put together a bill that would deal with that issue. We didn't get it done in those two years. It wasn't until I came to the Senate in '93 that I was on the Commerce Committee as well as what it was called

over here, and I was ranking Democrat on the Commerce Committee, and we had a ten-member conference committee between the House and the Senate. We had five Senators and five House members, unusual.

AC: Yes.

AH: Mega-conference committee on that issue. I tell you, for probably three or four nights in a row, we met until like 4:00 in the morning. We met over in the old Supreme Court room to just hash all this out, and we finally were able to resolve our differences on work comp and pass a bill that wasn't the best for injured workers, but we were able to get some compromises in the process. We were able to pass that bill.

But I will never forget those long hours that we spent. Governor Finney was the governor at the time. She was very helpful in trying to move along the process.

AC: You mentioned a little bit about some of the Speakers and Presidents. Just looking back over the list, you started out with John Carlin.

AH: He was our first Speaker.

AC: The first Speaker that you served with and then Wendell Lady, Mike Hayden, Jim Braden, and Marvin Barkis.

AH: Marvin Barkis.

AC: On the Senate side, Bud Burke, Dick Bond, Dave Kerr, Steve Morris, and Susan Wagle-

—so ten leaders, Speakers, Presidents that you worked with.

AH: Actually, Alan, I had a count of that. In the forty-four years, I was here, I served with fourteen Speakers of the House, nine House Democratic leaders, seven Presidents of the Senate. I was in the House when Bob Talkington was over here, and three other Senate Democratic leaders.

I'd also like to point out the fact that in the forty-four years I was here, I served with ten governors, five Republicans and five Democrats. Ironically in terms of years, twenty-two years with a Republican governor and exactly twenty-two years with a Democratic governor. Isn't that remarkable?

AC: It is. I'm sure most people would not have guessed that in terms of Kansas.

AH: I think it goes to show you that the voters of Kansas like bipartisan government. In the six years that Democrats were in the majority party in the House, I was there four out of the six. There aren't too many people who can say that.

AC: Absolutely.

AH: And then I think the one record, as you pointed out, I think the one record that will never be broken is the fact that I was the Democratic leader for twenty-four years in the Senate and also served on the LCC for twenty-four years—Legislative Coordinating Council, and I served on the State Finance Council for twenty-four years.

AC: That has to be a record.

AH: And I think in large part, I lived right here in Topeka. I could go home at night and sleep in my own bed. My wife would fix dinner. That's what I admire about this process here in Kansas. We're a citizens' legislature.

AC: Yes.

AH: These people that come in from out of town, they've got to find a place to stay during the session. They commute back and forth on weekends and that type of thing. One of the former presidents of the Senate, Steve Morris, who became a personal friend of mine in the years that we worked together, he literally lived closer to three other state capitols than his own. So that's why I admire people from out of town who come up here for the ninety days and do this job.

AC: And at least currently, $88.66 a day.

AH: There's not a whole lot of pay in it. That's right.

I also worked in another profession that struggled for a paycheck, and that was the teaching profession as well. I spent forty-three years in the classroom, thirty of which we had a special education, special purpose school that was located out on the grounds of the Topeka State Hospital. And I always told people, they were behavioral disorders in adolescents who I dealt with. When I took my leave from that teaching job out there, I went from one crazy place to another crazy place here in the Kansas legislature. I like to tell that story.

AC: Those years, you mentioned some of that relationship, working particularly on the Senate side, those Senate presidents while you were the Democrat leader, some maybe that were easier to work with than others? I know you mentioned some personal friendships.

AH: When I came in to leadership, I came in with Dick Bond, the newly elected President, and Tim Emert who was the Majority Leader. And before that, I was challenging Jerry Karr in our caucus. Jerry had been the minority leader. Jerry was a great guy, Rest in Peace. I challenged him. I told him I really wanted to try to get more seats for one thing, have more Democrats in the Senate. So I was able to successfully come out of that caucus.

Once I did that, I will never forget, even before that, Bond had talked to me. He said, "Hey, I'll tell you what, if I don't come out of the Republican caucus"—it is a constitutional office, the President of the Senate. "I'd like the Democrats maybe to vote with me. We'd form a coalition." And I said, "Dick, you know, we've talked about stuff like that. That's a pretty hard thing to do." He said, "Well, think about it."

So he came out of the caucus. Bond had ten votes. A guy named Mike Harris had nine votes, and Dave Kerr had eight votes. That's the twenty-seven in the Senate, and then Bond ended up winning on their second ballot, 15-12. So we didn't have to form that coalition.

But I really enjoyed working with Dick Bond and Steve Morris, too. Kerr and I had some issues, and I won't go into any of that, but Steve was there. Dick was there for four years. Dave was there for four years, and then of course, Morris was there for eight years.

Can I tell you a Dick Bond story?

AC: Absolutely.

AH: This is one of my favorites. Dick wanted and the governor, Governor Graves wanted to pass another comprehensive transportation bill. So I went into Dick's office, and I had Marge Petty with me. She was the ranking D on Ways and Means. I had Janis Lee who was the ranking D on Tax.

Before we went in there, I said, "We're going to walk out of this meeting," and they said, "What?" I said, "Yes, just bear with me." I said, "When I get up to walk out, you've got to go with me because if you don't, I'll look like a fool."

So we go in there. I'll never forget. Dick had a one-pager with the transportation plan. He said, "What do you think?" and I said, "Well, I have a question." He said, "What's that?" I said, "When's the conference committee on school finance going to meet?" and he said, "Well, what's that got to do with this?" and I said, "Well, you want our votes for Transportation, and we'd like to have your votes for School Finance because we'd like to put more money on the base."

"We don't do those kinds of things." I said, "Are you kidding me, Dick?" I said, "We do those kinds of things all the time, especially when it comes to putting a budget together." I said, "I guess this meeting's over." So I got up and walked out, and the two ladies walked out with me.

So I went over to the House across the rotunda. I went over to the House to talk to my friend Bill Reardon who was the ranking D on Education. We were both on the conference committee. We just never had met. I was telling Reardon this story. About that time, an assistant with the Speaker came over and said, "Hey, Bill, the School Finance Conference Committee is going to meet in fifteen minutes." And Bill looked at me and said, "You got it done!" I said, "We'll see. We'll see."

So we go in the conference, and typical of your first conference committee meeting, the research staff goes through the Senate position and then goes through the House position, and that's all we did. So I get another called from Bond. He wants me to come over to his office. So I go over there, and he says, "Well, the Conference Committee met." I said, "I know. I was there. I'm on it, but we didn't do anything." He said, "What is it that you want?" and I said, "Well, my idea is $50 on the base for two years." "We can't do that." I said, "Why can't we?" I said, "If we can pass a ten-year transportation plan, surely we can pass a two-year school finance plan," and he said, "Okay, we'll do it." He agreed to it.

I said, "Well, you've got to get the man on the second floor to agree to it, too, which he did, and that's what we got. We passed a thirteen-billion-dollar transportation plan for ten years and $50 on the base for two years in a row, the first multiyear school finance plan that I can remember ever passed.

AC: Were you surprised he eventually said yes?

AH: Not really. It was the art of the deal. I hate to use a Trump phrase, but it was the art of the deal, and Dick was a master of being able to try to put together a deal. And that was a perfect deal because we could vote for the Transportation Plan, and they could vote for the School Finance Plan. That's my favorite Dick Bond story right there.

AC:&Any other Steve Morris experiences that come to mind?

AH:&The one Steve Morris story I tell is maybe not as funny. But we had killed Sam Brownback's tax cuts on the floor of the Senate. It was 20-20, the bare minimum. Pete Brungardt from Salina gave this great explanation about how we couldn't afford to cut taxes this much at the expense of education and highways and the social safety net, the services safety net.

&I'm sitting at my desk, and Morris comes around the corner. He motions for me to come into his office. I go into his office. I'm sitting at one end of this long conference table, and he's at the other end. And he says, "I just talked to the governor, and he's real upset about the vote." I said, "Well, so what?" He said, "Well, he wants us to reconsider," and I said, "What did you tell him?" And he said, "I told him we'd reconsider." I said, "That's a big mistake. You can't do this because if you do, and we send that bill to the House"—it was a House bill that we had amended—"the House will concur on the Senate amendments and send it to the Governor." And Steve said, "Well, the Governor assured me that that wouldn't happen." And I said, "And you believed him?" And he said, "Well, I've got to trust him."

&And that's exactly what happened. The bill went back to the House. They concurred. It went to Brownback's desk, and he signed it into law. And then we were faced with these devastating budget cuts that had to take place. We had to balance the budget. The legislature had to take money out of the Highway Fund. We cut back on social services. It was one bad thing that happened after the other.

&To this day, Steve and I have talked about it, and he understands that it was a mistake to have sent that bill back to the House. I don't remember that bill number. I think I was trying to forget it.

AC: Block it out.

AH: And what was interesting about that, too, is that the very guy who had made this great explanation about why we should be voting against this bill, Senator Brungardt from Salina, made the motion to reconsider. I was tempted, this close to stand up and saying, "Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. You just made this explanation as to why we should vote no." But I didn't do that.

That's a moment in time that I just regret. Of course, later than, after the—since the 2016 primaries on the Republican side, there were enough moderates that got elected in that primary election that we were able to get the numbers to override, actually repeal those tax cuts. Since then, of course, the budget has gotten a lot better. We've got a huge surplus now that Governor Kelly has been able to use, and the legislature has taken the historic step of axing the food sales tax.

AC: When you think of the political persuasion, majority party, minority party, particularly the majority party when you were in the House, looking back, there was a—I think it was in '87, there was a Republican Reform Caucus, David Miller, Kerry Patrick, Susan Wagle.

AH: Well, we had what we called the Rebels. There were fifty-one House Democrats, and there were twelve guys—Kerry Patrick, David Miller, J. C. Long, Tim Shallenburger who became the Speaker. There were twelve of them. So fifty-one and twelve is sixty-three. There's your magic number.

And we basically controlled a lot of the operation of the House. We changed the rules at one point, made it easier to bring bills out of committee and those type of things. My perception always was was that David Miller was kind of the leader of that group. And then of course, he ended up running against Bill Graves in '98. He was the sitting Republican State Chairman at the time and ran against Graves when he ran for re-election.

Bill Graves was a good governor. I enjoyed working with him as the Democratic leader although I will say he didn't spend as much of his political capital that he could have in some areas. The last conversation I had with Bill Graves as governor, I don't know if he remembers this, but he was able to get about two billion dollars' worth of what I call "nickel and dime tax cuts" done. But he told me, he said, "You know, if I had to do it all over again, I would have repealed the sales tax on food" because we had enough money at that time to be able to do that. Like I say, he may not remember that conversation, but I do.

AC: Wow. You mentioned governors. So Bennett, Carlin, Hayden, Finney, Graves, Sebelius, Parkinson—somewhere I read that you encouraged him that he should really run for governor. Of course, he succeeded Governor Sebelius.

AH: I actually encourage Kathleen to pick him as a running mate because John Moore wasn't going to run again. I met Mark—the first time I met Mark was when he was in high school at the Model United Nations down in Wichita, believe it or not. Then, of course, he went to Boys State. But I knew Mark early on and served with him here in the Senate.

AC: Right.

AH: He had decided then to switch parties. He was a former Kansas Republican Party Chairman and then switched parties and decided to run with Kathleen as Lieutenant Governor. I was hoping that he would run for Governor after she had left to become Secretary of Health and Human Services, but he just chose not to. That was the year that Sam Brownback got elected Governor.

Finney was a good governor. I thought—

AC: A tough governor?

AH: She was tough. I thought Kathleen did a really good job. I thought Bill Graves did a good job. And I truly believe my friend Laura Kelly has done a great job as governor, and I hope she gets re-elected.

A funny story about Finney. House Democrats on a Friday, the Shawnee County House Democrats on Friday afternoons typically stayed in their office. Everybody else had gone home for the weekend. We would stay in our office because everybody was gone so we could get stuff done.

This was in ’91. It was rumored that Governor Finney was going to veto our School Finance bill that we had passed, the reason being that she had demanded that they put in a mandatory vote for the local option budget, and we didn’t do that.

So I set up a meeting. I took it upon myself personally to set up a meeting with me and the Governor, Kathleen Sebelius, Joan Wagnon who was Tax Chair, George Gomez, Denise Everhart. So we went down to visit Joan Finney to ask her not to veto this bill.

And she got mad at us. At one point she said, “You know, I really don’t even like you people.” What do you say when the Governor says that to you? The only thing I knew to say was, “Governor, thanks for meeting with us.” The meeting was pretty much over.

So she vetoed that bill. Well, we were able to come back in the ’92 session, and we convinced her, “What if we put in a protest petition for the LOB?” So she agreed to that, and we passed a historic School Finance bill. It was unbelievable what we were able to accomplish. The property taxes were going out the roof for schools, and we were able to reduce property taxes. We had a mix of income and sales taxes to pay for that school finance bill. I’ve always believed that that bill stood the test of time but for it was underfunded through really a decade, and that’s why we ended up going to court as many times as we did. That’s a good Joan Finney story.

AC: I’m sure there’s several others. And you’ve touched on some of these things—school finance, Medicaid, redistricting, budget taxes, death penalty, I was thinking just looking through things.

AH: Well, the death penalty was around here for years, years and years. When Carlin became Governor, he was opposed to the death penalty, and the legislature kept sending him the death penalty, and he kept vetoing it. The death penalty ended up becoming law when Joan Finney, who was opposed to it as well, let it become law without her signature as I recall.

AC: Yes.

AH: Then it got kicked out by the courts, and here again, Mark Parkinson when he was in the Senate, was real instrumental in getting the death penalty back on the books, but it was

constitutional. It was declared unconstitutional, and then he was able to fashion a bill that made it constitutional.

AC: I mean, the lottery, gambling, medical malpractice caps, liquor laws, of course, abortion, public pensions, transportation.

AH: When I was in the House in the ’86 session, it was remarkable because we passed five Constitutional amendments to put on the ’86 ballot.

AC: Yes.

AH: We had liquor by the drink, parimutuel wagering, the lottery, classification, and it was an amendment to eliminate the self-executing powers of the Board of Education. That’s the only one that failed.

AC: I was going to say, “How many of those passed?”

AH: The other four. But to eliminate the self-executing powers of the State Board of Education. The lottery was kind of the new kid on the block. States were starting to enact lotteries and things like that. But parimutuel and liquor by the drink had been around for years, session after session.

I had a remarkable gentleman here in the process named Richard Taylor, Reverend Taylor who ran an organization called Kansans for Life at Its Best. He had a weekly TV program, and he railed against the demon rum, you know, the bad things that liquor caused. So we could never get liquor by the drink on the ballot.

A group of clever legislators got together, and they decided, “Rather than doing it by an amendment to the Constitution, let’s do it statutorily.” So they defined in statute what was the open saloon. That’s what the Constitution said. The open saloon was forever prohibited. So they defined the open saloon was if you did, I believe at least 30 percent of your business in the sale of food, then you weren’t an open saloon.

So in a roundabout way, they were able to get liquor by the drink on the books, and it was done when Reverend Taylor was out of state one night. Literally the bill passed the House, the Senate, and was signed into law the same night that it was done. I don’t remember the bill number, but I do remember how it happened.

Reverend Taylor was up in Nebraska, I think. So they said, “Well, he’s gone out of town. We can take advantage of this.” Now, of course, we’ve got liquor by the drink because it passed in ’86.

AC: Yes.

AH: We went through that whole period, too where we had classification and reappraisal. Property valuations were completely out of whack. Some hadn't been updated for twenty years. And Carlin was Governor, and Hayden was Governor when all this took place.

I contend because of the reappraisal issue in the 1990 election, Joan Finney beat two incumbent Governors—John Carlin in the Democratic primary and Mike Hayden in the general because of reappraisal and how angry—there was a shift in property taxes, mainly on the Main Street business people, and they were really angry, and they took that anger out on those two and then elected Joan Finney Governor.

AC: Did you see that coming?

AH: I remember the rally they had out on the south steps. The guy who ran against Hayden in that election was Nestor Weigand who was a real estate developer down in Wichita. It was a huge rally, and after the rally, I was walking on kind of the periphery out there, I thought to myself, "I think Hayden may be in trouble." And that was before the primary. Well, he was able to beat Weigand in the primary, and Finney beat Carlin in the primary and beat Hayden in the general.

AC: So thinking back over those forty-four years, was there one legislative session that was perhaps the most difficult that really, boy, by the end of this—

AH: I'd say 2012 because of the tax cuts. I mean, I'm no soothsayer. I don't have a crystal ball or anything, but I just felt that this was the wrong thing to do. We were going to go to Zero on income taxes for some of the business people, and I just felt like it was going to negatively impact our budget for years to come, and I was right. It did.

AC: So on the flip side, any sessions out of those forty-four, that may be like trying to pick a favorite child, that you were really proud of the accomplishments of the body?

AH: '92 obviously with school finance. That was really good. I enjoyed the process of redistricting in the 2002 session when we formed that coalition with the conservatives. I was working with Stan Clark and Tim Huelskamp, and we always said, "We're not even on a date here. We're dancing together because we have to #1 save the only Democrat in Western Kansas, and then create a new district where the conservatives could elect a new Senator."

There was a tremendous trust factor there. You had to be able to trust one another because I also remember when Senator Kerr called us into the office, called me and Janis into the office and said, "We'd be willing to work with you guys, if you want to pass this Senate map," and we said, "No, we've got to dance with those that brought us to the dance."

So that is a remarkable political story when you think of the rawest of political things that go on up here that we were able to form that kind of a coalition to be able to pass that Senate map. I just have fond memories of that because of how extraordinary it was that we were able to get past our differences on all the other issues we had and work together on that. And I made some really good friends through that process.

AC: Here's maybe kind of looking towards the future. Could that type of coalition, could that trust, could that be in this building next session or a couple of sessions from now?

AH: I don't think so, no. Unfortunately, things have changed. I think a lot of it is a reflection of what's going on in Washington DC and how divided government is there. Unfortunately, it's permeated into the legislature. You know, in the old days, you were able to agree to disagree. You were able to argue, and yet you still could socialize with one another. Nowadays, you don't even agree to disagree, it doesn't seem to me.

I have watched the legislature since I've left on TV. I just am very disappointed. I wish there was more coalition building and more negotiations that go on between the two parties or between the three parties, whatever the case may be.

AC: As you look back over the forty-four years, just the legislature as an institution. Has it become more efficient, more effective? Just I guess, I think about the logistics, the operations, whatever it's staffing or whatever it may be.

AH: We always had a great staff. I mean, that's another list that I made, thinking about it. You start with the Directors of Legislative Administrative Services. I served with four of them—Bill Bachmann, Emil Lutz, Jeff Russell, and Tom Day. And then the Revisor of Statutes, Fred Carmen, Arden Ensley, Norm Furse Mary Torrence, and Gordon Self. And then there were Revisors. I remember Jim Wilson, Don Hayward on Tax.

AC: Oh, yes.

AH: When I'd go into his office, he'd always tell me what he couldn't do. "You can't do that." Or even Avis.

AC: Avis!

AH: Do you remember Avis? Avis Schwartzman?

AC: Yes.

AH: On Education. "Avis, I've got a School Finance bill." "Well, you can't do that." Bill Edds and Jill Wolters.

AC: Yes.

AH: And then I served when Richard Ryan was downstairs in Research and Ben Barrett, a guy named Alan Conroy.

AC: Yes.

AH: Randy Gilliland and J. G. Scott. Then Tom Severn, Emalene Correll. I was actually afraid of her. Chris Courtwright, Bill Woolf, Hank Avila, and Mary Galligan. Mary Galligan was in

charge of two different redistricting deals, which is above and beyond the call of duty when you've got to deal with legislators on redistricting.

&So our staff was always real good. And I think that they have held up the institution to a very high standard, and that's another good thing about this process is they are nonpartisan. They don't try to play games. There's that rule that whatever you ask them to do, they're not to tell anybody else what you're doing, and they pretty much stuck to that. What else was part of your question?

AC: Just in terms of the process of the legislature, the rule-making or just efficiency, I guess.

AH: To use school finance as an example, I think that process really broke down unfortunately in recent years because Governor Brownback and the Republican leadership thought that our school funding formula was broken. It wasn't working anymore. They repealed it, and they implemented a two-year block grant plan that was an absolute disaster. So fortunately from the 2017 session, we more or less put that '92 formula back together based on base state aid per pupil and all the weightings that go in, either at risk or declining enrollment, those kinds of things.

And that's another story that I can tell. In '92, when we were putting together our School Finance Plan, it was in Barkis's office. He was the Speaker, of course. When we first put out our plan and looked at it, we didn't make it public, but we looked at it as a leadership. I'll never forget Kansas City, Kansas was a net loser. Of course, Bill Reardon was our education guru. I'll never forget looking over at him, and he was kind of sinking down into the couch.

Somebody said, "What we could do in other states was what they've done and come up with an at risk weighting. Maybe that would help out Kansas City, Kansas." So that's what we did. Kansas City, Kansas then came out as a winner. And I tell that story with some risk because around here it was always said, "Well, legislature shouldn't be making political decisions on school finance," you know? But in that case we did because we needed Bill Reardon's vote. So we were able to get that bill passed.

AC: I don't know if this is even a fair question. But out of all those areas that you touched on, whether it was education, if there was one perhaps that you're the proudest of your efforts, your accomplishments.

AH:&Well, I was always a big supporter of prevailing wage. Prevailing wage—

AC: I did see that, several bills.

AH: A lot of prevailing wage bills. Prevailing wage was actually passed in Kansas back in the 1890s. We were the first state to pass prevailing wages, and it had to do with the railroad being built across the state. So the legislature in its wisdom said, "We need to protect Kansas contractors and Kansas workers from out-of-state contractors and workers." So they passed prevailing age.

Well, years later. Congress followed suit and passed what was called Davis-Bacon. So years in the House, when Hayden became Governor in ’87, the legislature repealed prevailing wage, repealed the law that had been on the books since the 1890s. So we continued to make efforts to make sure that we could get that put back into the law.

So on each of the highway plans that we’ve had, we’ve always been able to get prevailing wage put into those. In fact, Hayden’s own Highway Plan in ’89, he had to reverse his course on that issue and put that in the ’89 Highway Plan.

When I was Chairman of Labor and Industry, prevailing wage, work comp, unemployment comp, all of those issues were very important to me because I represented working class people.

AC: One of the questions that we ask all the people that participate in this, it’s a required personal identity question. I’ll just read it, and then you can react any way you’d like. Personal identity is loosely defined as gender, age, race, class, sexual or gender orientation, and marital status. Did you experience times during your time in the legislature when you believed your personal identity influenced your ability to pass policy, work with fellow legislators, or provide constituent services? Did you ever think you were given committee assignments or tasks that you believed were really the functions of that personal identity?

AH: I don’t really recall. I mean, on the Senate side, there were times in our caucus when the majority of our caucus were women. I mean, we had—when we were at ten one time, we had six women and four men. I don’t know if personal identity really was as big of an issue. I know there was some publicity a few years back about sexual harassment particularly over on the House side, but I really believe that I don’t recall any issues of that nature.

AC: And then just maybe as we look over time, outside influences on the legislative process. I assume there’s always been some, but you know, whether it’s Koch Industry, Americans for Prosperity, any of those. I mean, I noticed in 1996, you had a 71 percent ranking from the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

AH: It was that high?

AC: It was in ’96. But of course then from the Kansas National Education Association, you were 100 percent, as you might expect. 2018, the Kansas Policy Institute, you had a 29 percent rating, but the Mainstream Coalition, you had a 100 percent.

Anyway, I guess just the outside influences regardless of the organization, but outside money, outside viewpoints that people, of course, are trying to advance. Has that changed? Maybe it’s always sort of been there in one form or another, maybe just not as prominent as perhaps it is now?

AH: It depends on that period of history, I guess. At one time, I don’t think it was a coincidence that the Atchison Topeka Santa Fe Railway office building was directly across the street from the Capitol building because the railroads ran the legislature at one time. There was remnants of that when I first came in.

But there's been outside influences. We have lobbyists that come into your office. I always had an open door policy when it came to lobbyists, and I was willing to listen to all sides and explain to them why or why not I'd be able to vote for their bill or amendment or whatever. It's just part of the—it's the nature of the beast. It's just part of the process.

The money influence has gotten I think in many respects out of hand, and I know after the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, it's really gotten out of hand, and I'm hopeful that at some point Congress can deal with that issue. I don't have a lot of expectation about that, but I think they should at the federal level.

Unfortunately, there'll always be money in politics. I just have always appreciated the fact that I get support from working people, whether they be teachers or electricians or pipe fitters or whatever the case may be, and I'm willing to accept that. When you talk about political contributions, Senator Kerr and I would go back and forth on the issue of Political Action Committees. We used to have debates on the floor of the Senate about that. He wanted to abolish PACs, and I didn't, which you think I would be just the opposite because as I explained to Senator Kerr and others here in the Senate, Political Action Committees are important to the process because it's a group of people, whether they're realtors or teachers who can kind of band their financial resources together, and have some influence in the process.

They were formed out of the fact that Bebe Rebozo was raising huge sums of money for Richard Nixon. That's why PACs were created in the first place. And a lot of us don't have those country club kind of friends that can give us $1,000 or whatever. In the Senate, it's $1,000; in the House, it's $500. So we depend upon the little people forming those PACs to be able to contribute money. That's how they get their skin in the game.

AC: Sure. Would you ever see yourself returning to public service in some manner? I know you're on the State Employees Health Care Commission. If any other opportunities came up?

AH: I'd never say never. It just depends on what the situation is. For me, years ago, I had to buy into one or the other—the school or non-school KPERS plan because I was a teacher and a legislator at the same time. I chose non-school, which meant that I couldn't get a pension until after I'd been in the legislature. So consequently now I'm enjoying some financial stability in retirement, more than I've ever had in my life, being a teacher and a legislator, both of which don't pay a whole lot.

So I'm enjoying retirement right now. I've got three granddaughters, one of whom has started at Washburn this year, and so it's been—

AC: Is she going into education?

AH: I'm not sure what she'll—I'm not real sure what she'll do. Tomorrow we go to the football game. She's a dancer on the dance team at Washburn. So we'll enjoy that. And my wife's 50th class reunion is this weekend, too. So we're pretty busy.

AC: If somebody stopped you on the street and said, "Hey, Senator Hensley, I'm thinking about running for the legislature," what advice would you give that person?

AH: I've been asked that question before. My standard answer was always, "Yes, I encourage you to run as long as you don't run in the 19th Senate District." You have a lot of sacrifices, time and in some cases money. If you're going to run for the legislature, at a real retail level, you've just got to go out and knock on doors and meet as many people as you can. Later in years, obviously, I was able to afford to put myself on TV and that kind of things, but particularly at the House level, you just have to go out and see people. That's not easy either.

AC: Any dog issues as you went from door to door perhaps?

AH: Yes, my wife actually—we were real lucky for years. It was in 2016 that we were down in the Oakland neighborhood, and she got attacked by a German shepherd. That's the only time that that's ever happened to us. She didn't go door to door after that because that was a pretty traumatic experience.

Door to door can be a real rewarding experience because you meet a lot of really nice, good people, and that's the way you do it in terms of running for the House in particular.

AC: Kansas people, particularly in the House, they expect their candidates, most of them, to come and knock on their door.

AH: Yes. They want to see you.

AC: That's right. Wow. For forty-four years, a tremendous public service to our state. You've touched on lots of different areas through that service. You've certainly I think made a difference. You have to feel proud of your forty-four years. What an accomplishment.

AH: Thank you.

AC: I've got to ask one last question. You were in the House; you were in the Senate. If you had your preference, one chamber over the other? Is there an Upper Chamber and a People's Chamber?

AH: Well, the House is more raucous. A guy's got to run every two years. Consequently, they're running for re-election all the time. The Senate's a four-year term. So you don't think of re-election as much for the first, at least couple of years. But my experience I think in the Senate has been the most rewarding because I was the Leader on the Democratic side for that long a time, and I served with a lot of really good people.

When I think back, Paul Feliciano, for example. Paul was here for thirty years, and he was a great advocate for the Wichita community. I loved serving with Oletha Faust-Goudeau and David Haley from Kansas City.

And it was rewarding because of my staff. I had some really good staff people. Tim Graham was Chief of Staff for a long time. I don't remember exactly how long, maybe ten years. Will Lawrence was my Chief of Staff. He's now the Governor's Chief of Staff. Bill Graves one time told me, he said, "What is it about you, Hensley? You're like the farm system for the Democrats. You farm all these people out." That was more or less the way it was.

Communications Directors. My last Communication Director was Lauren Tice Miller who serves on the Shawnee Heights School Board. She was really good. Ashley Anstaett, [now Ashley All] was my Communications Director. She recently ran the organization that defeated the constitutional amendment on abortion. She was the head of that organization, whatever it's called, the Constitutional Freedom Organization.

And then the boss of our office was Carolyn Campbell.

AC: Absolutely.

AH: Mrs. Campbell who is a legend in and of herself.

AC: Yes.

AH: She was on the 501 School Board for eight years and then served on the State Board of Education. I always said that when I was at school, she was on the State School Board, she was my boss, and then when I came up here, I was her boss. So a lot of good staff people that made the experience really rewarding.

That's what it's all about, the people that you come across and you work with. At one time, I had a—I did some research. I think at the end of the day, I served with I believe about 125 different senators over the tenure that I had in the Senate.

AC: That's a lot. Well, certainly a lot to be proud of, a tremendous public service. Clearly you devoted your entire life, either in 501 or here in this building, you touched a lot of lives. Certainly I think most people would give you the benefit of the doubt, and you left it better than when you left the building. So that's certainly something you can be proud of in terms of your public service, and that legacy will live on in terms of legislation.

AH: The best compliment that Sam Brownback ever paid me was when he was coming down the aisle for his last State of the State message. I'll never forget this because he shook my hand, as we always did, and he said, "You've been a worthy opponent," and I said, "Well, thank you, Governor."

AC: Clearly you've had lots of wonderful experiences, lots of memories that you really should think about perhaps compiling this in a book or maybe make a movie. I don't know who you'd get to play yourself.

AH: It depends on if Heinemann would film it. I've thought about a book. A friend of mine has offered to ghostwrite it, and there are things that would be in that book that I couldn't talk about

on air today because of the different characters that I came across over time. I've always said that the first chapter—people say that you save the best for last. I'm going to save the best for first. The first chapter would be on Herman Dillon and all the escapades of Herman Dillon.

AC: There were a few along the way, I bet.

AH: I don't think there's a day that goes by I don't think about something Herman Dillon did or something that Herman Dillon said or whatever the case may be.

Another character, a great personal friend, was Charles Laird, funny, had a great sense of humor.

AC: Yes.

AH: And was a really good legislator. He was a conservative Democrat. He was pro-life. I'm pro-choice. But we became famous friends.

Don Mainey in the House was also a real good friend of mine. And Charles is still living. Herman and Don, of course, have passed on.

But Janis Lee in the Senate. She was the Assistant Leader. We worked together like hand and glove. Me being from urban Kansas, her being from rural Kansas, it was just a great connection to have over there in that corner, where we sat.

AC: Yes. Lots went on over there in that corner.

AH: That's right. A lot went on, especially on School Finance. The fights that she'd have with John Vratil over here from Johnson County, and they became good friends. So even though you would fight, and you'd argue, you still had these personal relationships and friendships that are as good as gold. It made the whole thing very worthwhile.

AC: Well, on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, thank you very much for your time and effort to be here today. Clearly your own research, pulling some things together, I guess that teacher in you, those traits to be well prepared certainly showed itself today, and again thank you for forty-four years of public service. There's certainly lots to be proud of.

AH: Alan, thank you. Thank you for your service, too. I always thought of you as a VIP, as much as you lived in the 19th Senatorial District.

AC: That's right. Always my senator.

AH: Thanks a lot.

AC: Thank you for your time.

[End of File]

[1] The Revisor has a list of Special Sessions on their website. There have been 24. Hensley participated in 6 (1/4th) of the Special Sessions:

- 1987: Governor Hayden, 6 days. Attempt to enact a comprehensive highway plan.
- 1989: Governor Hayden, 2 days. Extend deadline to pay property taxes.
- 2005: Governor Sebelius, 12 days. Respond to a Kansas Supreme Court order regarding public school funding.
- 2013: Governor Brownback, 2 days. Respond to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling regarding criminal sentencing procedures used to impose a 50-year mandatory minimum term of imprisonment.
- 2016: Governor Brownback, 2 days. Respond to a Kansas Supreme Court order regarding public school funding.
- 2020: Governor Kelly, 2 days. Enact the governmental response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in Kansas.

