Richard Walker: Greetings and welcome to this interview, which is another part of the Kansas Oral History Project that's being done under the auspices of that project. It is a 501 (c) 3 program which is designed to collect and preserve for future historians and citizens the work of people who have been very influential and prominent in Kansas government. And we're here today. It is January 28, 2023, on the ranch of Joe Hoagland, and his wife Norma is here. We are going to be talking about Joe's career, both in the legislature as an international businessman, a very innovative person as far as the resources around the world and his impact on international commerce and the cattle industry writ large. But we're going to spend a lot of time focusing on Joe's involvement during the 1970s and 1980s in the legislature because a lot of important things happened during that period of time, and Joe was a major player in so much of it.

My name is Richard Walker. I'm a senior judge for the State of Kansas. Joe and I have just been talking. We've known each other over fifty years and worked together, but the focus today is going to be on Joe's efforts during that period of time. So, Joe, welcome to the interview process. We appreciate you making your home available to us today.

Joe Hoagland: Well, thank you, Richard, and congratulations to you on your selection as the president of the State Historical Society.

RW: Well, that's mostly because I've been there twenty years, and they ran out of people to do it, other people to do it.

JH: It's very deserving.

RW: Well, we're here to talk about your major involvement in the events of Kansas government over a period of nearly twenty years. And so but the first thing we want to talk about is your background. Tell us a little bit about where you were born, your early education, your college involvement because you, I think, have a family connection to Tulane University. Why don't you tell us about your early beginnings?

JH: I'd be happy to. My family is one of the oldest families in America. We came from Holland thirteen generations ago. I'm the thirteenth generation. When Henry Hudson discovered the Hudson River and founded the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam at the foot of Manhattan Island, in fact, I'm a direct descendant of the first white child born in New York.

But our family came to Kansas following the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854. They were abolitionists, and they came here to vote Kansas in as a free state, and they settled between Topeka and Lecompton. That's kind of how my family got to Kansas. We still own some land that's been the family in that area ever since then.

I grew up in Kansas City. My father was the fourth generation of our family to own and operate our family business. It was started by my great-grand-uncle as a general merchandise store at the corner of 5th and Main Street in Kansas City, which was down close to the river. The City Hall at that time was directly across the street. So the whole center of the city was much smaller and much closer to the river. And there were people coming through Kansas City to set up wagon

trains and start moving west on the Oregon and the Santa Fe Trails, and he supplied them with things that they would need.

So it was a general merchandise store. My great-grandfather ran it. My grandfather and my father ran the company. By the time my father ran it, we had five retail stores in the Kansas City area. And we also supplied products to restaurants and hotels for their kitchens, things like glassware, chinaware, and cutlery.

And at that time, when my father was starting this—well, he took over the company in 1937 and ran it except for the time that he was in the Navy during World War II and then came back—two commercial airlines were starting up in Kansas City, Braniff and Trans World Airlines. They were sort of like another restaurant. Their food service in flight was just like another restaurant or hotel that were his customer base.

So he started supplying airlines, and that became a big focus in the business. We can get into that in more detail if you'd like, but that's what the company does today. It's being run today by my oldest daughter. That would be the sixth generation of family to own and operate the same company.

RW: So you graduated from high school in the Kansas City area.

JH: I graduated from Shawnee Mission West, went to Tulane University.

RW: Why there?

JH: It's an elite private school. I wanted to go out of state to school. I was vice president of the student body and done well in high school and had the resume to get accepted at a school like that. So I applied there. We'd had family members go there and had that connection with Tulane. But my plan was always to come back home to Kansas.

RW: You go back home, and then you kind of start your journey in politics. Why don't you talk a little bit about that?

JH: It was not immediate. I came back and wanted to do something after I graduated. I had some fraternity brothers that were active in politics. Jim Francis was involved in George Bush's campaign for Congress in the Houston area at the time. This was in 1970. So they were taking jobs in the summer working for political campaigns. So I thought I would do that before I started my career. And that's when we met, working in Kent Frizzell's campaign for governor in 1970.

RW: Unsuccessful campaign.

JH: Unsuccessful campaign. We can talk about why that was, but needless to say, Bob Docking was running for third term, and he was very popular following his property tax lid that he proposed as governor. That's right.

RW: And at the same time, law school at KU.

JH: Well, I had planned to go to work for the family business. That was always my destiny. I had applied to law school as just about every graduating senior had done some kind of post-graduate work at the time. At the time I applied to grad school and law school, it was a way to defer military service. That went away by the time I graduated.

So I'd been accepted to graduate business school. I'd been accepted to law school, but I didn't really plan to go. I wanted to go back into the family business. So I came home, went to work with my father, basically was given the same job I had when I was in high school, back in the freight room, preparing shipments and things. I went to him, and I said, "Dad, I just graduated near the top of my class from this elite private school, and I was president of my fraternity. I'd like a little more responsibility." He said, "Well, you've got to work your way up."

We got into an argument, and I decided, "I'm just going to go to law school," and he said, "Well, you can, but I'm not going to pay for it." Of course, he'd paid for everything in all my life before. But I had some money that I saved from summer jobs and things. I had money to start law school at least.

So that's how I ended up going to law school. It was a result of my argument with my father.

RW: And you and I share the same experience of running, of being law students and campaigning in 1972 for the Kansas House of Representatives.

JH: Well, I have to admit, I followed in your shoes. You and I took a class together from Barkley Clark who was a professor at the law school and who had also been the mayor of Lawrence. He was a very politically active guy, and he taught class in statutory construction, which is the language of statutory law as opposed to contract law and civil matters. This was how to write laws for statutes.

We did an internship as part of that class, and both of us worked in the '72 session for some state senators. I think you worked for Joe Harder. I worked for Norm Gaar. But that kind of got me interested in the legislature. But you were the one that decided you would run for the legislature, and that had never occurred to me, but I immediately thought that would be a good way for me to make money and be able to pay for law school.

RW: At $10 a day!

JH: Legislators got $10 a day and $25 a day expenses, and my rent for my apartment in Lawrence was only $65 a month. So I kind of did what you did. We met with Paul Hess who had been elected in 1970, was a prolific vote getter and had a formula for getting elected. He taught you, and I copied what he taught you to do in terms of campaigning. He had run then the next year when we were running in 1972, he'd run the State Senate and got elected and ran his wife for the House seat that he was leaving, and she got elected. So he was a very successful campaigner. He kind of gave us a road map to follow, and I did basically what you did. I ran against an incumbent. You ran against a twenty-year incumbent. My incumbent was not that. He'd been there six years or something. And we both won.

We were kind of a generational change. There were a few young legislators that had been elected before. R. H. Miller was elected in 1970. Dave Heinemann was elected I think in ’68, but there were very few baby boomers in the state legislature. But in our class in ’72, there were a number—Sandy Duncan from Wichita, Neal Whitaker from Wichita, yourself, myself.

Then the following year, there were more coming along. It kind of became a generational transition because prior to that, all the people that served in the legislature were, many of them were World War II veterans. There were very few women. I think there were only two in that ’72 session when we interned. And that was a big change.

RW: And that change became more evident as we served. Why don’t you talk about the genesis of the efforts to try to broaden things beyond the old-timers that kind of coalesced in support for Wendell Lady as Speaker of the House?

JH: We had a group—I learned from Wendell who was a mentor to me. His house was only a couple of blocks from my house. I was in the southern part of my legislative district. He was in the northern part, but we were both from Overland Park. Our constituents were very similar. And he had worked, starting when he was elected in ’68, to change the formula for the distribution of the state gasoline tax. Instead of distributing based on lane miles to counties, he wanted to have it distributed based on population so that more money from the gasoline tax would go to the cities and less to rural farm-to-market roads. It started the initial clash of rural-urban legislators. He was very urban.

But he was successful because he started these urban study groups, and he and Pete Loux who was the Minority Leader at the time would meet in the evenings and formulate strategies on how to advance a more urban agenda.

RW: Pete from Wichita.

JH: Pete Loux from Wichita, Kansas. Right. That’s essentially when I got to the legislature with these younger guys, that’s kind of what we started to do. I remember the first group was R. H. Miller, who had already served one term, you and I, and Neal Whitaker from Wichita, and Sandy Duncan. And Sandy coined a term for us, for our little meetings as the Meetings of the Young Energetic Legislative Leaders Out to Win, which went by the anacronym, YELLOW because we talked big, but we were terrified.

Over a period of time, we expanded that group. In my second term, my roommate, Mike Hayden, who later became Speaker of the House and Governor, I remember I would go to these breakfasts and leave at 7:00. “Where are you going?” “Oh, I’ve got this meeting to go to.” At night, “Let’s watch TV.” “I’ve got a meeting to go to.” So finally I just started bringing him to the meetings. There were other people that started coming to them. Some of the guys elected in the following term like Fred Lorentz who became a district court judge in Fredonia started meeting, and we expanded that group.

We all wanted more authority, more political power than we had. The power was controlled by the prior generation, America's greatest generation, right? The generation that won World War II. Everybody was a veteran.

But Wendell Lady was moving up in the leadership. He was competent. He was a civil engineer. He managed very complex projects for Black and Veatch, which was a nationally prominent engineering firm, designing wastewater treatment facilities around the country. He was picked by Pete McGill, to Pete McGill's credit, to be Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, which was a leadership spot for sure and handled all the appropriations.

We wanted to get behind him because he was the first person in leadership at that time that had not been a veteran of World War II or the Korean War. He'd never been a veteran and was kind of in that sandwich generation, a little older than us, but not too much, and we could get behind him and push him for leadership. If he got in, then he would put us in positions of authority.

And that's essentially what happened. Mike Hayden became Chairman of Ways and Means over Bill Bunten who was on the Ways and Means Committee from Topeka, had been the Vice Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. But Wendell was loyal to these young guys who got him elected, put Mike in as Chairman of Ways and Means, put me in Judiciary Chairman, put Whitaker in as Chairman of Federal and State Affairs. So that's how we kind of wrestled control from the legislature away from the older guys.

RW: Since most people probably don't know this and since we lived through it, why don't you talk about the major changes that occurred in '76 and then the transition back—your role in the transition back in '78 onward.

JH: Well, '76 was a pivotal year. I remember the Watergate hearings, Richard Nixon on the verge of impeachment resigns, Gerald Ford, his Vice President, becomes President of the United States and pardons Nixon for his role in Watergate and the whole event. Republicans were incredibly unpopular as a result of that. I remember in the '76 election, taking the word "Re-Elect" off my yard signs and just putting "Elect." I took the word "Republican" off my yard signs.

We lost control of the Kansas House that election. Jimmy Carter was elected President, beating Gerald Ford. The Senate held on to a Republican majority, I think by one vote. So it was a real sea change of leadership. Pete Loux had been appointed by Bob Bennett to chair the Corporation Commission. So Pete had left, and the young assistant floor leader, John Carlin came in to take his place. And then John Carlin moved up to Speaker from being the Minority Leader when the Democrats took control.

RW: And used that as a launching pad for a bigger political career.

JH: Absolutely.

RW: He became Governor after that. Okay. That lasted for a couple of years, and then starting in '78, you began to assume a much larger legislative role.

JH: I chaired the Judiciary Committee. In ’78, when the Republicans got the majority control back.

RW: And Wendell became Speaker, right?

JH: Wendell became Speaker. He was Minority Leader. He became Speaker, and I became Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. It’s interesting when you go back and look at the group of people that were members of YELLOW. There were four future Speakers in that group. There were five future Floor Leaders in that group. There was a Congressman, Bob Whittaker from southeast Kansas. There was a Governor. Mike Hayden became Governor. And there were two District Court Judges, myself and Fred Lorenz. It was an amazing group of talent that we had assembled that propelled that change.

RW: Then you took on an even larger role, starting in 1980?

JH: I was Chairman of the Judiciary Committee for Wendell’s term as Speaker of the House. He was Speaker for four years. That was the tradition. You served two terms as Speaker and then would step down.

So Wendell then decided to run for Governor, and Mike Hayden ran for Speaker. I ran for Majority Floor Leader at that point in time.

RW: And you were involved in some pretty major pieces of legislation. Why don’t you list two or three of the things you view as some of the most significant legislative accomplishments when you were in a position essentially to control a lot of the floor activity?

JH: One of the things that was interesting that we take for granted today was the 911 emergency phone system. That was before the deregulation of the telephone industry. It was Ma Bell, which was regulated by the corporation commission for telephone rates and everything else. And to be able to set up an emergency phone number, the same as the information number, which was 411, they needed governmental approval to be able to do that, to offer that product. So they came up with this idea of an emergency phone number that people could dial that would be so simple that even a four-year-old could dial 911 if it was necessary, and there have been stories of that actually happening.

But at the time, that was actually a controversial piece of legislation. It was introduced in the Senate. Jan Meyers [who]was a state senator at that time and became a member of Congress, is carried the bill on the floor to the Senate. It got through but not with the strong vote and got to the House side, and Ed Schaub who was the lobbyist for Southwestern Bell wanted me to carry it on the floor of the House because there was a lot of opposition in my home county of Johnson County, which was suburban surrounded by a whole bunch of small municipalities.

These municipalities did not want to give up their control over the dispatch of their fire department and their police department, and they opposed it. The League of Municipalities and Ernie Mosher who was the lobbyist for the League of Municipalities was in opposition, had too

many urban cities that didn't want to have that central dispatch. We got it through. It passed, and I remember Ed Schaub coming to me afterwards. He was a magnificent lobbyist. He knew everybody in the legislature and had taken everybody to lunch at least once. He could call in a lot of chips. It was more his work than my skill on the floor debate in getting it through. But we did get it passed, and of course, 911 is available everywhere today.

But after it was done, I remember him coming to me and saying, "Now, we've got another project, and we need to be able to set up towers to collect wireless transmissions of phones and move that phone conversation from one tower to another, and we need to be able to acquire easements on private property to set up these towers. And we would use this system to operate in cells, transmitting telephone calls from one cell to the next" and wanted me to carry that bill.

I said, "That is the craziest idea. What are you going to call"—"Well, they're going to be called cellphones." He did get somebody else to carry it. I don't remember who. But I said, "No, I've done enough heavy lifting for you. I'm not going to do anymore for the telephone company."

They had to pass the enabling legislation to allow them to enter in agreements. I think he asked me if it would be okay to use eminent domain, and I told him no. But he still had to have the authority to enter into a property transaction that would give the telephone company an easement on private property.

RW: And the rest is history, as the saying goes.

JH: The rest is history.

RW: What other big pieces of legislative work are you most happy with or I think most significant?

JH: I think one of the things that I authored was the Kansas Comparative Negligence Act, which abolished the harsh doctrine in tort law of contributory negligence. What it allowed was you could compare the negligence of parties and give partial damages to somebody. Even if the injuries they had were partly their fault, they wouldn't be banned from recovering anything. They would get something attributed to the wrongful party.

I authored that and got it past, and it became a model for other states. The way we did it was you couldn't recover unless you were less negligent than the defendant, the person you were suing. And that model was enacted verbatim in seventeen other states. So I feel kind of proud of that piece of legislation.

Interestingly, I was able to try one of the first comparative negligence cases as a lawyer, and it was a classic case where comparative negligence was involved. It involved a highway construction worker working on a summer road crew and a person going through the construction zone, speeding through the construction zone, and, of course, my client immediately told the police on the police report, "I never saw the car. I never saw what hit me."

Of course, that meant that he wasn't looking, and therefore he was negligent, but the person driving the car at a high rate of speed through a construction zone was also negligent. So we tried that case, and he was able to collect some of his damages as a result.

RW: You were also involved with a number of things related to criminal law while you were in the legislature. Why don't you talk about some of those? Really kind of two pieces involving firearms, both firearms as an element of a crime and an early effort in Kansas to do something about the use of firearms?

JH: Here we are, fifty years later, talking about an issue that was a problem fifty years ago. Gun violence was an issue before the legislature in the 1970s. I authored a couple of pieces of legislation with some Democrats from Wichita, Gene Anderson was one of them, Paul Feliciano on the other, to make it a bipartisan bill.

One of the things that we did was to say that if you're going to use a firearm in the commission of a felony, you're going to face an automatic prison sentence. It was a mandatory prison sentence for crimes committed with a firearm. The prosecutors loved the law because they could arrest somebody, charge them with that, and then get them to plead guilty if they take the gun as an element of the crime out of the charge so that they wouldn't face going to prison. And the defendants if they were guilty were much less willing to actually go to court and try the case, thinking they might get off. If there was any prospect that they were going to get convicted, they knew they were going to jail. So that law, and I think that law is still on the books, but it had mixed results whether it was really good or not.

Then Gene Anderson and I authored a bill to ban the sale of handguns with a barrel length of less than twelve inches, thinking that handguns are not used for hunting, and we could eliminate gun violence if we just took these guns off the street. Well, the first reaction was just the sheer introduction of the bill resulted in a run on handgun purchases. And it absolutely got nowhere. It didn't even have a hearing.

I don't think we really expected it to. We just were trying to make a point that we've got to do something about it. They were both very amateurish attempts at gun control, but here we are, fifty years later, we're still trying to find a solution to that.

RW: Didn't you get sued over that, too?

JH: We did. I got sued by the Kansas Chapter of the NRA. I'm sure the introduction of that bill drove up their membership and drove up their Political Action Committee fundraising radically. Here's a couple of liberal legislators trying to take your guns away. But, yes, it was an amateurish attempt.

RW: You're also going from the macro criminal to the other end of things, a big supporter and able to get through a small claims bill to allow people who might have something that didn't warrant hiring a lawyer but still allow them access to the courthouse.

JH: There had been attempts before, I guess. I was chairing the Judiciary Committee, and we introduced it as a committee bill. It has a little more gravitas than a bill introduced by an individual, but I carried it on the floor. And it set up a jurisdictional limit of $300. Today I think that amount's been raised to $4,000 or $5,000. But it was designed to give a remedy to people that had a civil complaint oftentimes involving faulty construction work or some relatively small transaction that there was no remedy for. You couldn't hire a lawyer. The lawyer fees were more than what you were wanting to recover, and this gave them a way out.

It was adjudicated before a judge pro tem who was typically a member of the bar just appointed for the day or the evening to hear these cases, and it was relaxed rules of evidence, but it allowed sort of an arbitration of small claims, and I wrote an article for the Kansas Bar Association about it and described it. It wasn't a great academic achievement, but I described it as somebody trying to peel a carrot and cutting your finger. You don't go to a doctor to solve that problem. This was a remedy like that.

RW: One of the things that I know you were heavily interested in and involved with was the change over from governorship and state officers running for two-year terms to four-year terms, and following along with that, the ability of the executive branch to pull together various disparate pieces of the bureaucracy and create a cabinet-type government. Why don't you talk about your analysis of the changes and the governor's role during your time?

JH: That's a very good point. I think a lot of that should, we should recognize the role of the Docking family. George Docking had been Governor before John Anderson was Governor back in the fifties, and then his son became Governor in 1968, I guess. The Governor served a two-year term, and at the end of that two-year term, Bob Docking ran for a third term, and that was the campaign that you and I worked in when we graduated from college for Kent Frizzell. Docking was re-elected, and then the following year, he was re-elected again. So he served eight years as Governor.

And I think there was a feeling that there needed to extend the term of office for state officers from two years to four years. This would apply to the Attorney General, Insurance Commissioner, State Treasurer, all of those. Bob Bennett supported that idea. I think Pete McGill supported it. I don't know if he was pressured from Bennett to do it. I'm pretty sure that Bennett and Bob Docking worked closely in restructuring this approach to running for four-year terms. I think it's been good for government. I think it's provided more institutional knowledge in these positions and more continuity of leadership.

The other thing that Bennett did and Docking did and Pete McGill did was we started reorganizing state government and bringing together a lot of independent commissions and state agencies that were operating autonomously. One of the first things that was established was a Department of Revenue. Under direction of the Governor, he appointed the Secretary of Revenue that ran the department. Before that, there were all these state agencies that had taxing authority, collected taxes like the alcohol tax. There was the tobacco tax, the motor vehicle tax.

All of these taxes were collected by separate state agencies, and when they created the Department of Revenue, it all fell under one taxing entity. They also set up the Department of

Corrections fairly early in the process. This I think was all done when Docking was still governor. I'm not sure, but I think so. That brought all the state penitentiaries under one Secretary. Before that, the wardens of each prison operated autonomously.

So by the time Bennett became President of the Senate, Pete McGill became Speaker of the House in the 1973 session, they created a new committee called Governmental Organization. Tony Brauchi chaired it in the House. Wint Winter chaired it in the Senate. He was from Lawrence. Brauchi was a physician from the KU Med Center from Johnson County. They worked a bill through to consolidate the various functions of the welfare system in a new agency called Social and Rehabilitation Services. Brauchi carried that bill on the floor of the House.

Brauchi was defeated in the next election, and R. H. Miller from Wellington was named Chairman to continue that process of setting up departments under the auspice of the Governor's Office the same way the President of the United States had a Cabinet system. We were going to create a Governor with a Cabinet system so that he could really administer the policies of the state through his appointments.

The first bill that we took up was the creation of [a department of] Health and Environment. We merged all those independent boards, the Healing Arts Board—the Mine Safety Inspection Board was a separate—it all came under the newly created Department of Health and Environment.

We also passed some conformity legislation that picked up the changes that Nixon had done for Clean Air, Clean Water Acts that were passed during the Nixon administration. We passed conformity legislation through that reorganization.

Then the next year, we did the Department of Transportation. That was controversial. The Highway Department was run by the State Highway Commission, and it was somewhat controlled by the highway contractors.

RW: I think more than somewhat.

JH: I think Norm Gaar described it as, " the fox guarding the chicken coop", if I remember. But we abolished that, set up a Department of Transportation with the Secretary. That process continued. Once we did that, of course, then the next session, I became Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and went off the Governmental Organization Committee. But they continued to work.

I think one of the last state institutions to be brought under the cabinet system was the State Board of Agriculture, which was elected by all of the various farm organizations. They elected a Secretary of Agriculture. Sam Brownback was originally Secretary of Agriculture before he became a Congressman, a United States Senator, and Governor. He got his political start being elected Secretary of Agriculture by all of these farm organizations like the Farm Bureau, the Kansas Livestock Association, the Wheat Growers, all that.

So we wanted to have that be a little more democratic system reflecting the will of the electorate and do that through the Governor's Office. So we abolished the State Board of Agriculture and

their ability to select a Secretary and allow the Governor to make that appointment, which is what we have today.

RW: You had a rather unique and personal experience on the transportation issue, which we could talk about for a long time. Can you give us kind of a synopsis of that whole thing where you kind of were involved with a pretty serious business?

JH: Yes, it was when we introduced the bill to create the Department of Transportation, we had this Highway State Inspector come before the committee and said, "I'm a State Inspector, and I'm working on US 59, south of the construction of US 59, south of Lawrence, and I turn in my reports and I'm being overridden all the time by the contractor."

RW: He was kind of a whistleblower.

JH: He was a whistleblower. We allowed him to testify before the committee to make the case that, "Hey, you know, really the State Highway Commission should not be running transportation issues and highway construction should be handled more by the Governor's Office."

So we had him testify, and he said, he basically made these allegations public. They had a lot of press coverage. There were TV stations coming in, filming him testifying, and he said, "I can prove everything I'm saying. It's all in my reports, my daily reports that I filed in the Highway Commission's log books."

About that time, Curt Schneider who was the Attorney General opened a criminal investigation based upon what he had heard in these televised committee meetings. He went to the Highway Commission and seized the log books and took them into his office and said they were part of a criminal investigation.

Well, the committee wanted to see them, to see if this guy was telling the truth. So we asked to see them. A long story short: we didn't get to. Pete McGill wouldn't support using the legislative subpoena powers to get that stuff. And Curt Schneider called me to his office and asked me, wanted to ask me questions about what I knew about this.

RW: The Attorney General.

JH: The Attorney General. So I went down there, and of course, the press was following. It was being written daily in the newspapers. I went there and basically asked him to give us access to the logbooks. He said no. I left the meeting, and I remember they asked me what had happened, and I said, "Well, the Attorney General will not turn over the logbooks that he has gotten in his possession." I said, "I would not want anyone to say that he is any way influenced by the fact that his wife is the secretary working for the State Highway Commission. That would be completely inappropriate." Of course, that got in the press, too.

But we ended up passing that. The logbooks were never made public. We don't know whether the allegations this whistleblower said were true or not, but there were issues involving pouring

concrete in muddy conditions when it wouldn't set up properly and that kind of thing. But US 59 got built.

RW: Yes, it did, a very nice highway. At some point, you decided you had enough of the legislature, and that was in 1984.

JH: I was the Majority Floor Leader. My father was—I'd reconciled things with my father. He was happy that I was a practicing lawyer, a partner in the law firm I was with. I was in the state legislature, had been elected Majority Floor Leader, but he called me and said, "I'm going to retire, and I'm going to either sell the company, or I'll give it to you."

He had amassed a lot of real estate. We owned land in Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Johnson, Jefferson, Jackson, Shawnee, and Waubunsee-- a bunch of counties in Kansas. He started buying citrus property in Texas, citrus orchards in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas and had become one of the ten largest independent growers of citrus.

So there was a lot of assets in this company. I said, "Okay. I'm done with politics. I'll come back and take over the family business."

RW: And you did.

JH: And I did.

RW: But somewhere along the line, you got hooked up with Major League Baseball. Talk about how that happened.

JH: The company was wildly successful. It was successful before I got there, and it got more successful. We had sold off all the retail stores we had. We concentrated on the airline business that my father had started selling passenger service products to airlines. We had opened—we had customers worldwide, all the airlines in the United States, all of the—a number of airlines in Europe and Asia. We had an office in Hong Kong. We had an office in Brussels. We had an office in Kansas City. And I had a depth of staff running the company for me, and I didn't really need to do much. So I'd come in one day a week and sign checks, but I was more interested in farming and ranching and stuff like that.

But I got interested in professional baseball. I played baseball in the Men's Senior League, won a national championship in a 30 and over hardball baseball league, and I played with some guys that had been professional players before. One of them was a guy by the name of Bill Kelso who had played for the California Angels. He'd gone to work for the Houston Astros as a scout, and I said, "Can I follow you around and learn what you do? I'm kind of interested in being a scout." So I was a bird dog scout for him, no pay, just followed him around. He taught me the business. He taught me the trade, how it worked.

Then I applied for a job with the New York Yankees the next year and got hired as a part-time scout, covering basically the Kansas City area, and then the following year after that, I was hired as a full-time scout with the New York Mets, which I did for four years.

The job was—I had a big region kind of in the Midwest, but I traveled pretty extensively. I went to spring training to evaluate players. It was my ambition to become a Major League General Manager. I had a law degree, which was a plus. I had experience in politics, which was a plus. I had a successful business career, which was a plus. The only thing I didn't have to create the perfect resume for a job as a General Manager was I didn't have player evaluation skills. Well, I was developing that as a scout.

I was the first professional scout to see Albert Pujols play. He was a sophomore in high school at Fort Osage High School in Missouri. I wrote a report, tried to get the Mets to take him when he was at Maplewoods Community College, which I followed him from his sophomore year. I never really rated him as that good a player. I never had any idea that he'd be as good as he became. But I did feel that he had some skills and could play at the professional level. So I turned in a report that we should try to take him in the fifth round. He's agreed to sign a contract because you didn't want to use your fifth round pick if the guy won't sign the contract. So you had to get the guy to say, "I'll sign if you draft me." He agreed to sign for $100,000.

The fifth round came. The Mets skipped. The sixth round came. The Mets skipped. Finally by the twelfth round, he was drafted by the St. Louis Cardinals. The Mets never got him. I was disappointed in that, and I pointed out that this guy ended up being the Most Valuable Player in the first Pro League that he went to. That was A Ball League in Iowa. Then there was an opening from an injury in spring training, and he got to go to spring training the next year, made the team, and was Rookie of the Year. And then you know, the rest is history, became one of the greatest hitters in baseball history.

But the next year I signed the Mets's first-round draft pick because they started to pay more attention to me, I guess, and that was a high school kid from St. Louis by the name of Bobby Keppel who never played for the Mets but played for the Minnesota Twins. We would typically take our young prospects and trade them to another team for a veteran player because the Mets in New York in the market they were in, they had to win today. They couldn't build a team up. So they were always trading their top prospects.

He went to The Minnesota Twins, played there for a few years. He played one year for the Kansas City Royals and then went to Japan and finished his career.

RW: I think you told me that the attacks on 9/11 changed things and basically ended your baseball career.

JH: It absolutely did. At the time before September the 11th, our company sold more stainless-steel cutlery than anyone in the world.

RW: You were the Teaspoon King.

JH: I made a fortune as a teaspoon salesman. In coach, you would get a meal served on the plane, a hot meal from Dallas to Kansas City. You got a hot meal in coach served on a piece of porcelain. You had stainless steel knife, fork, and spoon.

When 9/11 happened, they took all that stainless steel cutlery off the airplanes and put plastic because they were afraid that somebody would use it as a weapon. We had all that inventory. I had to come back immediately to take over the company, negotiate with the banks. We had multiple banks that were financing the company. I had to negotiate with them not to foreclose. We managed to avoid bankruptcy, but it was a stressful time.

RW: Well, from there, you have moved into the world of cattle and become not just a local cattle producer, but you have pioneered some things, which have become international standards, including creation of a very unique website that is not just designed for the cattle market but try to focus on environmental issues worldwide. Why don't you talk about your move into the cattle business?

JH: Well, I started with, I was a Hereford breeder. We lived on a farm. Actually even when I was in the legislature, we lived on one of our family farms in Jackson County. I would commute. We had cattle there. I became a registered Hereford breeder when I left the legislature in 1985. I also worked part time for the Hereford Association as their Director of International Activities because I was flying all over the world in the airline business.

I have flown around the world fifteen times. Typically I would leave Kansas City, go to LA, call on customers there, go to Tokyo, end up in the office of Hong Kong where I would work for a period of time which is kind of an interesting story. I won't try to do too many asides, but our office was in the 22nd floor of the Lippo Centre. They put all the American companies together, and a company moved in across the hall from us called Microsoft. Of course, they moved out. We stayed in that same building for thirty-five years. We never needed a larger office. And then I would fly on to Brussels, work there in the office in Europe, and then come back.

So because I was doing all this international travel, I could attend livestock fairs and things like that on behalf of the American Hereford Association. So I learned about Herefords, and I learned about cattle breed associations. So a few years later in 1994, I started my own breed of cattle called a Black Hereford. We used Angus genetics to change the hair color on Herefords black to meet market demands and started a magazine to support it and everything else. Today it's one of the ten largest beef breeds in the United States. We have 500 breeders in 35 states. We've sold cattle from our ranch to Hawaii, New Zealand, all over the world.

But you were talking about the cellphone app that I developed. That's an ongoing project, but I developed a cellphone app that takes an autonomous picture, using the camera function of the cellphone of a bovine face. In other words, if you put a cow in front of it, it will take a picture automatically. It won't photograph anything else.

RW: Is it like a fingerprint for the cow?

JH: Yes. I developed a facial algorithm, facial recognition algorithm at the University of Leuven in Belgium, did some work at Kansas State, proof of concept research there. I paid for that research at both universities. We developed this algorithm. So we would take those photographs, which we would stamp with the date and GPS location where they were taken and put them in a

blockchain database, cloud-based, blockchain database which would be verified by a third party in the blockchain so that it couldn't be altered. And then when the animal appeared somewhere else, we could photograph and query the database, and see where the animal had come from.

Well, that has attracted the attention of the European Commission. They want to ban the import of beef from Brazil because a lot of the deforestation in the Amazon, which is what the European Commission wants to stop, is coming from areas where trees are cut down that is used for grazing cattle. They don't want cattle coming, being imported to Europe from those areas of deforestation. They can use this cellphone app in Brazil to prove that beef is coming from the savanna area, not from the Amazon rain forest, and use that [information] to allow [beef] to be exported.

RW: Is that app used in the United States, too?

JH: It is. Not as much, and it's an ongoing process. We've had difficulty with the facial recognition algorithm. The cellphone app does not work as well on Android systems as it does on iPhones. We're still in the process of working with it. But it's promising, and if it does result in stopping the deforestation of the Amazon, that would be good, right?

RW: Absolutely. Well, aside from marrying Norma, which was probably your best decision that you ever made—

JH: Yes.

RW: As you look back, what do you view as some of your most satisfying things that you've been able to accomplish in your very broad and varied career?

JH: Let me say that marrying one of the most beautiful woman on the planet was helpful. Norma was Miss Kansas in 1970. When we were first married, she was a member of the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists and doing television commercials for pretty good money. She was the national spokesman for MasterCard, doing MasterCard commercials, Holiday Inn commercials running nationwide. She was doing grocery store ads for Super Foods, which was a West Coast grocery store.

And when we would campaign in my second election—I'd only lost two precincts in my first election. After that, when Norma campaigned with me, I never lost another precinct.

RW: Did people demand that she be on the ballot instead of you?

JH: She would go down one side of the street. I would go down the other. People would recognize her. They wouldn't have any idea who I was. The crowd was much more following her.

Another thing that she was very helpful with was she became a good friend of Olivia Bennett.

RW: Governor Bennett's wife.

JH: Governor Bennett's wife. She was elected the President of the Legislative Wives Association when she was young. She was in her twenties. And again these old World War II guys and their wives all came to Topeka together, and their wives would get together and organize stuff, and Norma was in charge of that.

So when it came time for me to run for Majority Floor Leader, she could go to these wives and say, "Will you support my husband, Joe?" And I defeated the incumbent Majority Leader by one vote. I'm sure that that had a lot to do with it.

RW: So you've had a long and varied career. What are the new challenges that you're taking on? Are you expanding your cattle empire?

JH: No, I pretty well turned it over to my son who runs our ranching operations and feedlot. My youngest daughter runs our citrus company in Texas. She's a nurse in Denver. It's a business that works very well for an absentee owner. And then my oldest daughter and her husband run our [airline] equipment business.

She has developed a side business that she runs through the company's book on generational transfers. She's a coach, a life coach for people that go into family businesses and some of the unique challenges of doing that.

RW: The one thing I don't think we've covered that maybe we can close on this is you've got this close to running for the United States Senate in Kansas. Do you want to talk about that?

JH: I don't know if I want to talk about this if we have time. I was very upset about the decision to go to war in Iraq. I knew that was wrong. I knew the difference between a Sunni and a Shia. I had been doing business in the Middle East for an airline company we had contracts with, Royal Jordanian, El Al, Saudi Airlines, Kuwait Airlines, Qatar, United Emirates, the Emirates Airlines in Dubai.

Even in Morocco we were doing some business. I had never been to Libya. I'd never been to Iraq. I'd never been to Iran. But I knew that it didn't make sense that Iraq was involved in 9-11. And all this discussion of weapons of mass destruction didn't ring true to me. I didn't believe it. Of course, there were inspectors there in Iraq.

Then I remembered I was in an airline meeting at Portugal, and I had a guy working for me who lived in Lebanon and spoke Arabic. He was my sales guy in the Middle East. We were talking to the Director of Purchasing from Saudi Airlines. He said, "I'm really worried that George Bush is going to invade Iraq." I said, "No way, he's not going to do that. He's just using it to get inspectors in there to look for weapons of mass destruction just to make sure that there aren't any. But he will never invade." The Purchasing Director said, "Oh, I think he's going to." I said, "No, he's a lot smarter than that."

Well, he did invade, and of course, the whole auspice for the invasion turned out to be false. The yellow cake uranium was not true. Valeria Plame had come forth with her revelations about the

intelligence that was done. And Pat Roberts was the Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. He should have been the guy that rolled that back. He didn't.

I was very motivated to run against him. I spoke at the state Democratic Convention shortly after, in 2004, I guess. The invasion was in 2003, saying that this was wrong, that I was changing parties and becoming a Democrat. I didn't want to be a Republican because we were going to war again for the wrong reasons. Like Johnson had done with the Gulf of Tonkin during Vietnam, Bush had done the same thing with Iraq and the weapons of mass destruction.

I remember Kathleen Sebelius, but Dennis Langley in particular, trying to convince me to run for the United States Senate. So I gave it some thought. I remember going to Wichita—this is a long story. You may not want to hear it all, but I went to Wichita, spoke to the Wichita Democratic Party about this same thing. Vern Miller was there. Jim Lawing was there, who was a legislator with me. Vern Miller had been a Democratic Attorney General from Wichita. There was great applause, a standing ovation. Yes, go run! We drove back on the turnpike, and I told my wife, "Let's do this. Let's run."

I got a call from Chuck Schumer who was running the Senate campaign committee for the Democrats, and he said, "Let me help you." He said, "Can you put any of your own money into the campaign?" I said, "I'll put a million dollars of my own money into the campaign. How much can you raise for me?" He said, "Let me see."

A few weeks later, we were in Belgium, and I got a call from Schumer saying, "I want you to come to Washington and meet with Harry Reid," who was the Majority Leader of the Senate and the head of the Democratic Party.

So I hopped on a plane from Brussels and flew to Washington along with Norma, and we went in for a fireside chat just like this in his office. I said, "We're going to need some support." He said, "I'll throw fundraisers for you in Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and you will have enough money to launch a campaign."

I said, "What about talking about this issue of why we're in Iraq? Why are we tiptoeing around the fact that the Republicans lied to us about why we're going to work in Iraq?" And he said, "Well, a lot of our members support the war." I said, "How can they deny this happened? The Democrats need to talk about that more than you're talking about it now." He said, "Well, we have a lot of friends that support the war and support our candidates." I said, "What do you mean, friends?" And it occurred to me, "You're talking about the defense contractors," and I asked him. He said, "You have to take the money that we raise for you and make that an issue in your own campaign." I said, "If the Democrats aren't willing to make it an issue on the national level, then what I do in Kansas doesn't matter."

I decided then not to run, but I was reminded of the closing comment of another Kansan, Dwight Eisenhower in his final speech to the nation when he said, "Beware the military-industrial complex." In many ways, we fight wars in this country because it's good for business.

RW: And every Congressional district has some defense presence, too with lot of jobs, which is certainly true in Kansas. Well, I think we've about—is there anything else you want to comment on?

JH: I think I've gone on long enough.

RW: The one thing I would ask you, you seem to me to have embraced bipartisanship in your legislative career and that seems to be absent today. Would you comment on the need for bipartisanship and the willingness to sit down with other folks.

JH: There have always been fractions in the legislature, rural/urban splits. Pete McGill who I certainly disagreed with—

RW: Well, that was the reason for YELLOW.

JH: And didn't want him to get a third term, but he taught me you never make an enemy in politics. The person that you're opposed to one day is your friend tomorrow. And he was like that with me when I was Chairman of Judiciary, when I was Majority Floor Leader. He was very helpful in teaching me things that I needed to do to run that committee, to be a leader in the party.

But, yes, we worked across lines. In some of these gun control proposals, co-authoring a bill with Gene Anderson who was a Black Democrat from Wichita.

RW: Very liberal.

JH: : Gene was an employee in the aerospace industry and [in] a Republican conservative [district]—I thought I was conservative at the time from Johnson County, a very heavily Republican area. But we tried to solve problems and make things nonpartisan if we possibly could.

RW: I think that's a good note to close on. I think we need bipartisanship and certainly you've given us a role model, although we have to dig back fifty years to find it.

JH: This is for the historical record.

RW: That's right.

JH: Thank you, Richard.

RW: Thank you, Joe.

[End of File]

