INTERVIEW OF RON HEIN BY ALAN CONROY, APRIL 16, 2021
KANSAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Alan Conroy: Good afternoon. The date is April 16, 2021. It's about 3:30, and we're in the Senate Chambers of the Kansas State House in Topeka, Kansas. I'm Alan Conroy, a forty-year-plus state employee with the majority of that time, state service working in the Kansas Legislative Research Department, a central nonpartisan research and budget staff for the legislature. I'm currently with the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System.

Today it's my pleasure to be interviewing Senator Ron Hein who served ten years in the legislature. He was first elected to the House in 1974, where he served one term, and then he ran successfully for the Senate and was elected to two terms here in this Chamber. He left the legislature, I believe to start lobbying and has operated a very successful lobbying firm since leaving the legislature in 1984, and he's currently a managing partner with the Hein Government Consulting Group.

I will be conducting the interview on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, Incorporated, a not-for-profit corporation created for the purpose of interviewing legislators. The interviews will be made accessible to researchers and educators, and the interviews are funded in part by a grant from the Humanities Kansas. The audio and video equipment is being operated by the former House Speaker Pro Tem David Heinemann.

Senator Hein is from Topeka. He's an attorney by training and as a registered lobbyist, having run a successful lobbying firm for over thirty years, I believe. Our discussion this afternoon I'd like to discuss first your legislative service and then your experiences and perspectives on the legislative process from that perspective, and then we'll talk about your lobbying career.

Ron Hein: Okay.

AC: So, first elected to the Kansas House in 1974, and then elected to the Senate in 1976 and 1980. Your direct legislative experience was ten years and all representing—I think your district was always in Shawnee County. I think in the House, it was District 52, so part of Topeka. I don't think you had any rural areas, did you, or townships?

RH: We had some townships outside the city.

AC: In the legislature then in 1975, you served on Judiciary and Public Health and Welfare, and then in 1976, Judiciary, Public Health and Welfare, and then Transportation. Then you decided, and we'll talk about the change, but then you ran for the Senate in District 20, again also here in Shawnee County. Over those next eight years, quite a number of committees, but Fed[eral] and State affairs, Judiciary, Governmental Organization, Transportation and Utilities, Special Claims, the Joint Committee, and you were Chair of that, Administrative Rules, and I think you were also Chair of that at one point, certainly lots of experience through those various committees. I think you were on Ways and Means?

RH: I was.

AC: Starting in '81. You chaired the Elections Committee as well, so quite a cross-section of legislative committees. You touched on a lot of different areas.

Maybe we'll just start out a little bit with your background before you got to the legislature and kind of that life before entering this building. I believe you're a native Kansan, is that correct?

RH: Yes.

AC: You were born in?

RH: Seneca, Kansas.

AC: Seneca, that's what I thought, yes. In 1967, you went to Washburn, got a BA in Political Science, and then Washburn Law School and got your law degree in 1974, but you got to do at least one semester abroad in England, which must have been a great experience. So maybe just in terms of your family, your background, did you come from sort of a political active family, your parents or grandparents or uncles of anything like that?

RH: Not in my immediate family, but my great-uncle, Czar Reed, was Speaker of the House in the US Congress. I may have gotten some genes from that, but I don't know. That would be it.

AC: And where was he from? Was he from here in Kansas?

RH: I actually don't know where he was from. I need to do my ancestry training here on that.

AC: Yes. So as you were either in high school or college, any mentors in terms of public service or legislative service that directly or indirectly would have encouraged your interest in public service?

RH: I ran for offices in high school and ran for senior class president and lost that race.

AC: I was going to say, were you successful?

RH: No, I really did pretty poorly up until I ran for the legislature. I lost everything I ran for in the educational system. But I was always involved. In college, I served on the Student Senate or Student Council, and then one of my mentors was in many ways John Peterson who is also a lobbyist now and served in the House in 1970 through '74, I think. I think he ran for Congress in '74. I had worked on a couple of his campaigns prior to my running in 1974. So I certainly worked a lot with him and learned a lot about politics and learned a lot about electioneering from John.

AC: I bet. A good source. Any national figures or people at the state level or national level, just in terms of who you admired or maybe somebody that you might want to follow, I guess?

RH: Well, I don't know if there was anybody I necessarily wanted to emulate or anything like that, but I stayed up on current events. I watched what was going on politically. I'm sure I always had my opinion. I had a pledge—I used to do kind of debating about political issues, and I had a pledge son in my fraternity who used to say, “Ron, you argue about everything,” and, of course, my response was, “I do not!” I'd get involved in debates on political issues and things like that, starting at an early age.

Then in 1974, you decided to run for the Kansas legislature, and that was your first I guess sort of publicly elected position then. You didn't do School Board or City Council or anything like that.

RH: No, that was it.

AC: Just jumping right into the legislature. I noticed that primary in 1974, it was a seven-person primary, and some of the names, J. B. Littlejohn, Ken Carpenter, Melvin Neely, and others. You were successful with 35 percent of the vote out of a seven-person election. That's pretty good. Do you remember much about the, I guess that first campaign? Did it go kind of as you thought? Or maybe John Peterson was giving you some suggestions?

RH: The '74 campaign was an interesting campaign because you mentioned, I finished up my law school over in Uxbridge, England, just outside of London at Brunel University over there. I finished up there about June 15th. I came back to the States and had to take the bar exam like July 30th and 31st. A lot of my classmates remember that the bar review, I'd be sitting there, signing my little hand card, “Dropped by to say hello. Sorry I missed you. Ron Hein.” I'd be doing that instead of paying attention to the law review.

I had the bar exam then, and then I had election. It was whatever, August 3rd or whatever the first Tuesday in August was. It was kind of a lot of material crammed into a short period of time there, trying to do an election, pass the bar, and do the whole thing in about six weeks. But, yes, the election went like I wanted it to.

AC: A lot of door to door?

RH: A lot of door to door.

AC: You got to meet some of your friends you didn't even know.

RH: That's part of what I learned from John. The other thing that I guess I'll point out, I don't know if you can do this nowadays with the mass mailings and stuff like that, but I would—every

piece of literature I put out, and I put out three pieces during a campaign, and I put them out door to door, but I'd have volunteers or whatever help me put these out door to door. But every piece of literature I put out had a picture of me walking door to door. When somebody got this brochure at the house, they thought I had brought it by.

AC: A big campaign budget?

RH: I had none. I had no money.

AC: I don't know. The state party or any of the associations then? Maybe there wasn't much of that then.

RH: Actually the state party was supporting J. B. Littlejohn for the seat, a wonderful man. I beat him, and he came back later and served in the House. But the seven-way race, it was really kind of between Mel Neely who was head of the KNEA at that time and J. B. Littlejohn and me. It was really more of a three-way race, but there were seven individuals in the race.

I mimeographed a lot of my brochures. I actually did. People watching, they won't know what a mimeograph is.

AC: It must have worked because you got elected.

RH: Go look it up on Wikipedia.

AC: I noticed in 1974, of course, there were a total of ten Constitutional amendments, five at the primary, five at the general election on all kinds of things from bingo to oath of office to the state printer, powers of the State Board of Education. Did those, I guess was that an issue where people, I guess maybe as you went door to door or in any discussions or—

RH: You know, Alan, that's the first time I've ever heard that. I was so busy campaigning, I didn't even realize that was the case, but I don't remember people really talking about the Constitutional issues.

AC: I just wondered if that might have generated some of the turnout because some of the people were for or against it and wanted to go.

RH: It may have, but—

AC: As it turned out, nine of the ten passed. of course, the one that didn't pass related to the powers of the State Board of Education.

RH: I wasn't aware of that. I'll have to go back and relook at my history.

AC: Then in 1976, you decided to run for the Senate. And Bob Storey, is that when the Senate was changing from two years to four years?

RH: It was already four years, but they changed from where it used to be we had three senators in Shawnee County, and they ran for the whole county. Then with the—I think it was Baker v. Carr decision, that they had to have an actual district. So, yes, that had already been done before then. I can't remember what year.

AC: And that one, you got 60 percent of the vote when you ran for that Senate seat. He got 32 percent. Anyway, that was certainly a successful—

RH: And I'd like to talk about that race.

AC: Yes, please do.

RH: Before I ran, I kind of made a list of people I wanted to call. I don't remember exactly what number I started out with, but quite a few. I think I had fifty or more people that I wanted to talk to about whether I should run.

AC: Right.

RH: Then I would call somebody, and they'd give me their feedback, and they'd say, “Well, have you talked to So and So?” I'd add that name to my list. I eventually came up with about a hundred people. Almost to a one, the hundred people said, “You can't win. You can't win. Don't do it. Don't run.”

But I ran. I'll say to one particular case of somebody who told me, he said, “I really don't think you can win, but will tell you, I'll vote for you.” In fact, a lot of them were just saying that, but this one in particular was “I've got a job in the state that's involved with the Department of Transportation, and Bob Storey is the Chairman of the Transportation Committee. I'll put up a Bob Storey yard sign. I'll have a Bob Storey bumper sticker, but I'll vote for you.”

Now I don't know if he ever voted for me or not. He could have just been telling me that. But the message I got was even that we don't think you can win, but if you run, I'll support you. So I said, “Well, okay. Let's go for it.” So the entire election, people were telling me, “You're not going to be able to win.” When I beat him 2 to 1, it shocked the whole community.

AC: Any campaign or budget there? Now it's a Senatorial district rather than a House district.

RH: I think my budget was five thousand dollars. Of course, that's in 1976 dollars. I think his budget was well over twenty thousand dollars. I think he outspent me 4 to 1. But I did a lot of work and worked hard and did the door-to-door. I had a lot of yard signs.

AC: And then in the general election, you beat Dan Lykins, and that was 68 percent of the vote, so certainly successful there.

RH: And another great guy. That was a really great, clean campaign.

AC: Do you remember any of the issues? Was it just general who can serve them better?

RH: At a kind of a local level, there are issues that you get involved, but a lot of it is just getting to know people, in a sense. When you go up to a door and somebody says, “I've never had anybody come by my door before,” they don't care whether you're a Democrat or a Republican. You probably can get their support because you bothered to come by.

AC: Yes. Certainly that effort to go door to door paid off.

RH: It paid off.

AC: And I think it seems like a lot of I guess Kansans sort of expect that out of their potential elected officials, that they will make that effort.

RH: Certainly at the local level, yes. I mean, you can't do that and run for Congress or US Senate or something like that, although you can do some targeted, but yes.

AC: Then in 1980, another primary, I think Charles Sloop was his name, and you won with 70 percent of the vote. And then in the general election, Don Hoffman, and you won with 65 percent of the vote. Certainly a theme here of 60 to 70 percent of the vote. Certainly you're turning out your supporters at the elections. That's very good.

RH: I'd add one other thing. When I ran, I just said, “I'm going to be honest with you. I'm going to tell you”—I'm not necessarily going to tell you what you want to hear. I'll tell you what you need to hear, and I'll tell you the truth. I think that went over with people. I still remember one phone call in particular, a guy called up and said, “I want to know where you stand on abortion.” As any legislator knows, that's not an easy issue to respond to on a one-on-one phone call. So I told him where I stood. He said, “You know, I couldn't disagree with you more.” I figured I'd lost this vote. He said, “But you know what? I called the other two guys”—this was in the primary in '74, the two other frontrunners, he called, “and they both hem hawed around. They kind of wanted to know where I was before they were going to tell me where they were.” He said, “But you just came out and told me. You just responded to my question, and although I disagree with you on this issue, if you're going to be that honest with me, I'll vote for you.” I

don't know whether he ever did, but to me, if he was being truthful, then it meant a lot to me, and I think a lot of people are that way.

AC: They just want to know.

RH: They can handle honesty. They just don't want to be deceived. They don't want to be lied to.

AC: Yes. So you got elected to the House. Do you remember the first time you went to the well of the House to speak in that Chamber as a member?

RH: I don't necessarily remember the first time.

AC: They didn't haze you as they do sometimes these days?

RH: I don't remember that. It sure could have happened. I do remember a time I went down on the House floor and suggested, presented an amendment that in order to get your expense allowance, they pay you a monthly stipend, that you had to submit receipts for your expenses, and it got overwhelming defeated on a voice vote. I can remember the noise was just resounding to my amendment. They didn't want that amendment.

AC: So you came to the House. Pete McGill was Speaker, is that right in '75?

RH: Yes.

AC: Jim Maag was Speaker Pro Tem.

RH: Yes.

AC: Richard Rogers was Senate President, and, of course, Bob Bennett was Governor.

RH: Yes.

AC: Then in '76, Pete McGill was still Speaker, and Ross Doyen became President of the Senate. But then in 1977, then of course, John Carlin was elected. You had a Democrat Governor to work with—I'm sorry. '77, he became Speaker. He was Speaker. Slattery was Speaker Pro Tem. Pat Hurley was Majority Leader. Wendell Lady was the Minority Leader, and then Ross Doyen was, of course, still Senate President with Talkington as Vice-President, Norman Gaar as Majority Leader, and then Jack Steineger as the Minority Leader.

RH: Let me tell you a little bit about that transition. I was thinking about running for State Senate, as we've discussed already. I was actually working with a group that was trying to

support Wendell Lady to run against Speaker Pete McGill. It started out as a group of four individuals. I think I was the fifth brought on board. It started out by former legislators, R. H. Miller, Sandy Duncan, Joe Hoagland, and I'm trying to remember who the fourth was. It could have been Richard Walker, names from the past, and they invited me to participate.

We had this group, and we used to meet every week at a local restaurant. Then eventually we'd oftentimes meet at my place, my apartment. We were going to run Wendell as Speaker. So I wanted to run for the Senate. Everybody was telling me, "Wait a minute. If you'll stay in the House, you can probably chair a committee. We'll control the House, and we'll elect Wendell as Speaker, and life will be good."

But I decided I was going to run for the Senate. So what happened was, the Democrats won control of the House. The Republicans were in the minority. So I wouldn't have gotten any kind of a committee chairmanship in the House if I'd have stayed. When I went to the Senate, they appointed me Chairman of both the Joint Committee on Rules and Regulations and the Committee on Special Claims, which are joint committees. The Chairman of the committee alternates back and forth between the House and the Senate. So I actually ended up chairing two committees because I ran for the Senate, where I wouldn't have chaired a committee at all if I had just stayed in the House, and Wendell Lady ended up being elected Minority Leader.

And your cameraman, Dave Heinemann, may have been the other fourth name I was looking for because he was a part of that group. As I recall, we called it YELLOW. It was like Young Energetic Legislators Laying in Wait or something, but that doesn't spell YELLOW, so I'm not certain exactly. I'll have to ask David later to come in and edit this and tell me what the real name of that group was.

AC: Were you on sort of thin ice to even talk about or plan potentially taking on the incumbent Speaker at the time?

RH: I know that the Speaker became aware of this group of Young Turks that were in the House, that they weren't acting according to the way the leadership would like at that time. So R. H. Miller, who was really good at catching stuff and tracking stuff down, became aware of a—kind of a, I'll call it an Enemies List or a blacklist of people who weren't going to be able to get any good—their bills probably wouldn't run and that sort of thing. My name was on it along with Dave Heinemann and a lot of other names were on it, but we made that public.

AC: How'd that go over?

RH: I had requested the creation of a committee to study the way the process that we do Rules and Regulations in Kansas because I became aware of a way that they do it in Ohio. The way that we were doing it in Kansas was they bring the regulations to standing committees, and they bring in a stack of these regulations a foot and a half tall. The standing committees never

had time to read them. So as a result, they weren't being looked at by the legislature. So I suggested that we create an interim committee to look at that process. This was right about the time of this kind of Enemies List having been created.

Well, the Speaker, once it was made public, he had turned down my request for creating this legislative interim committee, and he changed his mind and decided to appoint the interim committee, and he put all of these people who were on the list on the committee, and it was chaired by Senator John Vermillion at the time and a bunch of these Young Turks, and I was one of them. The net result of that interim committee was the creation of the Joint Committee of Administrative Rules and Regulations, which to this day reviews rules and regulations and has a means where the legislature can give oversight to what the executive branch and the agencies are doing. So that's how that got created.

AC: That is interesting. I guess maybe backtracking a little bit. You got elected to the House. Did you have an early conversation with the leadership of the House? This is even before the first day of the session. Did they visit with you about what a freshman is supposed to do or not do?

RH: I had just mentioned earlier to Joan Wagnon that prior to the first day of session, I was invited to a reception over at the Ramada Inn with Speaker Pete McGill, Judiciary Chairman John Hayes. I think George Van Bebber, I'm forgetting his nickname now, was there. Tom Van Better. I think it was George T., he was there. I'm kind of like, “Why am I here?” At some point, I think John Hayes kind of came up and put his arm around me and said, “Now we're going to have a vote on the first day, and it's this issue, and here's how you're going to vote.”

I mean, keep in mind, I'm twenty-four years old. On the other hand, I'm like, “I got elected in this seat. This is my district. My people sent me up here to do what they want me to do.” We are a republic, where I'm supposed to do what I think is in the best interest of my district. We are not a democracy. We're a republic. But definitely it was like, “No, you're not going to tell me what I'm going to do.” So my response to him was something to the effect of “Well, I'll think about that.” It was kind of like, “No, this is the way you're going to vote.” My response was kind of like, “No, I'll make up my own mind to what I'm going to do.”

I think that's when I probably began to earn my way onto this Enemies List with the Speaker, and it was probably some of that attitude that got me invited to participate in YELLOW with the R. H. Millers and the Joe Hoaglands and the other Young Turks of that day.

AC: So at twenty-four, were you the youngest at that time in the legislature?

RH: I was not the youngest. At that time, I certainly was probably in the Top 5 of the youngest. I remember Tom Van Sickle. I think he ran for, got in the legislature, and he was like twenty-one or something like that. That's a name that once again lawyer people are going to know. But since then, I mean, we've had nineteen year olds run. So I don't know where I fall in. If there

was a list of people, their ages at the time that they first were brought into the legislature, I might be in the Top 15 or 20, but I wouldn't be near the top like I was then. When I came in, probably the average age was probably late sixties or seventies. I don't know. I was the exception.

AC: I'll bet. So you mentioned about your relationship with Pete McGill. Then when you did transition over here to the Senate, the relationship then with leadership here in this Chamber?

RH: I will tell you about my first day in the Kansas Senate. I'll first start by saying the majority of the Republicans was 21-19. There were twenty-one Republican Senators, nineteen Democrats. The first day is the rules. Jim Slattery was a fraternity brother of mine and a very good friend, a Democrat. Pete McGill had always kind of kept Jim Slattery off of major committees over in the House because he knew how strong and competent he was, and I always felt like that was wrong. I felt that was detrimental to the process.

So I had actually put in my campaign literature that I thought the minority party leadership ought to be able to appoint their own committee members so that they're putting their best people forward, and the results is going to be the best legislation. That was just something I believed in.

AC: Right.

RH: Senator Jack Steineger was Minority Leader. He moved to amend the rules to allow the minority party to appoint their own members to committee.

AC: Oh, my.

RH: The motion was made, the vote was put, and it was close on the oral vote. So they called for a division, and I stood up along with nineteen Democrats. I stood up. It failed on a 20-20 tie to pass because I voted my conscience. I didn't vote what the Republican Party wanted me to vote was that we keep control of the committee.

And then shortly thereafter, they came around and asked me if I wanted to contribute $10 to the coffee fund. I've never drunk coffee in my life, and so I just kind of casually said, “No thanks. I don't drink coffee.” The doorman was very nice about it. He just said, “Well, thank you” and walked off. Probably within an hour or two, the Senate President, Ross Doyen, who at the time I was 6' tall. I think Ross was maybe 6'2 or 6'3, but he was taller than me, maybe 6'1. He kind of marches out of his leadership office over here, walks me back to the back of the Chambers here, and he's got me up against the wall like a DI with a recruit, and he said, “Hein, you've already voted against your party on the rules the very first day you're here, and then you won't contribute to our fund that we use for things like the coffee fund. We use that for if the secretary gets sick, and we want to send her flowers or something like that, you won't

contribute to that." I said, "Wait a minute. I didn't know that it was for flowers for the secretary." They wanted ten bucks. "Here, here's my ten bucks. I just thought it was a coffee fund, and I just don't drink coffee."

But he was just ripping me up and down, and his veins were just coming out. That was welcome to the Senate. That was my first day in the State Senate, but I'll tell you, Ross Doyen and I became very, very close friends after that initial meeting.

AC: You didn't see his veins again, did you?

RH: No, we worked really well together later. I think in many ways, he respected my willingness to kind of stand up and be my own person. We became close friends. When he passed away a few years ago, it was really a sad event in my life.

AC: I noticed in 1975, you're back in the House, one of the first bills that you sponsored had to do with something about the operation of motor vehicles. It didn't become law, but that was your first bill that you had your name on that you sponsored. I noticed that in '76, you cosponsored a bill with Joe Hoagland and Rex Crowell and Sandy Duncan, Bob Frey on meetings of public bodies and their agendas in minutes, and that one did become law, and kind of doing a little of the background on this, I noticed during your ten years in the legislature, your name was on 142 pieces of legislation or resolution. Some of them, the Kansas Higher Ed Student Loan Act, classifying the crime of unlawful sale of a child, mending the probate code, creating the Office of District Attorney in each judicial district, the Capitol Plaza Authority and certain zoning changes for the Plaza Authority, of course, here around the Capitol Building. The Uniform Product Liability Act, public libraries in certain cities authorizing increases in tax levies, which I assume was for the Topeka Library probably. The timing of primary elections, an act concerning watercraft, requiring federal certification with inspection, an act concerning manufactured homes, funding for the Regents, a child safety seat requirement. I think that was one of your pieces of legislation that you were involved in and ultimately, of course, it was successful, and, of course, child safety seats is a requirement of the law and do that. Certainly lots of different issues through those ten years. Any that kind of stand out for you?

RH: I've got two that stand out. One of them was I remember on the motor vehicles was to allow the left turn on red at the intersection of two one-way streets to the left.

AC: Yes. Thank you.

RH: You talk about a nonimportant issue for the vast majority of the world, but because there just aren't that many intersections, but that was my legislation for those people in Topeka, Kansas between Washburn Lane and Huntoon and 12th Street are able to turn left turn now where there's that series of one-way streets and a lot of other places where there's one-way streets. That certainly didn't move the needle of the world very much.

But the other one I want to talk about is the Higher Education Loan Program. Students were having a hard time getting student loans back in those days. I worked with Jim Maag on developing a bill to provide for a fund to be available for student loans, only if you could not get financing from a private institution. This is well before a lot of the federal programs that are in existence today.

So we thought this was a great idea. As I recall, it passed the House overwhelmingly. It went over to the Senate. It was doubly referred by Ross Doyen to the Education Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. Of course, a lot of people unless you're around the legislature don't realize that double referral kind of means that this is the kiss of death. That's the way leadership ensures that a bill does not get passed.

The Education Committee kicked it out almost unanimously. We had the votes in the Ways and Means Committee, but the Chairman who was in, Senator Wint Winter, simply would not bring the bill up, and Senator Billy McCray from Wichita kept trying to make motions, and the Chairman wouldn't even recognize him on passing the bill out of committee.

So eventually he did recognize Billy. This was near the end of getting later in the legislative session. He recognized Senator McCray. They approved the committee report. They approved the bill unanimously in the Senate Ways and Means Committee. From there, the Chairman of the committee has to assign the committee report and turn it into the staff so it gets reported out on the floor of the House. Senator Winter never signed the committee report.

What was interesting, he had a number of college students who were writing him, and he would write back and say, “Yes, that went through my committee, and my committee unanimously approved the bill.” He just never told them, “I didn't sign the committee report, so I killed your bill.” That's when I found out about how a Chairman of a committee actually does have a veto power over any legislation that is passed. Now that rarely occurs that you don't sign a committee report, but I learned the power of a Chairman to do that at that time.

What's interesting is the whole peanut behind the story, I'm sorry I've forgotten who was head of the Board of Regents at the time, but he was getting ready to retire. He just did not think he could take on doing a new project to set up a higher education loan program his last year before he retired. So he came over to Ross Doyen and just asked that that bill be killed. The next year he retired, and then the subsequent leader, that year the bill passed the legislature virtually unanimously, just flew through. I learned a lot about the process and how it worked that year, what leadership can do, and what a committee Chairman can do on getting a bill passed. Welcome to the legislature.

AC: A unique process, for sure.

RH: A unique process.

AC: A unique institution, too.

RH: So it's not like you read in the civics book where you introduce it in the House, and they vote, and it goes to committee, and then it goes to the floor. It's not like that, folks.

AC: Again, particularly in your time in the legislature, you talked about Doyen and Pete McGill, but just in terms of any legislator that you thought, whether in leadership or maybe not that were really effective and I guess were good for the process of the institution. Any that come to mind?

RH: So many, almost too many to name. One thing I will say about the Kansas legislature, and I've seen some others in office, and my son Derek Hein who also does lobbying today, he worked with a national group setting up lobbyists around the country, and he's seen a lot of state legislatures in action. I've had some great conversations with him about how Kansas works versus some of those other states. Kansas has a large number of people who just are truly genuinely concerned about the process and about the people that they're representing.

AC: Right.

RH: That doesn't mean they agree on everything because you have people that come from very liberal areas of the state, and you have some from very conservative areas of the state, pro-labor, pro management. So you've got a lot of differences. But they all bring their own perspective into the process and generally with very, very few exceptions that you could do on one hand, I think, over the years, the people are just really good quality. They're there for the right reasons. They're not there for their own personal aggrandizement or anything like that.

AC: So you'd put President Doyen then as an effective leader?

RH: He'd certainly be there, yes.

AC: Over those ten years that you were in the legislature, did you notice any sort of institutional changes, and I guess maybe some of them were maybe brought on by you and your young colleagues. Was the institution changing during that time from when you first came into the House to when you left the Senate? Any kind of institutional changes or process changes, more open or more member involvement?

RH: There were certainly changes. I'm not certain I could identify any that occurred within the ten year period that I served. But this is I think my forty-seventh year around the Capitol, and in those forty-seven years, I've seen a lot of changes, some of them for the better, some of them for the worse. I think for the better is that like when I came into the legislature, it was more

predominantly male, very few females, very few young people. There were ethnic minorities, they were very few at the time. There were some but very few. So I think we've certainly become more diverse over the years.

What I've also seen occur is that we used to have more lawyers, and although most people would think that that's good that we have fewer lawyers today than we did then. In my opinion, it's really been detrimental to the process because what people fail to realize is that lawyers bring a perspective of being very analytical about what's going on. Generally, lawyers, they're just as diverse as the population itself. You have more liberal lawyers. You have pro personal injury lawyers, and you've got lawyers representing banks and corporations and business interests. So you get a lot of different perspective from lawyers, but they bring an analytical process to the legislative process that I always thought was favorable. Today you don't even have enough lawyers to staff the Judiciary Committee, and that's sad that you have unfortunately laypeople making a lot of decisions about judicial issues like codes of civil procedure and stuff like that. I've seen those changes over the years.

But the other thing that's occurred over the years, in my opinion, is that we've become more political. We've become more of a “Let's get our clique into our little room and take our perspective.” When I first came up here, everyone went to the legislative functions. In fact, previous to me again, with your camera operator Dave Heinemann doing your video here, Dave would be able to talk about the days when they met over at the Jay Hawk Hotel, and everybody was just up there, and your politics didn't really matter a lot. Everybody got to know each other as friends and everything.

Some of my closest friends were people I disagreed with so strongly. I remember one in particular, Senator Paul Feliciano. He grew up in Brooklyn. He represented a liberal area in Wichita, Kansas, very liberal philosophically for me. I represent a predominantly upper income kind of demographically different district from his I represented in Shawnee County.

Yet I remember him more than anybody else, the day I announced my retirement from the Senate, and all the other senators came up and congratulated me or thanked me. Paul comes up with tears in his eyes. We had just become such close friends over the years despite the fact we disagreed ideologically on a lot of issues. Today, more so at the national level, fortunately, Kansans, we still treat each other with a lot of respect and civility, but it's just the polarization between Democrats and Republicans and liberals and conservatives, it has gotten unhealthy in my opinion, and I do thank God I'm in Kansas because it's not as bad as it is at the national level.

AC: Oh, my goodness, yes.

RH: What I see occurring at the national level just kind of makes me sick to my stomach to see the just hatred and anger of certain politicians and philosophies.

AC: That's right. I'll just share with you. There's a required question that we ask all of our people that we interviewed, and it's a personal identity question. I'll just read this, and you can respond, of course, however you'd like. Personal identity is loosely defined as gender, age, race, class, sexual or gender orientation, marital status. Did you ever experience times during your term in the legislature when you believe your personal identity influenced your ability to pass policy, work with fellow legislators, or provide constituent services? Were you ever given committee assignments or tasks that you believe were functions of your personal identity?

RH: I think I believe my response would be at the time, no. I mean, obviously I was much younger than everybody else, but on the other hand, I found that if you could speak intelligently with somebody that's forty, fifty, sixty years older than you and earn their respect that there wasn't any problem whatsoever. Some of my closest friends were diametrically older than me. Former Representative John Bower and I, he was probably sixty years my senior when I came into the legislature, and we just got along great. So I didn't ever experience that, but I'm certain that might not be the case with everybody.

AC: Your decision then to switch gears and become a lobbyist, was that a difficult transition? How did that happen that you were—I assume clearly you'd been elected twice in the Senate. You probably could have stayed for longer if you wanted to in an elected office. How did that transition take place? Was it a difficult one?

RH: I found that being in the legislature, and as anybody around the legislature knows, it doesn't pay well. As I recall, the salary for legislators has not increased since I got elected to the legislature in 1974. I think the per diem expenses have increased, but I don't think there's been any increase since that. What is that? Almost fifty years? There's been no increase, and nobody wants to vote for one because they think it would be their political suicide. So that's kind of a bad aspect. It's really difficult to be able to afford to run and serve unless you're either independently wealthy or whatever or have a spouse that supports you.

I was watching the income of everybody I graduated from law school go up dramatically while my income was not. I decided to get out of the legislature and just go back and practice law. I don't know that I made a conscious decision to become a lobbyist, but I got a call from a gentleman by the name of—the first call wasn't from him, but it was a call to represent T. Boone Pickens and Mesa Petroleum, and this was before I even got out of the legislature and asked if I would do their lobbying. I had apparently been referred to him by several other people who had seen me in the legislature over the years.

So I had the opportunity to meet with him. He was a multibillionaire from, at the time, Amarillo, Texas.

AC: A pretty colorful individual, was he?

RH: One of the greatest people you could ever meet. He worked with presidents. He did a lot for Ronald Reagan's campaign and a number of other campaigns. He was known on Wall Street. He knew all of these corporate CEOs, but he was the kind of guy—I remember he gave a speech down in Wichita, and before the speech, a young twelve or thirteen-year-old kid came up to him. He wanted him to autograph his baseball, and Boone talked to this kid for fifteen, twenty minutes. And afterwards, he came over, and he related to me about this kid, and what position he played on his baseball team.

For the fifteen, twenty minutes, he was engaged with this young man, he was focused on this young man. All the corporate icons, all the presidents, all the senators he dabbled with and went to the Hill to try and lobby on things were not in his mind at all. When he talked to you, he was focused on you. I see a lot of politicians who, they'll be talking to you. Meanwhile they're looking around the room to see who do I need to see and who do I need to talk to? He was not that way. He was just genuine. That's what made him a class act. He passed away just a couple of years ago after a couple of strokes. It's a tremendous loss to the country in my opinion.

AC: That would be a great first client to have, oh, my goodness.

RH: He was a great first client, and I didn't have to worry about being paid. What's interesting is he hired me five years before he thought he was going to have an issue in competition with what was then I think KP&L. It's now Westar or now Evergy. He hired me in 1974 because he thought he was going to have a dispute in 1979, and that's the way he did things. He thought ahead.

AC: I guess in terms of public policy, an elected official, a longtime lobbyist, is one more effective than the others in terms of charting that public policy or trying to influence or modify or change it?

RH: What's interesting is I actually found I've been able to be more successful getting legislation passed as a lobbyist than I was as a legislator. I wasn't aware I had cosponsored 142 bills until you told me that today. What I remembered is the left-hand turn on red. I remember that was not an earthshattering legislation.

As a lobbyist, we did the Instant Bingo amendment to the Kansas constitution and got that approved. We've been able to influence a lot of other pieces of legislation meritoriously, not because of just—I know people's perception of lobbying is probably pretty negative, but it's a really valuable part of the process for legislators.

AC: I noticed your mission statement on your website, upholding a high reputation of integrity, honesty, and professionalism, and clearly I think in this building, having that as your mission statement, clearly legislators these days I think probably know which lobbying firms might be

comfortable with that statement and some that may not. Clearly your firm is certainly one of those that has that—

RH: To me, that's a life mission is to be candid with people, be honest.

AC: Just looking down your client list, of course, some big names, but long-term relationships. Is it RAI Services, R. J. Reynolds since 1988? The Kansas Beverage Association, 1991. Hospital Corporation of America, 1994. And then of course, certainly your pro bono work with the National Kidney Foundation of Kansas and western Missouri, just as an example. I guess to me that's right, that standing of integrity. These big firms, if you don't have that, those attributes, then probably they're going to be looking for another lobbyist.

RH: I think that's correct.

AC: It certainly reflects well on you and your ethics.

RH: That's one thing that I hope that the people, the millions of people that are going to watch this interview, I hope they learn that, that the way the process should work is the lobbyists ought to be telling the legislators what they need. My theory is always that you don't want a legislator repeating something inaccurate on the floor. If they're getting information from you, you've got to be able to establish that's a fact, and that you're correct and there's a source for that information. I don't think that's the perception of lobbyists in the public. It's too bad. That's the way it ought to be done.

AC: As you look back over your years of lobbying, those thirty-plus years, do you think as a profession it's changed since when you first started with T. Boone Pickens to where you are now? As a profession, has it sort of changed?

RH: It probably has. There's more of them, I think, coming along all the time, which is fine, but I don't know that it's changed much. I remember Mary Turkington who used to represent the Kansas Motor Carriers Association who lobbied for years and even people like Charlie Houston as I recall, who was called Tobacco Charlie, who used to represent the tobacco industry back when there was one. They did the same things back in the fifties and sixties and seventies that we're doing today. And again to me, I think the legislators know which of the lobbyists are giving them the information they can rely upon.

I remember one lobbyist who isn't lobbying anymore and partially because he gave kind of some bad information. Once you give bad information, you're kind of tainted. Once you lose that trust, nobody wants to be caught as a legislator giving bad information.

AC: What about the handling of campaign contributions by associations or corporations, maybe? Has that process changed? How does that work these days compared to the way it worked when you first started out?

RH: You know, I was actually involved in some of that process because I chaired the Elections Committee back when some of those things were being formed. In fact, I remember, although I supported him for Speaker, Wendell Lady, he and I ended up kind of going crossways because the Senate and the House had a little bit different vision as to how governmental ethics ought to be handled in those days. The Senate thought that the Governmental Ethics Commission ought to be more of a watchdog agency where you list the information, and they review it. I think the House had one that was a little more direct involvement and greater detail on what was being reporting.

For example, we still follow lobbyists' expenditure reports today, and you have to report every gift, and we sometimes give gifts that are spread throughout all of our clients, and we end up reporting that we gave seventeen cents to an individual legislator, and we have to list that on a form that nobody is going to read. If they did read it, they're going to sit there and say, “What do I know that I didn't know before?”

To me, I think there's a lot of overreporting on the governmental ethics. The people who are doing the process correctly and are abiding by the rules, they spend a lot of time doing burdensome work, and then the people who are disregarding the rules probably aren't even filling out the forms correctly anyway. Once again, it's like the criminals aren't following the laws that you have anyway. If somebody is going to abuse the process, they're not going to report it. They're not going to sit there and give a $10,000 bribe to a legislator and hide that and then report it on their governmental ethic report. That's not going to happen.

AC: If somebody was thinking about either 1) running for the legislature or becoming a lobbyist, what advice would you give? Maybe that twenty-four year old maybe coming out of law school. What advice would you give them if they were to come to you and say, “Is there value?” or “What should I think about if I want to be in the legislature or if I want to be a lobbyist?”

RH: Let's start with if they want to be a legislator. I would encourage that, but my advice to them would be to know why it is you're running and if you're going to do it, realize the responsibilities that you're taking on and don't do it frivolously. In order to win, then go and learn from some of the people that have run before about how to run a campaign and how to do it correctly.

As far as getting into lobbying, it's not easy to break into lobbying. I've had a number of people, and when they come and—we'll meet with them. I've met probably with thirty people over the years who want to be lobbyists. I say, “Start out by maybe working with an association where you work your way up to to take a job with leadership staff of the legislature.” But people have

oftentimes a misconception of what it is to be a lobbyist. They'll sit there and say, “I've got a PR major. I can go out drinking with people and buy meals and stuff. I'm very, very amiable and whatever.” It's like, “Well, that's not enough. It's more knowing your issues and knowing your client. It requires a lot of grunt work of getting the facts and being able to make meritorious arguments to legislators.”

I sit down with them. You don't have time for me to go through what I go through in the hour interview with some of these young people that come along. If you can get into the business, it's a great business to be in. It can be a good career.

AC: Anything else that you'd like to add or anything that I haven't brought up or something you'd like to share for the record, any thoughts or observations?

RH: You know, I've had some great stories over the years, and now I wish I could remember some of them. We should have done this interview probably when I was a little younger, and I remembered all of these stories from forty years ago. But, no, first of all, Alan, I'm really impressed that you told me more about myself than I think I realized. Like I said, I didn't realize about the ten constitutional amendments and the 142 bills. So you've educated me today. I appreciate that.

AC: It's my good research training, I think. Then thank you very much for your time and contributing to the Oral History Project. This information, as you know, will now be available for educators and researchers going forward as they study the legislative process and public policy in Kansas. So thanks for your contributions, both as an elected official and for what you do as a lobbyist and your time today. Thank you very much.

RH: If I could also make a comment, I haven't been aware of this process that you have here, and I commend Joan Wagnon and you, Alan, and David Heinemann. You guys are all volunteers to this. This is a very worthy cause of preserving some of these stories and history for the future. So I really give my kudos to all of you for what you've accomplished putting this together. So thank you for the opportunity to participate. I really appreciate it.

AC: We're glad you're here, glad you're a part of it. Thank you.

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