Joan Wagnon: Good afternoon. Today is January 14, 2022. I'm Joan Wagnon, Project Director for the Kansas Oral History Project, but I'm a substitute today for Interviewer Frances Jackson of Wichita who was detained and delayed by the weather. With me also is our videographer, former Representative David Heinemann who manages to keep all of these cameras moving well. We are in the House Chambers of the Kansas Statehouse, and this is an interview that's part of the Kansas Oral History Project's examining Diverse Voices in Policymaking. It's kind of a mouthful, but we're going to focus on diversity in this whole series of interviews.

And we hope to learn today about policy development in Kansas through the eyes of someone who has been intrinsically involved in that. Today, my interview is with the Honorable Ben Scott. Ben is an icon here in Topeka. He has pastored the East Side Church of God in Christ since the early 1970s. He has been the person that you go to for the NAACP. He's held numerous offices with them. He served on the USD 501 School Board, and as a precursor of that, was on the District Citizens Advisory Council and helped organize a number of things when school policy and politics in Topeka got complicated. We'll be talking about that today.

You have had really a lot of experiences, Ben, and I think I'll start by just asking you to introduce yourself. Look at the camera and tell people who you are as you see it.

Ben Scott: Okay. Well, I'm Ben Scott. I've been living here in the City of Topeka here for quite a few years. I've been active and involved in many things within the city, but I guess one of the things that has been extremely important to me since childhood days was the church and church activities because it was through the church that really enabled me to do so many other things that I didn't intend to do during my childhood days. But as I worked extremely hard within the church and in various activities, it was because of that, that the calling came to be a minister. I didn't know it was going to be exactly like it was, but by the help of the Good Lord, I was able to persevere, and it was through the ministry that really motivated me and gave me the patience to deal with the knowns and unknowns of life.

And it was because of that, that caused me also to get involved with so many things in the community in which was a part of my daily life as an activist because I've been an activist since I was very young. There's many things that happened during those years. So it was because of my activism that allowed me to get involved in many issues. I've always been concerned about our schools and about our communities, and it was in the early seventies that I got involved with some school activities.

And those school activities ended up with me and several school officials organizing a new advisory council to the Board of Education. It was called the DCAC—the District Citizens Advisory Council. It was through that council that I began to work within a school system. I was on many city boards and so forth and etc., It was DCAC that caused me to become interested. I wasn't a politician. I wasn't interested in [elected office] but because of the various things and activities, I was able to get involved. During the early nineties, I was appointed to the Board of Education. It was sort of interesting because there were, I think, a lawyer, and several other degreed people that was interviewed for the same position, and I walked away with it.

So it's been because of that, I've been able to move to various positions within our city and help to fulfill some of the missions that I've always wanted to do and be helpful.

JW: You know, I remember you as far back as in the seventies when I started paying attention to what was going on in the community. Is that about the time you moved to Topeka, when you founded the church in 1974? Or had you been here earlier than that?

BS: I had been here earlier. I came here in the early sixties, I think '62, to attend Washburn University.

JW: Oh, okay.

BS: That's what's really brought me here. My sisters and my brother-in-law wanted me to come here. So I came here and enrolled at Washburn.

JW: You came all the way from Houston.

BS: I came all the way from Houston.

JW: It was quite a change, I suspect from Houston and Harris County and Liberty, Texas to Topeka, Kansas.

BS: That's right. That's right. One of the interesting things that took place during this time was just traveling back and forth from Houston to Kansas, I found out what many people probably didn't realize or realized but didn't admit, that segregation was real. I can remember many times getting off the bus in Oklahoma and several places and having to go outside just to get a sandwich or to get a drink. Those were new experiences for me, and it was quite a bit of experiences, but they taught me great lessons.

JW: Let's talk a little bit about what it was like to go through the segregated school system in Liberty because you had, my guess is, all Black teachers?

BS: That's right.

JW: All Black principals and an all Black student body. What was it about coming up here that was different?

BS: Well, I think, and that was one of the stark differences because most of the jobs I had, the few jobs I had prior to coming here were jobs basically working in the cotton fields, working corn fields, and so forth. I remember my school days. I remember being around people almost every day that looked like me. We worked together and so forth, and when I came to Kansas here, there was a stark difference. Even when I graduated from high school, I was very deeply concerned about education. That was one of the things, one of the main purposes I had in life was education. When I came here, I began to work a little bit in the school system and so forth, it was quite a difference because at that time, we still had segregated schools right here in Kansas.

So once again, it was schools that I attended. I went to quite often. It was all Black schools. It sort of made me think because there is a great difference between Texas and Kansas. There's a lot of differences there. But I didn't anticipate when I first came to Kansas here that I would find segregated schools.

JW: Because we are the home of Brown v. Board.

BS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JW: And the school district where you rose to the position of being on its governing body was the governing body that had to deal with segregation.

BS: Absolutely.

JW: I think that if you had come up and gone to Topeka High, you would have found that it was integrated.

BS: That's right.

JW: But not the elementary schools.

BS: Right.

JW: So talk to me about being on the School Board [USD 501 Board of Education] then. I mean, you've had this experience of coming from Texas, going to Washburn which was integrated, and sitting on the School Board, first the DCAC and these parent groups, and then dealing with the requirements to desegregate the schools here in Topeka. They didn't desegregate easily or early.

BS: No, you're absolutely correct. When I came on the Board in 1990, the district was still under court orders to integrate the schools. It was in 1990 I think when we drew up the first plan to integrate the schools. It was quite a chore. That was in 1990. We had several plans. And the very first plan, I can sort of remember like today, the very first plan they drew up, that the School Board drew up, it closed I think four schools on the east side. And there was only one potential school to close on the west side of town.

JW: Belvoir was one of them.

BS: Belvoir.

JW: Was it Lundgren?

BS: No, it was Belvoir, Highland Park North, Highland Park South, Lafayette. [*After the interview Mr. Scott corrected this list: the 5 schools on the eastside of Topeka proposed for closing were Lafayette, Hudson, Avondale East, Highland Park North and Belvoir. The one proposed closure on the westside of Topeka was Crestview.]*

JW: Lafayette's the one I was thinking of.

BS: What had happened, when we sent in that first plan, Sherman Parks and I, we were the two that looked at it, and we found that all of the burden—

JW: Sherman Parks, Jr.

BS: Sherman Parks, Jr. That's right. It was on the east side. The kids on the east side had to bear all of that. What happened, I think in 1993, Sherman Parks and I, we went throughout the community, talking to people about it and everything. Many of the people, these were White and Black, they felt the same thing. They heard it, but it wasn't a reality to a lot of people. It was just like these are Black schools. They were lower performing schools, and they used that, I think, and I was on the School Board, as a measurement to close them.

But when we talked to people in the community, they saw it different.

JW: How different? How did they see it differently?

BS: Well, basically, they understood that it didn't look right in the first place.

JW: It didn't look right.

BS: I didn't look right. When you look at it on paper, you know, it didn't look right because all the movement at that time would have been on kids on the east side of town because what they would have to do to integrate other schools on the west side, they would have to move them, they called it M & M transportation, transfers. They had to move them.

JW: Busing.

BS: Busing, absolutely. Sherman Parks and I, we drew up a plan. We got a lot of support all over the city for the plan that we had drawn up. One of the most interesting things that I'd ever experienced in my life was when we went to court, into federal court, Judge Rogers was a judge and we submitted our plan to Judge Rogers.

JW: Judge Richard Rogers.

BS: Yes. We submitted to him, and he looked at it, and he told, I can't think of his name, he told a lawyer for 501, he said he wanted them to take a look at. What it was was the fairness. It was a more balanced plan, and it shifted the burden on **each** side of the town for kids.

So once we presented our plan to him, we wanted to testify before the court. Our School Board president wouldn't allow us.

JW: Who was the School board president at that time?

BS: I'm sorry, not the School Board president, but the lawyer for the School Board. I'm trying to think of his name.

JW: That's all right. We'll look it up later. [*Mr. Scott later said the lead attorney for the school board was Gary Sebelius.*]

BS: Okay. He would not call us to testify. So what's interesting about this is that the lawyers on the other side, they called us. They gave us that opportunity that we could come and present. It's something that I had never seen it before. But we was able because they called us and so forth, we was able to present our plan. So that's how our plan was got in place, and that's how we as a School Board had to come back and look at the plan that we submitted and make some adjustments.

What happened, we closed Crestview. We closed Gage. I'm trying to think of the others that we closed. We closed—for some reason, I can't think of them now.

JW: And I can't seem to remember them either. I thought I'd never forget that.

BS: Right. What happened was, during this transition, we decided to close Belvoir, Hudson. Hudson was the other school.

JW: Hudson, yes.

BS: Hudson and Highland Park South, and there was another. I can't think of the other one right now.

JW: Lafayette.

BS: Lafayette. What we decided to do with Lafayette was to put a new school there—tear the old one down and put a new school there, which would later become the magnet school. That's what we decided to do with Lafayette. That was a magnet school we put there.

And way over on the west side—these schools ain't coming to mind—we decided to put a new school there.

JW: Was that Meadows? Because you closed some kind of north central.

BS: It wasn't Meadows.

JW: But you ended up with six magnet schools, I think, didn't you?

BS: No, we only ended up with two magnet schools, one at the Lafayette site and the other magnet school here on Williams.[2]

JW: Named after Mamie Williams *[long-tenured Black elementary teacher]*.

BS: Right. Named after Mamie Williams. But the other new schools that we built, the one on the west side, I can't think of the name of the school, these were quality schools. These were schools that would be multimedia, both of those schools. So that was sort of the trade-off.

But the only thing, when we got the two magnet schools, one of the purposes in the plan was to draw kids from the west side to the east side.

JW: Did that work?

BS: It did not work.

JW: Are you surprised?

BS: Yes, I was surprised. As a board member, I was surprised because those schools, those magnet schools were the greatest schools almost in Kansas. We put so much into those schools to make them accessible, to make people want to come to them. We thought sure that because it was a science school—one was a science school, and I forgot what the other one, Williams, was. But they had themes that we felt would automatically draw kids to them. So we thought sure that we'd get the gifted [students] in it. If we could have gotten the gifted kids to come into that school, it would have helped to mitigate the racial balance there.

JW: So the whole thing was about numbers.

BS: Numbers.

JW: Was Sherman Parks, Jr. on the School Board before you were?

BS: Yes.

JW: Was he the first African American on the School Board, or do you know who was the first one?

BS: No, I don't know. I know Joe Douglas was on there.

JW: It was Joe Douglas, I bet, who was Fire Chief.

BS: I think either Joe Douglas or the other gentleman. I can't think of his name. I think it was Joe Douglas, I believe. I want to think it was Joe.

JW: Yes. So Topeka has a history, going back into the late sixties and certainly in the early seventies, of beginning to appoint or find African Americans to serve in some of these positions.

BS: Right.

JW: So you were not the first, but you certainly were at an important time when desegregation depended on loss of federal money. What other were the consequences, if you hadn't gotten your plan passed?

BS: Well, I think, #1, 501 would have still been under court orders, if the plan hadn't passed. And really even all the maneuvering with the new schools and so forth that we put together, you know, that still didn't racially balance the school because they had a threshold—forty-six, fifty-four, I think at some schools, and then they had different [percentages depending on the grade level], but we also had to work out the teacher ratio. At that time, one of the reasons why we could close Gage was because, at that time, I don't think Gage had any Black staff at all.

JW: Probably not.

BS: But that was one of the big sticking points, was trying to get it racially balanced for the courts because everything we was doing, we was doing [to meet] the courts [mandates]. And really after all we'd done, you know, we thought we had the schools pretty much managed, but it wasn't until 1998 and '99 that the schools was declared unitary. That's when we got unitary status—I think it was 1998 or '99.

JW: So from 1954—

BS: Absolutely.

JW: When Brown v. Board was heard by the Supreme Court until 1999, it took [45 years] before the Topeka public schools met muster.

BS: That's right.

JW: And Kansas City public schools are still under court order.

BS: Absolutely.

JW: I believe, or it's about to be lifted.

BS: Right.

JW: So you've served at an interesting time.

BS: That's right.

JW: Talk to me a little bit about the NAACP. What led you to think it was worth your time as a volunteer to work with the NAACP? What do you look back on and see as some of the things that the local or larger NAACP accomplished?

BS: Well, I think the NAACP at that time was one of the only organizations that Blacks had that they knew they had a voice. And because it's a national organizations, there was always the

possibility of looking at issues statewide and getting support from the national to get those kinds of issues implemented.

One of the big things as a part of the NAACP from the time I can remember until now, one of the big issues that we had to deal with was racism.

JW: Yes.

BS: The other thing that we had a real problem with was jobs. We had some problem with getting teachers. This was back in the eighties. I can remember us doing some things, working with the Board at that time. At that time, if we could find people that was qualified to be teachers—at that time, they weren't hiring many people from out of town, as I can recall.

So we were able to put some things together. I remember our superintendent, Dr. Edwards, he was very helpful. I think he had just come help to deal with getting the school integrated because he wasn't here that long. But it was through his efforts that we were able to get more Black teachers within our school system.

That was one of the things I could remember back in the eighties. When we looked at the number of African American teachers, there weren't that many. One of the things that the NAACP felt was so very important, and I was really clear about, was that we wanted teachers to look like us. That was one of the cries back then, you know.

I remember when I first came on the Board, our teacher ratio wasn't that great, but it had improved, and in 1990, one of the remarks I made on the Board about teachers, I said I feel like that a Black student could go from the kindergarten through 12th grade and never experience a Black teacher. It was true.

BS: It became a reality. I mean, people didn't look at it in that form though. We look at teaching so forth and etc. But my point was that I felt it was important that Black kids should be able to have Black teachers. A lot of it had to do with my bringing up because that was all I had was Black teachers, and I know how important they were. So that was one of the big issues that the NAACP dealt with.

I think the other issue that the NAACP dealt with back in those days, in the eighties, was homes, nice homes. They had that program. I think it was called HUD, I believe. It was out in Paris Addition. You probably don't know Paris Addition.

JW: No, I don't know it. [*I believe Mr. Scott is referring to the City of Topeka's neighborhood revitalization program which was funded with Community Development Block Grant funds from HUD--Housing and Urban Development Department of the federal government. JW]*

BS: It's full of homes occupied by African Americans. You know where the Boys and Girls Club is?

JW: I certainly do, just off Adams Street.

BS: That was Paris Addition, all through there, and that was one of the things that the NAACP worked on. We got HUD to come in. They put a lot of new homes out there. They were displacing people for new homes. That was one of the improvements that we began to see in the city. What it resulted in--Black home ownerships. Most of the time, Blacks were just renting. I think it was during that era that I could remember that it produced home ownership for Blacks.

The other thing that the NAACP had worked with during those times, it didn't come to light for me until the early nineties, and that was racial profiling and the criminal justice system. That was one of the things that I was very much concerned about. One of the committees that I served on when I was here at the House was the Federal and State Affairs. That was one of the committees that I served on, and that was one of the issues that I think I testified before the Senate on one of those, I think it was SB 82, bills on racial profiling. But I think the NAACP was very active in those kinds of issues, and I know those kind of things was concerning to me.

I think the other thing was I've always been concerned about our schools, student achievement, and teachers. One of the things that I, the various committees that I helped with and worked on while I was here was to provide more money for our teachers because I knew, I was right there, I looked at the figures every week. We had the lowest-paying teacher salary I knew in the state, let alone any other place. That was one of my main concerns was to make sure that—I'd sit in the classrooms. I volunteered in the classroom with teachers. I saw them firsthand bringing in clothes, bringing in food items for kids. I couldn't believe it.

BS: Those things happened. That's reality. This happened many times. Going to elementary schools, teachers would work. They had a clothing bank. They brought that thing in the place. They would bring food and so forth to the kids. So for me, they were underpaid, so that was a concern as a part of the NAACP.

And I did the same thing when I became the vice president of a state—those were issues that we still worked on from the state NAACP.

JW: So housing, affordable housing, home ownership, employment at a living wage.

BS: Yes.

JW: And protecting people's rights and fairness in the criminal justice system.

BS: Yes.

JW: Does that sort of outline what you were doing? [in the NAACP]

BS: Yes.

JW: I got your profile here that I pulled off of the Kansas Legislative Services directory, and it says that you were elected to the legislature to District 58 as a Democrat, and you were on the Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee. You served on Local Government, which is good.

BS: Yes.

JW: And you served on Federal and State Affairs, which deals with a wide variety of things from sin and gambling and all of those things. But you were only here two years.

BS: That's right.

JW: So all of this activity from the School Board, the NAACP, these various and sundry committees that you served on and your work in the church led you to think that sitting here in this Chamber and being able to enact laws would be a good thing. Is that correct?

BS: That's right. It is correct.

JW: What were you hoping to achieve here? I know what you wanted to do on the School Board. You were trying to get it desegregated. But what were you hoping to do here?

BS: One of the things that I hoped for when I got elected to the House, and I talk with people in our district, the 58th District and so forth and etc., and one of the things that I really hoped for was some changes to the criminal justice system.

JW: Let's talk about that.

BS: When I came, I was concerned because of things that happened to me. As a citizen, I tried to do everything right and so forth. And I can tell you, being racially profiled is one of the lowest things that you can experience in a lifetime. It happened to me many times. Because of that, when I came here, I wanted to do everything I possibly could to see some changes come in those areas, not only the criminal justice, but also for the juvenile justice. Both of those are dear to me, the juvenile justice also.

And because of that, I worked with our legislators. I met many times, I think it was Scott Schwab.

JW: He's now the Secretary of State.

BS: The Secretary of State.

JW: But he was a legislator in this body when I served.

BS: Yes. So he and I, we worked together good, you know. I was able to work with him on this criminal justice bill. We had testimonies coming from all people and everything. I shared my experiences. I was so thankful because they heard what I was saying because it wasn't a story. It was reality.

And many changes has taken place within the juvenile justice system. I think there should be a lot more. If there are people that's pushing the issue, I think they will be because this is a nationwide issue. Criminal justice, it's nationwide. When I think about the many Black lives that

was lost, useless, you know. It hurts right now to think of, if you're out there and you're a criminal, you're doing things, and something happens, that's bad. But it's not as bad as somebody that's got some bogus cigarettes, and his life was taken just because of something like that.

So the criminal justice system was very dear to me as the time I served here, and the other was the Juvenile Justice Bill. That was a bill, I'd come into the committee meetings here late in the evening, working in the committees on that bill. One of the things that came out of it which was great, and I'm thankful for it right this moment, was how we were able to craft that Juvenile Justice Bill because in that bill, we had to deal with a school pipeline to prison.

BS: That was one of the things through that bill that they were able to put more money into it so that there was outside programs that could serve kids prior to coming to the juvenile detention centers here. So that was one of the main things that I really felt good about was getting that Juvenile Justice Bill passed because it's still doing great things even though we're slipping. But I think with good-minded people, things like that can become more important and more controllable.

JW: How do you deal with the racism that's inherent in that juvenile justice system or the criminal justice system? I mean, we lock up more Black men than any other group.

BS: Absolutely.

JW: I think it must be a difficult problem to address because we just lock people up. We don't provide services or at least not very many in our prison system. How would you go about attacking the racist underpinnings in that system?

BS: That's a very difficult situation to deal with.

JW: It's not easy.

BS: It's not easy, and I know I've been looking at it for years, how to deal with it. There's a couple of things that I personally feel like because I've experienced it. I've done it in other areas in life, and it has brought some good results is to #1, acknowledge that there is racism. It's very hard to get many people to believe that racism really exists.

JW: Yes.

BS: A good example is CRT. [Critical Race Theory]

JW: Talk about that.

BS: Absent of actually acknowledging, "Hey, racism does exist. Racial profiling," if you don't acknowledge, and I worked—the Chief of Police here, I worked with them. We did lots of things. And during my whole tenure, I'm digressing a little bit, but during my whole tenure working with the police about racial profiling, not one Black person was ever brought before the

court, never. No one ever was charged. No one was ever brought to court because of it. So things like that tend to escape you. [*In reviewing this segment, Mr. Scott notes that he was referring to a time in the past, but recognizes that policing practices may be changing.]*

JW: And we talk about it in terms like "driving while Black."

JW: In one of the series that we did on racism for the YWCA, Delmar White, Pastor White talked about what it felt like as a Black man to be pulled over and profiled, and he had his family with him.

BS: Yes.

JW: And he was embarrassed.

BS: Yes.

JW: And it humiliates.

BS: That's right.

JW: So I don't know what the solution to that is, but I understand we probably need to find one.

BS: I do. And about the CRT, I think this legislation here, both sides, is going to be taking that up within the next week or so.

What's troubling to me about it is that CRT is not new. This is nothing new. This is something that's been around way back there, all right? But it's only been taught in the universities, and it talked about how racism and so forth, it's here. It's something that's alive. But it never had been taught in the public schools as such.

And what is happening now with CRT is that we've got a lot of school districts and a lot of legislators is looking at it as though it's being taught in the schools. And what's happening with that is, they're looking at diversity, and they're looking at—there's a couple of other things that they're looking at, and they're saying that that's CRT. It's not.

Now I've looked at several school districts that's dealing with this. They really don't want diversity being taught or dealt with within the school because they have termed it as CRT.

JW: And have shined a light on it.

BS: Yes.

JW: That you believe is inaccurate, right?

BS: Yes, because diversity is not racism. I think, and there was another one. I can't think of the other.

JW: Diversity and inclusion? Is that what you're talking about?

BS: Yes, but there was another one that these people [Kansas legislators] that they're looking at that's being taught in the schools now. They're looking at it as a CRT, but it's not. They're saying that we teach diversity, and I'm looking at one of the school districts, then that's CRT, and that is not CRT because even the State Board [Kansas State Board of Education], they've already declared that it's not in the school system.

But what it is, it is a way to move away from kids being able to understand that there is racism. I think this is one of the ways to divert it in the school system and because of that, I think we have one of our legislators to say that teaching diversity, it hindered the health of kids, and that is so naive.

JW: What you're bringing up is the difficulty that we have in this state and in other states in coming to grips with such polar opposites of opinions about the impact of race on our society.

BS: That's right.

JW: How do you deal with it in the church?

BS: Well, it's a little different in the church because most of our churches, and thank God, they're becoming more and more mixed than they were in years back. So one of the ways is that we just talk about it. That's what I'm saying. If you can acknowledge that racism does exist, if we can look at examples of it. This is what we do a lot of times. We look at a lot of issues within the church, how racism impacted employment, for an example. How racism can attack, and this one seemed a little naive, but if you don't have insurance. You go to the insurance—and I have dealt with this as a pastor. There's some people that can go and don't have insurance, and they can get good service. But there are other people that can go, and you're put in the back line so to speak. This is experience. I'm talking about things really happening. If you don't have insurance, you're limited as to what kind of medical services you can have. I don't want to turn all of those kinds of issues as racism, but I look at the color of the skin. A lot of it had to do with seeing your color, you don't have insurance. How do you separate the two?

JW: Yes.

BS: So in the church, we have a lot better way to deal with it because we're talking about love. We're talking about faith. We're talking about understanding. Love your enemies. Believe me, that goes a long way. We do have mixed people in our church. That goes a long way in helping to deal with those kinds of issues, especially racism.

JW: Well, you have certainly in your career taken on some very controversial topics. We're probably running pretty close to the end of our interview. I want to ask you two more questions and get your take on this. When you ran for election the first time, Harold Lane had just retired. So you won that first race.

BS: Yes.

JW: And then you ran to get re-elected, and you ran against Vic Miller. What was that campaign like?

BS: Well, that was sort of a bittersweet campaign. First of all, I'm not a sore loser. I've lost so many times down through the years, but what I've realized, I've gained far more than what I've lost.

JW: I understand.

BS: And because of that, there isn't any animosity, nothing of that sort. But I think the thing that bothered me the most was people that came to me and began to share things with me that they felt like if I would talk about these issues, you know, that I would have a much better chance of winning against Vic Miller. I told them, I said, "I can't do that." I guess that was a part of me that didn't show a true politician.

JW: They wanted you to go negative.

BS: They wanted me to go negative. On my old phone, I've got people right there now on my old phone, the messages are still there, telling me even things that they would share with me, that he would come by and say this, that, and the other. One of them that's sort of crazy said that you've got to watch out for him because he is a Republican. These were people, they shared that information with me, and that was one of the things that I felt good about because #1, I would not get negative. I felt like if I would have, I would have had a much better race because there are umpteen people that was piling on him, and I wouldn't do it because that was not my nature.

JW: So you lost the race and lost the seat and the opportunity then to work on all of these issues that you care about. How are you going to keep working on these issues?

BS: Well, I think one of the reasons that I'm going to keep because I'm an activist. That's the first thing.

JW: Okay. That's where I want to go with this.

BS: I have been involved. One of the things that helped me on the School Board, we traveled across the nation as School Board members on how to #1 make policies and how to impact bills to get passed. I've got a lot more lessons to learn, but I've learned a lot of those lessons, and because of that, I understand fully that to get, as an example, to get the sales tax taken away, I'm going to have to deal with legislators, okay?

All of them, you're not going to be able to deal with. But what's important, I learned this as a pastor, you've got to find somebody that will listen. That's what I do right today. I'll find legislators in the Senate and the House that will listen to my issue and work with them. In fact, I've got a bill through the NAACP that hopefully—we won't be able to get it this year because we didn't get all of our members to agree with it, but I'm going to work for this legislation.

JW: Well, you have a good vantage point because you are currently the doorman up here.

BS: Yes.

JW: So you catch them in the hallway coming through the door.

BS: Absolutely, that's right.

JW: And say, "Vote for the sales tax."

BS: Yes. I've got to be careful.

JW: I guess, "Vote to get rid of the sales tax on food," I should say.

BS: Right. I've got to be careful how I approach them as they come to the Chamber, but when we're outside, I have that opportunity. I can visit with them, and like I said, face recognition is important. They know who I am.

Is this Joe? The gentleman that was here? [A legislative staffer had entered the chamber.]

JW: Joseph Le.

BS: I see him all of the time when he comes. I see him all the time, but like I said, I'm on this side. I don't get to interact with the House people.

JW: Well, the Republicans are over here now.

BS: Yes. But anyway.

JW: I need to bring this interview to a close. It's been delightful having the chance to talk with you. I'm glad we got this set up. I do have one thing that I have to say for the project, but before I sort of give my spiel about what the Oral History Project is, do you have anything else that you want to add to this interview that you want to get on tape for us?

BS: This is an Oral History Project.

JW: Yes.

BS: Okay. I do want to say this. In 2011 or 2008, I served on a committee because I sent a resolution to the State Board of Education to get Black history as a standard in our school system in Kansas. I was looking at that resolution the other day. We worked on that for two years, almost two years.

JW: We, the NAACP?

BS: No, this was a group that was set up by the State Board of Education. It was forty people. The main thrust here, I presented that resolution, they formed this committee, and the standards

was to deal with history, social studies, and another one, I can't think of the other one. There was three.

JW: Civics?

BS: Social studies, history, I can't think of it. But that's what the standards was about. And my purpose was, and I did that through the NAACP, was to include Black history. What many want to think is that Black history and American history is the same thing. They are not the same thing. I know there's a lot of correlation. I think we've dealt with it all these years because of that, but there are some distinctions. There are some things that really need to be looked at. So that was one of the projects that I worked on that I was very proud of. Even though it didn't come out like we wanted it to, but it brought a lot of focus to the State Board of Education as to how important Black History really is.

JW: Well, Ann Mah still is sitting on the State Board. So you can call her up and see if she'll do it.

BS: That's right.

JW: Thank you very much. This was delightful, and I'm glad we had a chance to do this.

The Kansas Oral History Project is a not-for-profit corporation created to collect oral histories of Kansans who were involved in shaping and implementing public policy. Recordings and transcripts of these oral history interviews are accessible to researchers, educators, students, and members of the public through the Kansas Historical Society, the State Library of Kansas, and our own website, ksoralhistory.org.

Funding for this project has been provided by volunteers, individual donors, and Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization connecting communities with history, traditions, and ideas to strengthen civic life.

I'm Joan Wagnon, and this is Ben Scott, and we have enjoyed the opportunity to talk together about his experiences as a leader in Topeka. Thank you.

BS: Thank you.

[End of File]

[2] Two magnet schools: Scott Dual Language and Williams Science & Fine Arts

