

## Interview With Frank Kemp

This is Lee Bahrych coordinator of the Colorado Legislative Oral History Library. The date is January 27, 1995. With me today is Frank Kemp. He served three terms in the House of Representatives and served in the Senate for one term. The interview is being conducted in Mr. Kemps office at 1559 Logan Street, Denver, Colorado.

L.B. Frank would you tell me something about your family history and your education and why you decided to run for office?

F.K. I was born here in Denver. My father was a lawyer and later became president of Great Western Sugar Company. Although we lived nine years in Nebraska as I was growing up, we went up there a little after I was through the kindergarten, I think. We went up to Nebraska where he was district manager and we lived in Scotts Bluff until, I think it was 1936, we lived up there nine years. The president of the sugar company, a fellow by the name of William Lippet was thrown from a horse and killed and they brought my dad down to become president of the company and during the years I was in high school and college he was president of The Great Western Sugar Company. So we have had a long history of mostly in the agricultural business, the beet sugar business. I would guess a lot of my interest in politics came from the fact that a, my dad used to have to go to Washington a lot of his time seeing that legislation was passed to help the sugar industry. I used to go back with him at times carrying his briefcase to congressional hearings and so forth and the agriculture committee and I would say that probably those trips got me interested in politics.

L.B. So your interest in politics then went on so that you ran for election, you ran from Denver.

F.K. Yes

L.B. Was it all open then, everybody ran city wide or did you.....

F.K. We ran citywide the first election, but in fact all my elections, as I recall, were citywide. The last time, 1966 when I ran for the Senate, I'm pretty sure, my memory might not be quite right, but it seemed to me we ran at-large in all the elections I was involved in.

L.B. What were your feelings when you knew you'd won?

F.K. Well it was very.....

L.B. Overwhelming?

F.K. Yes, you work hard. It's difficult to campaign in Denver, it's such a diverse population and as you well know, not particularly Republican orientated so that most of our members of the House and Senate during the years I served from Denver were Democratic members. Frank Hayes, and Palmer Burch, and a few others that we had from Denver were a little bit few and

far between.

L.B. What was your first impression when you entered the Capitol and you knew you were going to serve there. Do you remember?

F.K. Yes, I certainly do. That first year after the election in 1952, we had a, it was a very long period of nearly two or three weeks that the very last members of the House from Denver, there was sort of a holdup. No one really knew who the fifteen members were going to be. The last two or three, of which I was one of them, we kept shifting up and down and it was a little bit of a hardship to know after the election whether we did make it or we didn't. That was the first difficulty I had. But finally they decided, the election commission, that I was one of the fifteen that were elected.

L.B. How was your family affected by your service in the legislature?

F.K. We had two sons. They were growing up at the time, they were in grade school, when I was first elected. My wife did an enormous amount of late work and all kinds of activities during the year and particularly during the election period. Going to meetings, having coffees, the various things that you do. She is an extremely good organizer and was very helpful in campaigning and people like her so I had to lean on her a good deal to a, on every single time I was up for election. The boys were young at the time. They would carry literature around the neighborhood when we got into districts and were very helpful. I was fortunate in having a very supportive family.

L.B. Frank do you remember the first bill that you introduced and if you do what happened to it?

F.K. I'd have to think a little bit about that. It was a, Dave Hamil was our Speaker and Frank Hayes was the majority leader and as I recall the first legislation that I actually had my name on as chief sponsor had to do with some minor agriculture problem, I can't really tell you what it was but I do remember we got it out of the Agriculture Committee and it was a bill of not any great moment. It passed both Houses and was signed by the Governor, Dan Thornton at the time. I don't really remember the a ...

L.B. That was unusual for your first bill to get through the assembly and be signed by the Governor, very unusual.

F.K. Yes it was, it was that, because as you well know, the older members, as a general rule, do most of the legislating.

L.B. What major issues were you involved with? Would you say agriculture was your main...

F.K. Yes, being in the agriculture business I was principally interested in that, another it just happened when I was in the Senate, the very first term, we had to write a bill during the summer on one of the committees, and I was chairman of the committee to put medicare into practice. Into our law. We had a whole summer of the hearings and the various people from the medical profession, the hospitals, all other kinds of people involved in, the nurses

and so on, in health care came to this meeting we had. Roy Shore and I, he was in the House at the time, a doctor from Greeley, who was a very fine legislator, and I introduced the legislation that we formed out of this committee work. That was very interesting, because I knew it was going to be an essential part of government in Colorado for many, many years. I was interested in the health part of it. That was a very interesting program that we got into and we got the bill passed. It started the legislation in Colorado for medicare.

L.B. Was that Federal mandate, you had to do this?

F.K. Yes it was. It was required by a Federal law that the states start some type of a medicare system in the state.

L.B. And that's still in force today.

F.K. Yes, it is. It certainly is, it's been done over a time or two but the principal work that was done in that committee,.. and it was a very interesting thing. Another bill that I remember, Palmer Burch and I were the prime House sponsors for the beginning of Metro State College. We authorized that college, and as you know, it's become a large institution and does a great deal with night classes and the fact that it takes most any kind of a student that wants to get a higher education and the tuition and so on are considerably lower in Metro than they are in some of our other fine schools in Colorado. Working people can go down there and take courses and so on and I took great pride in working with Palmer Burch in getting Metro started. Most of the other bills that I actually had something to do with had to do with some committees that I was on, Labor and Employment relations we had quite a bit of regular labor legislation come through. Although in some instances I wasn't the prime sponsor. Being chairman of the committee in the Senate, in particular, I had a great interest in most of those labor bills. I think that.. and then although being a great interest in agriculture, cause that's the line of work that I'm in, ranching and farming, I was always interested in the bills that came out of the Agriculture committee. Although I wasn't always a member of that committee all through the time I was there, part of the time I was.

L.B. How were committees handled when you served. Did you have committee staff, did you have assigned rooms?

F.K. We had assigned rooms and a certain time of day whether it was Monday or Tuesday or whatever so that the people on the outside would know when that committee was meeting and normally we would post a, like you do today, a calendar of the bills that were to be discussed during that committee meeting period. Sometimes you got to them sometimes you didn't but there was always an effort made by the legislature to let the public know what was going to be discussed in these committee meetings. That's the first real time that the public gets to look at the proposed legislation. I think the way our legislature is run is one of the best in the whole United States for one reason or another during the time I served. Every time I go on a trip I used to try to go to if they were in session, go to the Capitol, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Illinois, wherever I happened to be and go up to there legislative body and if they were in session and just see how they did things. I always came back with the feeling

that despite our small size and population and so on we ran a legislature just as well or better than most of the other states.

L.B. I agree with you Frank , I visit with the Chief Clerks around in the other states.....

F.K. I'm sure you have

L.B. They take many ideas home from Colorado. Were the bills printed by the committee at that time or was it like now, the bills are printed as soon as they are introduced and then they go to committee?

F.K. I recall, Lee, that in the Senate that, when I was in the Senate during this period that I was there '66 to '70 all the bills were printed. Now I don't know exactly remember in the early days in the House you're going clear back to '53 '54, we perhaps had the committee order them printed. I don't really recall when that change took place. But it seems to me that in the early days in the House, one of the first things the committee where the bill was assigned was to order it printed. I'm not real sure about that....

L.B. So many bills would not get printed if the committee did not want to print...

F.K. That's correct in the early days that I was in, in the early '50's.

L.B. Frank, what changes do you see in state government since you served and do you think these changes are good?

F.K. Well one of the things that I've noticed particularly, probably due to my association to agriculture and livestock business is that more and more of the members are not related in any way to farming, agriculture, livestock and so on and I think that in some ways having most of the majority of the people that are elected being in a, from cities and not from farming communities is a little bit of a misfortune for the state. We had some really great legislators in the early days that I recall that were, oh they might not necessarily be a farmer they might be a lawyer in a small town or I think of Oakley Wade, for example but they really worked and they read the bills and they understood what was going on. They took a great interest in the state and they were dedicated legislators. Some of the young fellows that I see come up from the cities now a days, I don't think they work as hard, I think the staff does a lot more of the work than they used to do. There's a larger staff and perhaps it's necessary because of the number of bills they have and so on but I think we ran a wonderful legislature. We got our work done. People who were elected did the work and it wasn't assigned to some staff member. They read the bills. The debates were I think, the membership was much more knowledgeable about the legislation, and therefore, in some ways our bills were really much better than some that they pass today.

L.B. Frank, Have you noticed that many of our legislators today have moved into the state, probably lived here three or four years before they were elected to the Capitol. Perhaps they aren't as knowledgeable about the area as you could say a previous legislator?

- F.K. I think that's very true. I believe that particularly some of the younger people who have been attracted to Colorado, who maybe went to school here or maybe they visited here and decided it was a wonderful place to live and moved here. That they don't have the historical knowledge and caring that some of the old timers did.
- L.B. If you could change one thing back to the way it used to be, repeal a law, relocate an office, or bring back a particular elected official, what would you change?
- F.K. Well, I, that's a little bit difficult and in a way a for me to answer, I'd say that one of the main things that I miss and see as I go over there to the Chambers today is the decline in membership from the agriculture community. The rural people due to the national laws about representation by population has leaned towards bringing more and more city people into the body and I'm not sure that that's is a good thing.
- L.B. Frank what's your favorite place in the Capitol? What memories do you associate with that place. Some members tell me they like the cafeteria, some members tell me they like their desk and chair on the floor.
- F.K. I would say, I really enjoyed the work on the third floor, the committee work. Where you really had the people who knew something about the proposed legislation, either pro or con and they came down to testify and as a committee member you sat there and listened, asked questions, so forth, so you had a decent understanding of what the bill was about. I think I liked the committee system and the work that was done to prepare legislation for going to the floor. Next I'd say was the floor debates on a good tough bill where it might be fairly evenly divided whether it was going to be aye or nay. That would be my second choice. The building is a wonderful building. You get very attached to service there and some of the best friends I've ever had in my life were fellows that I, and women, that I met in the circle.
- L.B. Legend has it that there used to be a lot more camaraderie, a lot more liquor, a lot more poker parties and things in the Capitol, do you think that's true, do you have any stories about that?
- F.K. I don't really remember too much of that in the ten years I served. In the evening, particular the rural people who had to rent apartment houses or rooms or whatever, some of them lived in hotels, a good deal of the socializing and one thing or another in the early days would be down at the various places where the members lived. Many of them would try to get apartments or rooms close to each other and you could go down, as normally a Denver person would go home at night. Often I used to go down to the Shirley Savoy Hotel and just listen to Dave Hamil and Ted Gill and some of the old timers that talked, Don Carl Collins, talk about things that they were interested in and what they'd done in past legislative sessions. That was a wonderful thing, particularly when you've first been elected to learn something about how it's done. I certainly remember some very good events at some of the hotels around the city and we often would take trips together. I can remember very well, the first year I was elected, during the winter of '53 we all got together and got on a train and went over to Glenwood Springs and those that wanted to all went skiing over a weekend.

That was a wonderful trip and you got better acquainted with some of the people you didn't know and it wasn't partisan, there were Democrats and Republicans and those kind of outings were wonderful and very enjoyable. The wives were invited and through those types of meetings and trips, I just had a wonderful time and made some friends that, a lifetime friend.

L.B. Frank, people seem to be more pessimistic and skeptical and even cynical about our government now and about politics and politicians. Do you think this is more so than it used to be or do you just think it's always been this way.

F.K. I think, Lee, that it isn't any greater a problem today than it was maybe,... in our United States, I do worry that more people don't vote and take a direct interest in legislative efforts and know the people and know who they're voting for and so on. In Denver it's a little better now that we have districts cause you can get to know your own Senator or Representative, but I think we have a tremendous legislative system in Colorado. We have a great staff, we have people who know something about how it works and how bills get passed and signed by the Governor. It's a tremendous process and you can't help even if you just spent one day in the Capitol watching the system work, you can't help but be proud of how our system really works and passes laws that, on the whole, are needed and are beneficial to the state.

L.B. How do you feel about the Joint Budget being moved out of the Capitol over in the Legislative Services Building and of course now we have the Secretary of State out of the Capitol, Supreme Court out of the Capitol.

F.K. That doesn't really bother me. I've been to a number of hearings over in the old museum which it once was, where the Budget Committee now meets and I was a member of the Budget Committee for a term during my service in the House. How many old guys like myself do you find to do this with, Lee, how many have you got on your roster?

L.B. Oh, I probably have about 40 more to do and I'm getting new names all the time. Do you remember Al Thompson, the Speaker? He wrote a letter to me and he expects me in Walsenburg sometime this month, but I may have to put it the first of February before I can drive down.

F.K. I see Al every now and then. He sat right in front of me when he first came up and we became good friends. I'm very fond of him.

L.B. When we dedicated the paintings to all the Speakers of the House, and I'm sure you've seen the large paintings in the House. He was coming up that Sunday when we got a bad snow storm and I-25 was very bad and he couldn't come, but we had seven Speakers and John Vanderhoof could not come, Alan Dines, Tompson, and a Speaker that lived in Hawaii. We had seven Speakers sitting on the podium at one time and he was very disappointed he couldn't come. You know how I-25 gets with some of the snowstorms and so we missed him and I've never met him but I'll look forward to....

F.K. You'll enjoy it. I had to testify in his court, I was doing some work for the Colorado Fuel

and Iron Company and we had some sort of a row about some little thing. We had to go to court to get it settled. He's a wonderful man.

L.B. Well I'll give him your regards when I go down. Frank how do you feel about the discussions that are taking place right now about restorations in the Capitol?

F.K. I would be a, I'm sure that there is work that has to be done. Any building of that age with the enormous wear and tear by the people who go in and out of the Capitol requires a good deal of maintenance and although I haven't kept up with the specific things that are wearing out it's just logical that any building of that age needs renovation and care and maintenance so I hope that the legislature finds it possible to spend all the money that's necessary to keep that wonderful building just as good as it can be. It's just a beautiful building inside and out. Some of that marble that's there is just priceless today.

L.B. That's all there is.

F.K. The stairways and so on and I think we just have to do the best we can to maintain it.

L.B. Well, I certainly agree with you. I would just think it would be dreadful for the building to burn, and it's not fireproof. It was built at the same time the Masonic Building was erected down on 16th street. The same kind of construction. Every morning when I walked in the Capitol building, I saw how fortunate I was to work in such a beautiful historic building.

F.K. Oh it is, it's just a wonderful building.

L.B. Frank are there any other stories or anything that you want to add on to the tape while I'm here today?

F.K. I can't really think of anything. I just know one thing I'd like to leave, being a city legislator from Denver, I emphasized in our talk of the admiration that I had for most of the rural people who gave of their time and came many, many miles to serve down here and lived in probably places that didn't compare to their home, houses where they live at home, and spent many many weeks away from their business and their family. I think it is one of the most pleasurable things that a person could get into. I used to enjoy the give and take, the intellectual clashes that would occur, not just the partisan part of it, but people that might have tremendously good ideas about a bill, which way certain things were going. A political process in this state is a wonderful process and it to me achieves great dignity, it helps run the state. We're very fortunate that we can't spend any more money than we take in. We're a little different than the federal government

L.B. A balanced budget.

F.K. But that's one of the great things about this state. I think that a young person who cares about Colorado and has the time and the inclination, I think it's one of the greatest things that a man or woman can do is to serve in that body.

L.B. I agree with you. Well Frank I want to thank you for letting me come today.

F.K. I certainly enjoyed.....