H. EDWARD "ED" FLENTJE: This oral history interview of Robert H. Miller, former speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, is being conducted under the sponsorship of the Kansas Oral History Project, Inc., a nonprofit corporation created for the purpose of establishing an archive of oral histories of Kansas state legislators who served prior to the year 2000. These interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Kansas Humanities Council.

Professor [H. Edward] "Ed" Flentje of Wichita State University is conducting the interview at the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka on November 9, 2017. Audio and visual services are being provided by the Chapman Center for Rural Studies at Kansas State University under the director of Tom Parish.

Mr. Miller farms in Sumner County, Kansas. He graduated from Kansas State University in 1967. He was first elected in the Kansas House of Representatives in 1970 at the age of 26 and reelected to twelve additional terms, serving from 1971 through 1997. He served as majority leader of the House in the 1989 and 1990 legislative sessions, as minority leader in the 1991 and 1992 legislative sessions, and as speaker in the 1993 and 1994 legislative sessions.

So, does that sound reasonably accurate?

ROBERT H. MILLER: To the best of my knowledge, that's pretty accurate.
EF: Well, good. Well, Bob, we've known each other for quite a while.
RM: That's right. I believe we met during the Avery-Docking campaign [when Governor William H. "Bill" Avery ran against Robert B. Docking, who won].
EF: And you were active in Young Republicans, the College Young Republicans [sic; College Republicans]—
RM: That's right.
EF: —at the time. Did—were you born with kind of a political gene, or where did this come from?
RM: It came from my time at—at Kansas State [University]. I've told this story numerous time to—to Rotary [Club] banquets and other—other such groups that—I was always tight with the dollar because growing up on the farm, I didn't have a lot of extra spending money, so when I went to Kansas State, the first or second week of school, they had an activities fair, and the cheapest member- —the cheapest

organization that I could join was for a dollar you could be a member of the College Republicans, and I got my dollars' worth. I didn't—didn't miss a meeting. I went to all the activities and very quickly fell in love with it.

EF: So literally started at the university, —

RM: That's right.

EF: —not—not before.

RM: Not before. My family was very—you know, and I didn't know really, when I was in college, you know, how my folks were registered.

EF: So obviously you graduate in '67, ran in '70, so had you been thinking about that?

RM: Well, —

EF: I mean, what prompted you to kind of sign up and—

RM: Probably for all the—all the wrong reasons. When I—when I graduated, I spent—spent time in the—in the Air Force, and I came back, and I wanted to, you know, continue my involvement in politics. And one of the things that—that we'd done at K State was there were closing hours at the dorms for the girls' dorms, so the guys on weekends, after they had to take the girls back, we'd meet out at the Holiday Inn for coffee and talk politics and talk strategy: what we're going to do in student government, what we're going to do, you know, the next—next time around. I wanted to get involved in those kinds of discussions in—in Sumner County, in Wellington. I kept inquiring, kept inquiring. Finally, another farmer, who was the head of the county taxpayers association (really it was the anti-taxpayers association) said, "If you're so dang interested, why don't—why don't you run for office?" So, I thought, Okay. There was—had a guy that had been in office for—he was running for his tenth—tenth year, his fifth term. You know, I'll run. I'll lose. But that'll show'em that I'm interested, and they'll start drinking coffee with me. Well, I won. And then I found out the reason I didn't get invited was because nobody was drinking coffee; they would get together for a county Republican meeting every two years, when the law said they had to have a meeting, and that was it.

EF: Did you campaign to say—I'm gonna go to Topeka and change something, or was it—

RM: I campaigned—you know, —

EF: —I'm young and wanna do this?

RM: The fellow I beat went by the name of Whitey. His name was Elmer Holt [Hall? 5:29], but everybody knew him as Whitey. And he was exactly fifty years older than I was. And I knew I really

 

couldn't campaign against him because the demographic of the district was a lot more in his favor than it was in my favor, so I campaigned on, you know, that I wanted to help make Sumner County a better place to live, to work and raise a family, just a—a positive campaign. And—and at that point in time, [President] Richard [M.] Nixon was kind of riding on a wave of popularity that might not have lasted long, but I tried to attach myself—it wasn't a presidential election year, but I tried to attach myself somewhat to some of the things he was doing.

EF: You get to the Statehouse, and in the time period before you seek leadership, you start as a back-bencher. And were there committees that attracted your interest in terms of public policy?

RM: Well, my—my first term, when I filled out a—my memory—when I filled out a questionnaire, I pretty well said I want to be on the Ag[riculture] and Livestock Committee, and wherever else you think I might will fit in. I got put on Local Government and Oil and Gas [Committees], and I think Oil and Gas maybe met two times during the two-year session, and then the committee—the committee went away. But by my second term, I knew what I wanted to be on, and I asked to be on the Federal and State Affairs Committee [often called Fed and State] and got that—got that assignment. And by then I'd started getting my—a real feel for a love of the policy, not the politics, which is what brought me to—to run for office, but the policy.

EF: What was it about Federal and State Affairs?

RM: It was just—you know, the whole—the whole variety of—of issues that—that it dealt with. I didn't—didn't really like the Local Government Committee because I didn't have an experience in local government and debating township laws or cemetery district laws seemed to me pretty boring. Some of the other committees, like Education—although one of the most important committees—without a background on a school board or—or in education at that time—I was single the first twelve years I served in the legislature, so I didn't really even have a background in education as far as having children in the school system. And Federal and State Affairs just had a whole variety of—we were doing a lot of things in Corrections at that time, and it was just pretty fascinating.

EF: Were—were there any issues on Federal and State Affairs that you pursued again before leadership that you recall?

RM: Later on, I became—I went off of the committee for a while, and then I went back on as chairman. And that's where I really probably got my teeth in—in issues, not because they were parades that I, you know, wanted to get out in front of but just came with the territory. The constitutional amendments on

 

pari-mutuel, liquor by the drink, and the state lottery all came through the committee. Then the following year, since they all passed—the voters approved all three of those—the implementing legislation came through. There was a—there was local interest or local—local expertise in—in the liquor issues. There were—there were—there was local interest and some expertise in pari-mutuel both from the horse racing side and the dog racing side, but since Kansas never had a lottery—there weren't any Kansas companies that were involved in the lottery— there wasn't any local expertise, so it was kind of natural that I became, at least in my eyes, the—the expert on that.

EF: When you say "local," what—how are you meaning it?

RM: State—people in Kansas. Anybody that's coming in to—to put something together on the state lottery was coming in from the outside, the various vendors and—and law enforcement people and so on.

EF: I noticed that you were on [the] Ways and Means [Committee, also known as the Appropriations Committee] and then went off. Was that not something that particularly—

RM: Well, the logistics of that were—were kind of interesting. My first major committee chairmanship was one I really wanted and I really enjoyed, and that was Energy and Natural—Energy and Natural Resources, and this was during the—the [James Earl "Jimmy"] Carter administration and the—and the energy—the energy crisis, and I—I really—really enjoyed that and—and—and worked with Governor [John William] Carlin very closely on getting a number of things passed. Some of were his ideas; some were my ideas; a lot of them were other people's ideas. But it was a—we had—it was just a lot of fun.

But I wore out my welcome in certain elements of the Republican Party because of taking too much of a pro-consumer point of view and—and viewed as anti-utility. That, coupled with my policy of not taking—letting lobbyists take me out and buy me a drink, buy me coffee—I'd wanted to hard to have coffee with the big boys, and then I wouldn't let them buy me the coffee, but that—that's quite an oxymoron right there.

But anyway, between—between my—my positions on the—on the lobbyist and my positions on some of the energy issues, I'd kind of worn out my welcome, and I—I think I was pretty good at reading the handwriting on the wall that I probably wasn't going to get —get—be that chairman, so I went to the incoming speaker and—and said, "You know, I'll save you the energy of kicking me off the committee.

 

Why don't you, you know, put me on Appropriations? I'd—I'd love to be the vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee." We kind of had a deal, and then some- —something happened, and I wasn't made the vice chairman but—it's kind of inside player—insider's game on the Ways and Means Committee, but the Front Five [that committee's leadership], three Republicans and two—two Democrats, kind of were on the subcommittee that make all the big decisions.

So, I was the third Republican on that. And I—I was having a good time. And—and then, after one year of that, Neal Whitaker, who was a good friend of mine in the legislature and personally, was—was the chairman of the Federal and State Affairs Committee. He resigned to take a job as a lobbyist. And, you know, I don't see a real future for me in leadership positions on—in the short term—on—on Ways and Means, so I called the speaker and said, you know, "Could I get moved over?" That gave him another opening on the Front Five, and he jumped—he jumped at that, and kind of the rest is history.

EF: Yeah. I noticed you were on [the] Post Audit [Committee]—

RM: Yes.

EF: —and chair of Post Audit—

RM: Yes.

EF: —a number of years.

RM: Yes.

EF: Anything you remember of that assignment?

RM: Well, up until that point in time, the Post—Post Audit was created when the constitutional amendment did away with the position of state auditor, and when—the Post Audit Committee was a joint committee, Post Audit, and the chairmanship alternated between the House and the Senate between, and it was the—the chairman of the Senate Ways and Means and the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. Well, the speaker split that off. That was another crumb but an important crumb that he gave me, and when I left Appropriations, I never knew if he forgot, but I—I got to—I got to do that for—for a number of years. And part of that time I was also chairman of the Rules Committee, so I was really doing—wearing three hats at a time, and I always thought somebody wasn't looking at the list very carefully, but I didn't—I didn't say anything.

But, you know, we did—we did, you know, a number of—a number of audits. Some of them were—were—were kind of—kind of fun. You know, using the [unintelligible; 14:05]—the Kans-An phone

 

system [a long-distance service for state employees] was being abused by state employees, and we found out that people in the governor's office had been calling out-of-state radio stations to request songs to be played for the boyfriends. But—but—but there were other—other audits on the misuse of dealers' license tags that—that led to some changes in—in laws.

EF: Before your aspiring to leadership, what would you point to —and that was—you were '71 through—I mean, in your first fifteen or more years. And it's unfair for you—ask you to look back thirty years. Are there anyone, two, three things you would point to that "I—I made a difference" in this? In those early years.

RM: There were a number of energy issues that we—we—we—were passed. They've been undone since then. So, I really didn't make a difference. Probably the things—and I've—I've—I've told people that this will—nobody will ever put this in my obituary or on—on my tombstone, but probably the—the things that I hung in for on the—enabling the legislation on liquor by the drink and—and pari-mutuel and—and, to a little bit lesser degree, the lottery—

EF: And those were through Federal and State—

RM: Those were through—through Federal and State Affairs, which is where—and that's a chairmanship I had, but I then ran for majority leader.

EF: Now, those in particular were—I kind of think of them as gubernatorial initiatives, and you were, in a sense—I'm thinking of Carlin.

RM: Right.

EF: —kind of representing a Republican point of view on those?

RM: There really wasn't a—partisan view on those issues, there wasn't- —it wasn't very partisan. The best of my memory of it, it wasn't—wasn't very partisan.

EF: Do you remember leaving your imprint on anything in particular on, say, the liquor by the drink or—I remember local option, for example, local vote to go into the liquor by the drink—

RM: The—the—the amendment, itself, had that provision that, you know, any—any county that—and this is—my memory is probably going to get off a little bit here, but any—any county that passed a constitutional amendment, liquor by the drink, would be legal in that county. Any county that didn't, would have to have another vote in subsequent times. And there was always provisions in there for only a certain amount of the revenue had to come from food in order to have—have the drinking license.

 

Probably the thing I remember is where I—I— [Edward F.] "Ed" Reilly [Jr.] was the chairman of the Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee, and him and I probably had completely different personalities, especially in dealing with these issues, but his thought was: Just convert the existing private liquor laws into drinking establishments and then move on for the rest of the battles on a different day. And the—the governor and I thought: Let's—let's use this momentum, this opportunity to move us even—you know, farther forward. So, we included and successfully included in that legislation things that everybody takes for granted now, such as when you go into a hotel, you can have a minibar in your room. What did that have to do with liquor by the drink? But it is—you know, at the very base—that is liquor by the drink, but it didn't—you know, wouldn't have been done if we hadn't, you know, dug—dug in.

You know, modernizing the—the laws on what retail liquor stores—up until that time, a retail liquor store had to have an—an exit—the entrance to the liquor store had to be out onto the street, so if you went into a mall and there was a liquor store at the mall, you had to go back outside and come in. That was for law enforcement purposes originally.

You— In a hotel. You'd have to go outside, come back in to—to buy a bottle to take to your room. There were literally twenty or thirty things like that that—

EF: And during all of this, no lunches with the lobbyists or—

RM: That they paid for, that's right.

EF: That they paid for. Okay.

Well, let's jump to after the '88 election. Sixty-seven Republicans in the House. You jump into a leadership race. What do you? How do you remember that?

RM: That one's pretty clear. My —my memory is—is—is pretty—pretty clear—clear on it—since one of my, you know, opponents in that race was is standing in the room [David Heinemann is observing the interview], it better be pretty accurate, too. The—the—the—I never aspired to leadership, primarily—and I've—I've—I've mentioned this a couple of times already—because of my image as Mr. Clean which isn't how I viewed myself, but I—you know, I didn't think that I would ever—you know, could get elected. I didn't really have political aspirations beyond the legislature. So, election night, general election night, I'm having a small party out at—out at the farm, and—

 

EF: In Sumner County.

RM: In Sumner County. And there—there was a race going on between the incumbent majority leader, [Joseph A.] "Joe" Knopp of Manhattan, and a—a state representative from Salina, Bob Ott, and I got—and I don't remember what sequence these phone calls came in, but I got phone calls saying they'd both been defeated. So, all of a sudden, here's an opening for a leadership position. The leadership election is in three weeks. I quickly decided that maybe the people don't like me. Can't get organized 'cause they're not gonna be in Topeka at the same time, between—in that period of time. So, you know, I started mobilizing, you know, support. And obviously, some other people had—you know, for different reasons, had exactly the—the same set of thoughts, and it became a three-way—three-way majority leader's race, which—

EF: How did you mobilize support?

RM: Lot—lots of phone calls and then road—road trips to meet the new people that had been elected and—and road trips to see a few of the—of the people that I'd served with and hadn't gotten particularly close to.

EF: What was your pitch?

RM: That I had good relations with—with the press, that I could—could be a—be a good organizer, and I—I pointed to—to my success with the issues in Federal and State Affairs. But primarily the—you know, Hey, gimme a chance. I'm—I'm a good—I'm a good guy.

EF: I've served time, and I'm willing to take it on. Burdett Loomis wrote a—did a book on the '89 session, and I kind of prepped for this interview by going back to the book. And Robert Miller is in that book, in a number of places. He has a couple of descriptions of Robert Miller, "an independent, reform-oriented legislator" (in quotes)— "aloof and distant" (in quotes). Are those fair?

RM: I think—I think they're fair. Maybe not for the reasons that people would ascribe to those words. I think, you know, people thought the fact that, you know, I wouldn't let a lobbyist buy me a cup of coffee or—or take—take me to dinner, I was being aloof or distant. And I'm not a warm, cuddly guy. I mean, even today, at 72, '3 years old, when somebody comes up and gives me a hug: Okay, and what's this for? So, you know, the words—the words fit, but not for quite the context that a lot of people saw them in.

 

EF: Loomis did an interview of you at the time, and, you know, asking the same question I'm asking, and your response, reported by him, at least, was, "I want a role in agenda setting." Do you remember? Is that accurate?

RM: Yeah, yeah.

EF: Was there something you wanted on the agenda?

RM: No, I just—I—I've—I've—again, in a lot of the talks I've given over—over the years about being in the legislature, I—I—one of the things I—the reason I love being in politics—what I discovered it in college—I didn't want to be one of the people that—that set around, you know, reacting to what was on TV, what—what Johnny Carson at that time would say on the Tonight Show. I wanted to be there when the decisions were being made, not only how to do things but what we were going to do things about. So, it's setting—setting the agenda.

EF: Is there any—that race, according to Loomis again, was there were three ballots, and I think you won in—in December of '88 by one vote.

RM: Right.

EF: How would you describe your group?

RM: My group of supporters?

EF: Yeah, the thirty-four who finally said, "We want Bob Miller."

RM: It—it was mixed. The—the—the divisions then—they weren't really divisions. You know, a lot of the—a lot of it was on—on relationships and—and friendships and people you trusted, people you had working relations.

EF: So, it wasn't rural-urban or—

RM: It wasn't—it wasn't—it wasn't rural-urban. You know, yeah, it wasn't young-old, rural-urban.

EF: Relationships.

RM: Big—big spenders-little spenders. You know, we didn't really—I didn't really think in about the terms of social conservative at all in—in those times, but I had went back and analyzed my supporters then with today's—today's definitions, they were all across the board on those issues.

EF: Okay. Jump two years ahead, '90 election. Republicans come up with sixty-three, and Democrats come up with—or, excuse me, Republicans come up with 62, and Democrats have the majority. You're elected Minority Leader. Did you have the same kind of close battle or do you recall—how do you recall that second round?

 

RM: It wasn't—it wasn't as close.

EF: [unintelligible; 25:57].

RM: And I—I don't recall exactly how—how it all—all played out. What I do remember is the morning after the election—I'd been asked quite a—quite a few weeks before to—to give a speech by a—a—a—legislator, who didn't vote for me—to give a—that's just a fact—to a nurses' group in Wichita. So, I'm here in the majority leader's office for election night. You know, we—we—we won the majority. I—I go to the Hyatt in—in Wichita, check in probably at one o'clock in the morning, and get up the next morning to give my speech, but I'd—I'd made—made an appointment to have breakfast with [William] Todd Tiahrt, who was—was running against Rick Bowden for—in a rural, [unintelligible; 26:55] Sedgwick county district. And—and he was somebody that I hadn't had a close working relationship within his campaign because, quite frankly, didn't expect him to win.

And I got—got a message at the hotel from—from Vicky, saying the county clerk has called—or the election commissioners called and said that they miscounted the votes and Todd lost. Well, that was a big deal to the Tiahrts, but it was also a big deal to me because that meant we didn't have the majority; we had—we had the minority.

EF: Yeah. But in terms of opposition, was it a rerun—I'm wondering if it was a rerun in terms of a leadership vote of—

RM: It was—it was pretty—it was—it was mi- —mixed, the people. You know, some of the people that opposed me—you know, or supported other people more than opposed me—were supporting me.

EF: Who was—who was—

RM: And I don't remember quite how it—how it—how it ended up. Michael—Dale [M.] Sprague, who was the speaker—was elected Speaker Pro Tem the same time I was majority leader ran, and I can't remember if Mike O'Neal ran a campaign and then dropped out, if it was that race or the next race. People—people were in and out.

EF: So, it actually was a—in a sense, a mix-up in—well, how do I say this? The thirty-four votes in '88 wouldn't—would not necessarily have been the same folks in '90 [crosstalk; unintelligible; 28:32].

RM: The same thing. No, no, it was not a—it was not a—a rerunning of the previous two years.

EF: Well, let's jump ahead again.

RM: Okay.

 

EF: Just focusing on the leadership, after the '92 election you're just sixty-six Republicans, and you're running for speaker. Any—

RM: The dynamics had changed a little bit, but because—even though I managed to dodge the bullet and not take all the blame for losing the majority, I was able to capitalize on running some good campaigns or helping run some good campaigns across the state to get the majority back in a—in a, you know, a sizeable—a sizeable majority. And that picked me up—picked me up some votes on the—you know, the—the political—from the political side.

EF: Did you do—did you do something for '92 election that you didn't do for '90?

RM: We did—we did more—more organized fundraising, that we could—we could distribute the money out to—to candidates. We set up a Campaign Committee of elected—it was—it was members of the Republican caucus, but they were elected by the Republican caucus to make those decisions on who was going to get the money so that I couldn't be accused of—of—of steering all the money to buy votes, in other words. And—and—and I was able to— you know, that paid off, I think, in—in changing some votes.

EF: I'm going to jump now to '94.

RM: Okay. Okay.

EF: Do you have any memory of '94?

RM: Things—things—you know, a lot of—a lot of things have changed.

EF: And the Republican numbers went from sixty-six to eighty.

RM: Yeah. A lot of—a lot of—a lot of things changed. You know, talk—talk radio, Rush—Rush Limbaugh. The Internet was—was just starting. We had a—had a guy in Washington by the name of Newt Gingrich (speaker of the House of Representatives], who was sending out cassette tapes to—you know, to thousands of people across the country. You know, I got them and was trying to figure out how to use those to re-record something I could listen to out on the tractor, things like that. But there were—there were people getting those that were—you know, got elected in the legislature, but that was—that was Gospel, and—and I found out, as I—I was going around, you know, talking to these candidates, and I was getting questions, not what do I think about school finance or what kind of people would I appoint to the—to the judicial committee but what was my favorite [conservative author of several books] Ayn Rand book—you know, questions I—I had not pondered for a—for a long, long time. And—and this was important to them.

 

And I also—I remember visiting with somebody that—that had beat an incumbent Democrat. The incumbent Democrat was Marvin Barkis [who was beaten by Jene Vickrey]. I—I—I can't think of the guy that beat him, but he ended up being majority leader. And I was talking to him about—you know, some-—something about—you know, one of the important things we do, you work on the budgets of the Regents institute—institutions. He—he says, "What's a Regent?" You know, you know, and I—and I use that as an example that there were more and more people getting elected that really didn't know what they'd been elected to. So, it was just a whole different kind of campaign, and the—and the social conservative issue—one-issue voters -- abortion [unintelligible; 32:20], prayer in schools, home schooling—you know, all of that. And it all got wrapped—

EF: Did you—you—you obviously said you kind of saw it coming.

RM: Yes.

EF: And, of course, Newt Gingrich [was] elected speaker of the—of the U.S. House in that year. But my question is more—you were obviously involved in recruiting candidates, much like you'd done two years earlier. Did you see—I mean, you mentioned the one legislator who won, beat Marvin. Did you see—were there signals out there?

RM: I'm—I'm sure there were signals. I missed them. The—you know, my—my—my approach when I was—you know, I was not involved in candidate recruitment or any of that kind of stuff until I was elected majority leader. So, you know, as—as majority leader, my—my approach was if somebody wants to be a candidate and they appear to be a good candidate and if they aren't a felon or, you know, an accused—a seriously accused wife beater or something like that, we'll work with them. We'll work with you. We're not going to take sides in the primary, but if they are the Republican candidate, you know, we'll work with them, give them, you know, all the—all the things that are available to all the other—other candidates.

And I think, you know, that approach helped me get what I—then ran and was elected speaker the first time. I took that same approach the second time, and a bunch of people got elected that, you know, if I'd have really been analyzing if [unintelligible; 34:10] are they going to support me or not, I would have known they weren't going to support me.

 

You—you—you—you know, go back to the Newt Gingrich thing. I think there was an influence that—Gingrich was elected speaker, like, a week in—if I'm remembering right, like, a week and a half before the leadership elections here in this room. And I—I think people—I think there were some people wanted to be like the big boys. You know, if there could be that revolution in Washington, we want to be the guys that just came to Topeka and the revolution too. And I think that was an influence. Do I blame my defeat on that? My defeat was a lot of things, including, you know, my being aloof and distant. But it was—it was a lot of things.

EF: Well, so much for that.

RM: Okay.

EF: Let's move more to kind of policy. As you—and, again, look back thirty years or so, and focusing on why you were in leadership, were there accomplishments of the legislature as a whole that you would point with pride to or disappointments in that era? Do you—what do you—I mean, leadership is a consuming kind of activity.

RM: Yeah. My—my—my style was to appoint people that I thought were really good leaders and had a lot of interest in the—in the areas that I appointed them to serve in: appropriations, tax—all the various committees. And I'd pretty well, you know, leave the ball in their—their court. As a result of that, you know—my memory isn't very good on what some of those accomplishments were. You know, you know, I'm—I'm very proud of the fact that during all my time in leadership, I never had a member of the caucus indicted. You know, those—those—those kinds of things, which—you know, we—we had good press. I was proud of the fact that I was never the victim of a political cartoon in my whole time in the legislature, and I don't think there's very many of the legislative leaders, even in my time, that could say that.

But as far as, you know, specific things, I never—I never championed a—you know, a particular tax increase or a tax decrease. I never championed the building of a new—of a new building or a new department in a university, so I don't have those kinds of things to brag about. But I think not having those to brag about is something to brag about, in a way.

EF: Mm-hm. When I think back on those years you were in leadership—obviously, [John Michael] "Mike" Hayden is Governor. Mike Hayden [unintelligible; 37:20] advocates a highway—champions a highway program, building a prison, water plan funding and a few things like that. A couple of weeks

 

ago, Marvin in a sense drew a contrast. Says, "I was for kids, not infrastructure." And I don't recall—well, I do recall you weren't greatly enthusiastic about a highway plan.

RM: That's right. I—I opposed it.

EF: Did you finally vote for it?

RM: No.

EF: —or did you—you didn't ever vote—

RM: I never voted for it. And my—my—my—you know, my thinking probably, in hindsight, was faulty. But I thought it was too much at one time, and it—and it would leave itself open to mis- —misspent funds, mismanagement. And it all, to the best of my knowledge, worked out fine.

EF: You were, again, according to the Burdett Loomis book, active in kids' programs even during the Hayden—I mean, during the Hayden administration. How did that come about?

RM: I'd gotten married—you know, number one, I had kids. All of—all of—all of a sudden, I adopted two—two young daughters. My—you know, I had a different focus. I got involved with some other legislators with the—with the same issues, and when—when I was minority leader, as you mentioned, Marvin Barkis was speaker and had Mar- —Marvin was—was four kids. He created a—a—I think it was called the Kansas Commission on Children something or another [sic; Kansas Children's Initiative], and I was the vice chairman of that, and—which was an unusual situation because usually the in a joint committee is the Senate, the vice chairman is—the chairman and vice chairman are one's from the House and one's from the Senate. Marvin insisted that—that I be the vice chairman of that. And we made a number of recommendations, which were enacted into policy.

EF: Now, that's fairly audacious, for the speaker and the minority leader to name themselves as chair and vice chair of a commission.

RM: Yes.

EF: Did you have any hesitation about that?

RM: I don't know—I didn't have any hesitation. I don't know what kind of negotiations I was involved in with—with the Senate leadership, but we got our—we got our way.

EF: You got it done. Marvin talked about a—having a good relationship with you, certainly, during his speaker's term. How did that happen? I mean, I look back and remember Marvin as being fairly a partisan guy, and, of course, I'm looking a little bit from the Hayden perspective, but here—and, of

 

course, you have the Rebel—the Rebels at that time making deals with Marvin on House rules. How did—how did you and Marvin kind of become allies?

RM: I was never sure that we were allies.

EF: Okay.

RM: This is—

EF: This is interesting.

RM: —this is—this is—this is—this is a quote or a question that I really—really didn't anticipate. You know, we—we haven't talked about, you know, the—the Rebels, but, you know, when I was elected majority leader, [James D.] "Jim"—Jim Braden was—was—was the speaker. One of the first things that—that the—the legislature does—after they elect leadership is adopt rules: joint rules, temporary rules, permanent rules. And we got the—the—I believe it was the morning that we were going to be voting on the rules at ten o'clock—we got the word that a group of Rebels were—were—these were Republican legislators, most of them not freshmen—

EF: Kerry Patrick, David Miller, [Robert] "Bob" Vancrum, J.C. Long,—

RM: Yes.

EF: —others.

RM: Den- —Dennis—Dennis Spaniol, Vern somebody from Wichita [Vernon L. Williams].

EF: Williams.

RM: Old—old—old guys, young guys. We didn't—we didn't know who all these were. And it was—I think it was twelve and a half Rebels. Clyde Graeber, who's had, you know, a million different, you know, obitu- —and he's still alive. He's had a million different obituaries written, the latest one dealing with the pig—the pig farms up there that he resigned from the County Commission on. But—but—but we—we got the word that this was going to happen.

EF: And this—we're talking about '88.

RM: This would have been '88.

EF: Eighty-eight session.

RM: So, you know, the first thing I did was go into—yeah, as—as a newly-elected majority leader—I went in and talked to the speaker.

EF: "What's goin' on?"

 

RM: Yeah. And—and I—I misspoke. I said, "Jim,"—no—I just—I just now misspoke. I didn't go in to talk to the speaker, I went in to talk to the minority leader, Marv- —Marvin Barkis. And—and—and said—you know. And he said, "Yes." You know. And I said, "Can we have—can we have some time to kind of negotiate?" I said, "There's some of these things that I'm—I'm hearing that, you know, you guys want, like not having really late-night sessions at the end of—end of the session; you know, having tighter rules on what can be—you know, money added into an appropriation bill that's for, like, an airplane for the executive branch of government that never been talked publicly about or anything," you know. And he said, "No, we've got the votes. We're gonna—we're gonna do it." So, from that point on, I never really felt like we were 100 percent on the same page. On issues like the children's issues, you know, I had no doubt.

EF: How did you—I mean, how—how did you balance this in the '88 and '89 sessions? Or, excuse me, '89 and '90 sessions. Mike Hayden is governor. A lot of—a lot of things on the agenda that were gubernatorial initiatives. Your kind of leadership role in—to some degree, supporting the governor, certainly, and your hesitation with some of the issues, like the highway program.

RM: The highway program was the only one where I opposed the governor—

EF: [crosstalk; unintelligible; 44:40].

RM: —where I—where I remember. You know, on a lot of the—a lot of the—a lot of the things—you know, Mike—Governor Hayden and I were, you know, on—coming from the same place.

EF: Yeah. Well, let's jump to the '92 session. Some issues—I mean, the school finance issue was a big issue, and you had not been in the Education Committee or the Tax Committee. How did—how did you—I mean—and [Governor Joan] Finney, in a sense, started—I mean, a court—a district court judge started—

RM: Started.

EF: —the issue rolling, and Finney grabbed it and then the House Democrats. How did you see that initiative from the House Democrats, the majority, one-vote majority in the House—how did you view that at the time? Was that viewed as partisan, or not? Or—

RM: The—Democrat —I don't have a completely clear rec- —recollection of—of those moments. But, you know, the—the—the—the House Democrats have viewed themselves, among other things, as, you know, the pro- —pro-education party. And as time moved on, you know, the Republicans—they weren't anti education, but they were—a lot of the Republicans, not the party, but a lot of Republicans were anti

 

teacher. And they—it was hard to separate out—you know, is school finance money for teachers or is it money for education? And then it gets partisan, when you kind of—

EF: Well, you're Minority Leader at the time. How did your caucus come down? As pretty much like you just described.

RM: Oh, pretty much like I just de- —just said, yeah.

EF: Antagonism toward the teachers—

RM: Yeah.

EF: —union. Probably a number of them weren't supported by—

RM: Right, and the teachers had never supported them; why should we support the teachers?

EF: But the initiative of the House Democrats got a lot of Republican support.

RM: Yeah.

EF: Did the caucus have a position as these things—

RM: I—I—I can't recall.

EF: Yeah. Well, I—I was curious, because that was certainly a significant development of that '92 session.

RM: I might throw something in here, kind of blend a couple of things we've talked about in. I mentioned the position of Re- —Republican legislators on education versus their position on teachers. I considered myself pro education and—and pro teacher and able to work with the teachers' organizations. When the committee that we talked about that Marvin was the chairman of the commission, and I was vice chairman—

EF: On children.

RM: On children. We were—we did he- —we did hearings, and I did he- —hearings of my own in my district, and I tried to get teachers involved because who better, besides parents, to talk about how do you solve, you know, some of the problems? How do you identify the problems, then how—how do you solve the—the problems? And I was literally shocked—and, you know, it takes a lot to shock me, or it did in those days—when they showed up with their union rep, who didn't live in the district, didn't know the kids we were talking about, and quickly pivoted the conversation to money.

EF: On schools.

RM: On school—on teachers, yeah. If you pay—if you pay the teachers more, all these problems will go away. That—that's probably not quite a fair assessment, but—but the—the fact that, you know, they

 

brought their—their—their teach- —the KNEA [Kansas National Education Association] rep out of—out of Wichita, out of Haysville or wherever the particular person was from—they wouldn't—you know—and I—I got the feeling that they had been giving some kind of instructions how to show up [at my stuff? 49:14] without their guy. And that soured me. Not enough to be vindictive, but it—it—it soured me on—on some of that.

EF: You were obvious- —you and Marvin were obviously working together on the children's initiatives.

RM: Right.

EF: How do you—you remember that? I mean, was—how, as you look back? And Joan Wagnon [legislator from Topeka who worked on the Children's Initiative and developed a Blueprint for Kansas Children and Families] was involved.

RM: Joan—Joan Wagnon. And Kathleen Sebelius [legislator from Topeka and later governor, a leader on children's issues]. Joan—Joan Wagnon and Kathleen Sebelius were—we co-sponsored several pieces of legislation prior to Marvin coming up with the idea of—of having the commission.

EF: Was that—did you see that simply as a continuation of stuff you worked on earlier?

RM: Yes, yes. There's a, you know, a massive broadening of—of looking into those issues.

EF: is there anything in that that you can point to that you were particularly interested in or—

RM: Pretty much all of it. Again, my—my memory—I can't remember—and then, you know, Mike—Mike Hayden also had a—you know—and my—my memory of—of some of those—my wife was—was on his—on his—I don't remember what it was called, a task force or a commission, on and—and—and some of the issues, my wife was on the task force, —and my memory are is kind of comingled.

EF: And having kids kind of sparked this.

RM: Yes.

EF: Did—did you get any criticism for your work there?

RM: From members of the caucus?

EF: Yeah.

RM: Not a lot. I mean, there—there—there were some of them—you mentioned some of the names, like Kerry Patrick and David Miller that are going to criticize you, even if it's their idea that you go down and talk on it and they'd come down and talk against it.

 

EF: You were involved in a number—in leadership over—what? —six legislative sessions. As you look back, what stands out? "We really did a good job this session." Or "We really screwed up." I mean, didn't—

RM: Probably passing the death penalty is the—is the—is the one—one moment when I [unintelligible; 51:55] sat there and hit the gavel and knew that, you know, —

EF: In other words, getting that done.

RM: Getting that—getting that done, and—

EF: And that would have been '93 or '4.

RM: And Governor Finney was going to let it become law, even though she opposed it.

EF: Yeah. Talk about that a little bit. How did that come to your mind?

RM: It's like a light—even—even though nobody's been executed, you know, when I hit that gavel, I didn't know that nobody was going to be executed, but, you know, that's a—a pretty—pretty weighty decision.

EF: Had—had that—I mean, that had been bouncing around for a while.

RM: Had been bouncing around pretty much —

EF: About every fifteen years.

RM: Yeah, pretty much since I've been in the legislature, when the Supreme Court reopened the question had—

EF: Did—were you on the—voting vote for it?

RM: Yes. I mean, it wasn't something I campaigned on. It wasn't—you know. But I always a supporter.

EF: You, during your leadership, obviously had Mike Hayden in the governor's chair for two sessions and Finney for four sessions. As you look back, how do you remember that—those relationships?

RM: It was day and—day and night difference. I mean, Mike Hayden—he came to the legislature I believe two years —after I did, you know, so we were rough- —roughly the same age. He was at Kansas State when I was there. I didn't—didn't know him at the time, although when I got back to the yearbook, I see that we were in the same place and the same—you know, at the same time. I—wa- —anyway. So. And—and then we all deferred to referred to Wendell Lady [from Johnson County] when he was speaker and was—was running for speaker. It was his cab- —kind of a kitchen cabinet, a group of us that would get together after lobbyist functions or whatever, late at night, and—and make—make plans and talk about what we'd do if we were the big boys. And so, I'd been around Mike for—you know, for

 

several years. So that. And then when—you know, when he became speaker, he didn't use that kind of, you know, team—or if he did, he didn't tell me about it, but I suspect that he really, you know, didn't—didn't have that—that kind of group.

But when he was governor, it was a lot more open. You know, there was no relationship with—with—with Governor Finney. I had—a—a—a guy that was my best man in—in my wedding, a high school classmate of mine. And this wasn't really, really well known up here in—in this building, for obvious reasons, was [Senate Minority Leader] Jack Steineger's administrative assistant, Richard Larimore. And—and Richard was a—was a good friend of Joan Finney, and—and Richard said, "You gotta treat her like you would your—you know, your aunt or something." So, you know, when she got elected and she had the leadership out for a—for a breakfast out at—out at Cedar Crest [the Kansas Governor's Mansion]—so I took her a housewarming present. You know, I went around my district and gathered up corn—corn flour —cornmeal from the Oxford Mill, and honey from a local, you know, beekeeper and then made up a nice little basket. I don't know if she ever saw it after I handed it to her at the door. I mean—you know, just—you know, and I tried two or three other, you know, things like that to kind of establish a relationship and just never—never happened. I was not—not around her office very much at all, dealing with her. Her staff, yes, but not her.

EF: Marvin described coming out of her office with you, and you're both shaking your head.

RM: I'm sure that's accurate.

EF: [Laughs.]

RM: I'm sure that's accurate.

EF: You have no correction—

RM: No.

EF: —or elaboration?

RM: No, no correction on that.

EF: Well, how did—there was obviously a break, significant break in the '91 session between Marvin and the governor over—well, the way Marvin described it is, "We worked hard to pass legislation, and then she vetoed it without consultation." And then he says, "We were gleeful to override her veto." I mean, here's—the Democrats have the majority, and they won't even support the governor's vetoes. How did—just kind of—not that you were in the middle of that—how did you observe that at the time?

 

RM: Quite frankly, I don't remember what the issue was. This is not—you know, being around discussions for the last twe- —you know, twenty years or something, I—I don't remember what that issue even was, but I know things like that happened.

EF: Did you—I mean, she was overridden more than any governor in recent history—

RM: Multiple—multiple times.

EF: Multiple times. And—but—

RM: And some of them were—were insignificant kinds of pieces of legislation.

EF: Yeah, yeah. In Marvin's view, the overrides were on things that his House Democrat majority had worked on.

RM: Right, right.

EF: And I just—I was kind of curious, as you were watching the Democrats override—how that was going.

Do you want to take a break?

RM: I just—I thought I had my alarm going off.

EF: You've talked about this a little bit. I'm shifting again. And I was trying to think how to—how to raise it. The ninety- —in fact, I've written in a book on Kansas politics, that the '94 session—or '94 election was a real break in state politics, national politics. And I guess in part I've asked this question, but I'm in a sense framing it in a broader sense: Did you see this coming? You mentioned the Gingrich tapes. I mean, if I were looking from '94 earlier, you know, politics were pretty competitive between—in Kansas—between Republicans and Democrats.

RM: That's right.

EF: The Democrats had actually won a House majority twice in that—

RM: Period.

EF: —twenty—prior twenty years. Other than the Gingrich tapes, so to speak, did—did you see this kind of shift getting—

RM: I—I saw numerous things. I didn't connect the dots in a—in a meaningful way, that it was anything but, you know, a passing fad or something. You know, the—you know, call him anything that—you know, the Republicans began to call anything they didn't like "a liberal plot"—you know, big—big—big spenders, socialist, things that were just, you know, not—not right. I didn't think—didn't think it would ever stick, but it just all came together. And—and that's part of what the, you know, the Gingrich—

 

Gingrich tapes were—were—were, ma- —you know, have—have a plan, la- —label your opponent, make—you make the issues. It doesn't have to be necessarily the whole truth. It doesn't have to be the most important—the most important issue. You know, you know, is home schooling—you know, in that day and—it was—it was home schooling, and the most important issue in the state was, you know, at what level should gun laws be made? Should they be made at the state level or at the local level? Is that one of the most important issues? But people were campaigning on those issues.

EF: Did—did you connect the Rebels with this later development in '94, in the '94 election, Gingrich and—whatever?

RM: I didn't really. A lot of those people—if you—if you look at, you know, their—where they went, they were kind of all over the place later on. Some of them didn't run for re-election. They—they didn't follow through. You know, I expected with to see some—even as—you know, as far into the future as—as [Samuel D. "Sam"] Brownback's being elected—you know, I expected to see some of those people surface in—in appointments. It didn't. I'm not sure how much of that was just a group of people that were back-benchers and they all came together at—at one point in time, and I—I—and I don't mean this as der- —I probably shouldn't say it, but I don't mean it as derogatory as it—as it sounds, but the old saying: If you put a hundred monkeys at a hundred typewriters, eventually there's going to be a good novel written. You know, that might be a little bit what happened. But these were intelligent guys. But they didn't have—I don't think they had a lot in common with kind of the—the—the—where the party has gone now.

EF: Yeah. I was trying to think of those that stuck around. David Miller, of course, stuck around in politics in the '90s. [Tim] Shallenburger wasn't in that group.

RM: Shallenburger—Shallenburger was in that.

EF: Was he? Was he one of the Rebels?

RM: He—he was in—he was in that group, yes. And J.C. didn't stick around that long. Dennis Spaniol didn't stick around. The older guys from western Kansas didn't stick around. Clyde Graeber stuck around and ended up being in the [Bill] Graves administration. Graves appointed him instead of Shallenburger. That's a—that's a—and I hadn't—I don't know if I'd ever thought of that before. You know, he—he Graves appointed him state treasurer instead of Shallenburger.

EF: Huh! I forgot that, too.

 

Did you see—one thing I'm trying to understand is when Koch Industries, Charles Koch, entered into state politics—did—Jonathan Small apparently was representing Koch Industries in the '80s. I don't remember that at all. And, of course, later, the Kochs got involved with ALEC [American Legislative Exchange Council] in creating Kansas Policy Institute and a variety of other vehicles. I didn't—did you see that at all in—

RM: I don't know at what point I—you know, I became aware of the Kochs as we—we—as we know them now. I remember when I was at Kan- —Kansas State, you know, Fred Koch, being—his name being out there and him being around with [Southwest Grease? 1:04:48], if I remember right, at the time, but the John Birch Society board of directors and things like that, and then kind of—from my perspective, the Koch name disappeared. When I got elected to the legislature, you know, Willard Garvey was the guy that was funding think tanks and—and had people around, that was making campaign contributions where he was getting warehouse receipts for bushels of wheat instead of money. And then somewhere that transition took—took place. I don't know exactly when that happened, but it—you know, in looking back, I think—you know, the—the Kochs' rise in all this stuff was pretty quick.

EF: And pretty much after your leadership time period.

RM: Yes. When ALECS [sic]—you know, when I—when I was speaker, you know, ALECS was—Kansas was kind of getting—some certain people from Kansas were getting involved in ALECS, but I don't—I don't—but I don't remember the—the Koch involvement at that point in time.

EF: Do you recall members of the Republican caucus attending ALEC—

RM: Yes.

EF: —meetings?

RM: Yes. In fact, one of the things I was trying to do was cut back on duplicate or sort of duplicate organizations, and there were—at the time, there were—there were two—from the time I was elected to the legislature until the time I was speaker, there had been mergers of a number of government organizations—I don't know what the right word is. The National Conference of State Legislatures was a merger of several previous organizations, and there was—there was another—there was another—another organization—

EF: Council of State—

 

RM: Council of State Governments. And I was working at trying to eliminate even more of that duplication, and I was surprised when all of a sudden there was resistance in the—in the caucus. They wanted to add —another body—you know, this brand-new—new body.

EF: Which was ALEC.

RM: Which was ALEC, and start sending people to that. And when I kind of played the fiscal responsibility card they said, "Oh, we'll just use their money. We don't"—you know. And that's—I don't know if there's state money goes into it now other than maybe per diem or something.

EF: Another development, obviously, during this period was the abortion issue, Right to Life, Summer of Mercy. Do you—how do you remember the emergence of that?

RM: Well, it was a Federal and State Affairs issue. It was only—I think when I was speaker, I started sending some of the issues to [the House] Judiciary [Committee] because it evolved into much more appropriately where legal minds needed to be involved, not—not the mismatch of Federal and State Affairs. Most of the issues in the early days in Federal and State Affairs—they usually didn't go very far because the Catholics and the evangelicals weren't on the same page. And they'd be—you know, they'd be—they'd be fighting each other and the pro-life—or pro-choice people, so the pro-choice people usually came out ahead because the other side was—was divided.

EF: Mm-hm. Were you aligned in any way on those issues?

RM: I always supported the pro-choice.

EF: I'm going to—I skipped over something I wanted to ask you about. And I'm back during your leadership years. The Loomis book described you as a policy entrepreneur on campaign finance reform. How—is that an accurate description?

RM: It's an interesting description. I thought I'd read all his stuff, and I don't—I don't remember that one.

EF: You don't remember.

RM: A little bit of—a little bit of background: You know, campaign finance and issues like that, when I ran for the legislature, weren't on—on anybody's radar screen in—in Sumner County, Kansas, let alone, you know, Kansas. Then came along Watergate, and all of a sudden that was a big issue, and Richard [B.] Walker, who was a—just retired as a—as a district judge now in Harvey County that came to the legislature two years after I did kind of take took that issue on as a—as a cause—were—were really involved in—in—in that issue, creating the—what was then known as—it's got a different name now, I

 

think, but the Governmental Ethics Commission. And—and—and— [unintelligible; 1:10:26]—and—and—and Speaker [Duane] "Pete" McGill I think had some—maybe had some regrets later on about how some of the—the things played out but was very helpful and—in—in those issues.

EF: Now, Loomis is talking about the '89 session. Do you recall—and I—I get—let's forget that. What did you see needed to be done in campaign finance reform? I mean, did you have a strong feeling about changing something at that time?

RM: What—what I was talking about was earlier—earlier than that. I'm not sure—I'm not sure what—

EF: Okay, so your—most of your memory goes back to the McGill—

RM: Is back in—yeah.

EF: —speaker era.

RM: Yeah, back in '73, '74, that—that—that time frame.

EF: Well, I'll tell Burdett to—to—he's off base.

RM: He might—you know.

EF: One other thing. I'm jumping around a little bit, but the Kochs were having a big legal battle, Charles and David versus Bill. And Bill Koch got connected with Governor Finney to some extent. Do you—do you recall anything about that activity? Not that it would have been a legislative issue.

RM: I'm trying to think. I—I know Bill got involved with the Attorney General, Carla Stovall. But I—you know—and he's the only one that I've met with on a—on a one-on basis.

EF: Bill Koch.

RM: Yeah, [unintelligible; 1:12:23].

EF: What do you recall about that?

RM: He was very interesting, but he—for somebody with as many degrees as he has—you know. I almost had to order breakfast for him, I guess is probably the way to put it in layman's language.

EF: Well, he—

RM: And it was obvious that he was just—you know, you know, he was wanting as many supporters on his side of something that we weren't even players in, but he was trying to create all that goodwill and, you know, funding the crime commission and all those things.

EF: You don't remember a similar meeting with Charles Koch, then.

RM: No, no.

 

EF: Well, I think we've covered a good part of what—some of the legislative stuff. You—twenty-six years in the legislature, you got to see a lot of folks. You not only be in leadership but see a lot of folks in leadership, and I just looking at—I mean, a number of governors, speakers, minority leaders, Senate presidents, et cetera. Who stands out in that twenty-six-year period that they really had figured this out and helped the state move—move forward? Anybody in particular?

RM: I think, you know, on kind of an equal—equal level. Mike Hayden and John Carlin. Both had some—both had some good—good visions and good skills at—at executing. You know, Mike—Mike Hayden got caught up in the whole property tax issue, which wasn't all his making, whether it was handled completely right. But, you know, Governor Finney was able to—you know, to really capitalize on that.

EF: Did you have much experience with Robert F. Bennett?

RM: Not a lot. I was—I was new enough to the legislature, and he had a—a certain group of guys that he hung out with, and—and I didn't have a lot in common with that group of guys. And they weren't bad guys, for the most part.

EF: Yeah. What about—I mean, obviously, Mike Hayden, John Carlin, legislative leaders. Any others that stand out?

RM: Wendell Lady is, you know, kind of one of my—one of my favorites.

EF: Did you—during your leadership, did you kind of draw on some of your experience with those folks?

RM: Yeah. I mean, I—I tried to—you know, when I was—when I was making decisions and, you know, on how to—you know, how to—how to refer bills or who to appoint to—to some committee, and more importantly, maybe how to explain that to the—what I'd done to the caucus. You know, I—I tried to think—you know, refer back to how those—how those guys did it, and sometimes I was successful in drawing some comparisons and using—using their tactics, and sometimes I wasn't.

EF: I came onto—if I go on the Internet and put "Robert H. Miller" in there, I come on an article that lists a whole series of awards that you received while you were in the legislature and, according to this article, a Legislator of the Year award was granted, and—I can't remember the year. I'm not even sure it's indicated. What—what was that about?

RM: There was a—a publication out of Wichita called Kansas Magazine [Kansas Magazine? 1:18:57]. It wasn't the Kansas Magazine that Economic Development Department had. And it was run Roe Messner—I'm trying to think of the person—you know, this is, you know, infamous. He—he built churches out in—his wife [Tammy], who later on earlier married Jim Baker?

 

EF: Yeah, I remember.

RM: So, it was Roe Messner's wife, Tammy. Jim Baker's—you know, you know. Anyway, she had the magazine.

EF: Oh, really!

RM: Yes.

EF: I'll be darned.

RM: And that's—and they were trying to—they were—and they did a pretty—you know, they picked me, but they did a—they and did a nice job of copying Texas Monthly. Texas Monthly for years has done a—a series on outstanding legislators and legislative furniture, and that's—they—they—they—this magazine did it one time, and I happened to be picked—

EF: Do you remember what year it was?

RM: It was the year before I ran for majority leader, because I know I mailed a copy of that to everybody.

EF: Very good.

Well, I'm through all my—my questions. Anything else you want to put in the memory bank of the—

RM: Just that, you know, in twenty-six years you—you—you do meet a lot of very interested—interesting people, you know, from all walks of life, from—you know, from—you know, from—from all over—all over the state, you know.

Probably my—my biggest regret—and this—this probably goes back to the reoccurring theme of—of—of being aloof and distant is I didn't develop, you know, very close relationships or close enough relationships with some of those people that have continued on for the—you know, for twenty years out. I mean, it's just a great, great group of people. And I—I always pictured myself as—as kind of one of the guys in the Continental Congress that—that, you know, would go—you know, go—you know, take care of business, and then go back to their plow that was leaned up against the tree, hook it up to the horse and—and go back—go back to work worse. I—so I never had aspirations to run for governor or to run for, you know, another office, which if—if you don't have those kind of aspirations, it does give you a little more flexibility. It also takes away probably some of your drive and motivation to really go for the kill.

 

EF: Mm-hm. I've got a policy question I'm going to save. I've got some notes, but you lost the speaker's job in—after the '94 election.

RM: Right.

EF: You decided not to run again, and Marvin reminded me—he ran for attorney general even after he'd lost. I don't recall that you ever ran for elective office again.

RM: No, and I—I—I never had any plan to run—run for another office.

EF: How did you see that? Did you say, I've done my time?

RM: No, it was time—it was time to go—go back, pick up, you know, that—that plow that was, you know. And kind of interesting: That point in life or that point in life, cotton was becoming a—a—a—new crop, and my first year out of the legislature, I planted my first cotton crop, and all of a sudden I was involved in national—because of my political background, the—the cotton producing states saw that, you know, they could add, you know, another representative from the state that gave them access to two more senators and five—at that time, five—five congressmen. And I rose to positions in some national cotton organizations that I didn't have any business rising to. But that made a second fun run in my life.

EF: So, cotton politics. Is there a politics in the cotton—

RM: There's—there's a lot of—lot of—lot of—lot of politics, and every once in a while, when there's—when there's debate on the farm bill, people always say, you know, "The dairy guys and the cotton guys always get their way because they know how to do it." And [Kansas State University professor emeritus] Barry Flinchbaugh used to tell that story, said, "If the wheat guys could just get their act together like the cotton guys and the dairy guys"—now that I'm a cotton guy, I see exactly what they're talking about.

EF: Ramon [pronounced RAY-mun] Powers [a member of the Oral History Board], I think, has reminded me that—an issue—and this is, I would think, prior to leadership experience, that was significant over a number of years: Wolf Creek [Nuclear Power Plant]. And you may have had a number of involvements in that. What do you—how do you remember that issue? Were you—were you involved in that?

RM: Very. Very. You know, Ramon would remember that because he was the legislative research staff for the committee [the Energy and Natural Resources Committee] that I chaired on Energy—

EF: Well, he didn't want us to miss that.

RM: —Energy and Natural Resources. I thought it was bad economics. I thought the Rural Electric Co-ops [sic; Cooperatives] were, you know, kind of sucked into being a part of—a part of Wolf Creek,

 

because they wanted—they wanted to run with the big boys. I—I—I mentioned, on in regard to the teachers, about the—you know, not—I thought they didn't want to go to meetings without their union guy—or their—their teachers' organization guy. I sent a letter out—we had a special committee on—on Wolf Creek. I can't remember exactly what the—the subject matter was, but that was in a nutshell. I—I sent a letter out to every local Rural Electric Co-op board member, asking them some pretty simple questions. I got three answers back before the Kansas—whatever the—the state organization put the word out: "Nobody talk to Miller." To me, that was very, very telling.

I went to a couple meetings—you know, I went to a couple—the—the wool was being pulled over all the local people's—you know, they talk about being—co-ops being, you know, run from the grass roots, but they weren't being on that. And I think, you know, many, many of those—those people a few years later, you know, wished that, you know, their local co-op had not joined the consortium that was part of Wolf Creek.

EF: Do you remember the time frame you're talking about? Because I remember it goes back to the Bennett time.

RM: This would have been—I have to count on my fingers—'78 to '82? I'm not sure exactly where, but those were the four years I was chairman of that committee, and I'm —I'm not sure—

EF: And that's the Energy [and Natural Resources] Committee.

RM: That was the Energy [and Natural Resources] Committee. And I'm—I'm not sure where in that four years that—that fell.

EF: Bennett obviously, before that time. But there was—was it John Simpson of Salina, Senator Simpson that was a big opponent of that?

RM: Yes. And Arnold Berman from Lawrence.

EF: Okay. And so, you were a strong opponent of that.

RM: Yes.

EF: Was it just on economics?

RM: My—my argument was—was—was economics, not the—not the safety. I—I got involved in low-level—low-level radioactive waste disposal, was on the group that negotiated a compact between, like, five states to dispose of the—the waste, which never came—never came to fruition. None of the

 

compacts that were passed in the United States ever—ever—ever implemented. [crosstalk; unintelligible; 1:25:25].

EF: And that was the Hayden time, the low-level nuclear waste compact.

RM: Yeah. The safety part didn't concern me. It was the economics, which I think, in hindsight, is still—is still the problem. That's why there's—

EF: Has your view changed on that?

RM: No. I mean, there's—there are several plants that, you know, utilities have spent literally billions of dollars on that are never going to be built, and the ratepayers are—

EF: And basically your—you would conclude consumers are just paying a lot more than they would have had to pay—

RM: Yeah, that's right.

EF: —as a result of this. Okay.

Well, unless Ramon has more, I think we're going to bring it to a close. Thank you for putting up with all the questions and digging back in the gray matter.

RM: I thought of things I hadn't thought about for a long time.

EF: Any closing statement? You—you had an earlier closing statement.

RM: Nothing else.

EF: Okay. Great. Thank you, Bob.

[End of interview.]

 