

Interview With Peggy Kerns

The date is June 22, 1999 and with me today is Representative Peggy Kerns. She was a member of the House of Representatives and served during her last two years as Minority Leader in the House. This interview is being conducted in her office at the National Conference of State Legislators in Denver. (This is Lee Bahrych speaking)

L.B. Peggy I want to thank you for being here with me today. I always start my interviews by asking about your family history and about your education.

P.K. Well I grew up in southeastern Ohio. My parents owned several newspapers. That's where I really got my love for public service. My parents were very much involved in their community. These were little towns where they owned their newspapers. So they were very involved in community service. They were wonderful models for my sister and me and also my brother. So that's really where I started liking politics. My parents were always very aware of what was going on in the national scene and in the state scene. I remember when we were growing up we made a visit to Washington, D.C. and our Congressman, John Henderson, I still remember his name, this must have been in the '50's sometime, took us to lunch at the restaurant at the Capitol and that was a big thrill. Alvin Barkley stopped by, he was, of course he was Vice President to Truman. I still have Alvin Barkley's autograph. So I still have strong memories of that and we have this wonderful family picture of us with our Congressman, standing in front of the Capitol. So maybe that's where I got my real love.

L.B. What about your education.?

P.K. I went to parochial schools in New Lexington, Ohio for twelve years, which is about 50 miles from Columbus. Then I went to college at Dukane University in Pittsburg and graduated as a Journalism Major and met my husband, Pat, there who is also a Journalism Major and that was in 1963. We got married after we graduated and moved around to a series of small towns where my husband was a newspaper reporter. We raised two kids and in 1972 we moved here.

L.B. What made you move here?

P.K. My husband's job. He was with the National Education Association at that time and I had done all this community volunteering as this young mother. So when we moved here to Aurora, Aurora at that time had about 75,000 people, and there were wonderful and many volunteer opportunities, I got involved a little bit in politics but a lot with the city doing volunteering with United Way and on the Citizens Budget Committee and things like that. I was very much involved in my children's schools as a volunteer. President of the PTA and just did a lot of activities and was president of this organization or that organization, chairman of this or that. In 1982, Jack Fenlin, who was my State Representative, or who was my city councilman, ran for State Representative and won. So the city council spot was opened. So council then appointed me to fill his seat. That would have been in January of 1983 after he was sworn in down at the Capitol. So I served for six years then on the Aurora

City Council before running for the state legislature.

L.B. Did you run because Jack decided not to run or did you run in an election against him?

P.K. No, he moved on to the State Senate, so the seat was opened.

L.B. Oh, I had forgotten, he did go to the State Senate. The seat was open, you ran for it. What did you think when you won?

P.K. Well, I was the first Democrat to ever hold the seat. It was seen as sort of an upset. Kind of an interesting thing. I had a very good opponent, actually someone who's a friend of mine who's remained a friend. He looked at the registration numbers because it was a predominately Republican district and he figured he could just play golf all summer. What I did was go out and really campaign. I had been on city council and so I knew a lot of people and I had an electoral base that he didn't have. People knew me in a nonpartisan way, because city council is nonpartisan. You know issues of cleaning the streets and police protection and all of that and pick up the garbage, those are local issues. I had a lot of people who knew me and so I worked all summer knocking on doors and he played golf. He still laughs about that and reminds me today. I won by 52% and it was really seen as an upset. Of course it was just thrilling. Your first election is always the best and the most exciting, I think, because it's unexpected.

L.B. Well, you came to the Capitol and had you been to the Capitol before to testify?

P.K. Oh, yes. I had never testified but I had been at committee meetings. Through all my community involvement, League of Women Voters, and everything, there was a lot of exposure to the Capitol. In fact my first exposure to the State Capitol was when we lived in Jackson, Mississippi. That's where we lived right before we moved to Aurora. At that time Mississippi was one of the few states that did not have kindergarten, public kindergarten. So I was part of this Mother's group who lobbied the State Capitol. So I had strong memories of walking into the state capitol in Jackson, Mississippi to advocate for public kindergartens. This would have been in 1971. Finally about twenty years or so later they finally passed the law. So we weren't all that successful, but no I was very much aware of the Capitol here. The day I was sworn in was January something of 1989 and there was a bad snowstorm.

L.B. I remember that cause your parents were coming in.

P.K. Yes. Well they never made it in, and we started out real early from Aurora to get a parking space. It was one of those snowstorms that I don't think it ended up being as bad, but that morning at least there was a lot of snow and people were fearful about driving. A lot of us in the metro area, cause there was a big freshman class that year, we had family and relatives and campaign supporters coming down to see the swearing in and then we all had lunches planned afterwards. Quite a number of people couldn't make it because the roads were slippery and icy in the morning.

L.B. It was a proud moment to be sworn in and have the Chief Justice come in and your family up in the gallery.

P.K. It was fabulous. It was just really fabulous. The thing that struck me, I think the most about the swearing was the reading of our county. Our district. We all felt some pride, you know, Peggy Kerns, from House District 61 it was then, Arapahoe County. All the people kind of break out in applause when different ones were introduced. It was quite striking. My husband actually was on the House floor. We got there so early that he had a seat on the House floor. Everybody else sat up in the House gallery. You had to have someone tell you if you want your family to sit on the House floor you'd better be down there. I think you could have one member or something. I had this wonderful picture of me standing there being sworn in. My husband had bought me a new outfit, a new suit to wear, but I'm standing next to....on one side was Representative Jo Ann Groff and on the other side of me was State Representative Peggy Reeves from Ft Collins.

L.B. She's now a Senator.

P.K. Right. I thought that I had died and gone to heaven because here I was positioned on the House floor having a seat between these two intelligent, smart, very effective women legislators. So that in itself was a big thrill.

L.B. Peggy how did your service affect your family? Were your children grown by this time?

P.K. Right, my children at that time were both in college. They had been through my campaigns on city council and they had carried literature for other candidates over the years and so they laughed at every time they got involved with an activity with me that took more than a few weeks or few months. It was a campaign of somebodies.

L.B. My son once said every time he saw a stamp, he got the taste of glue in his mouth.

P.K. Yes, right, right. I think, course my husband was always very much involved, he did the computer set up. This was 1988 and we forget even though it's ten years later, we forget in 1988 we weren't all that sophisticated with computers. We decided that the campaign would buy an IBM computer and a laser printer and we could save money by doing a lot of our mailings from home. So we had volunteers come in and you could hand feed envelopes that would feed out and in fact we had those computers until just recently. They're out of date now. It's kind of interesting to see how technology has changed. You know, I have another interesting memory of my first day when I was sworn in. It might be my strongest memory of my first two years. So here we had these freshmen and there were a whole handful of new Democrats. Don Mares, from Denver, a few others. There was also Jim Pierson and Pat Killian who were from Jefferson County. Both of them were new, young Democrats holding seats that had been held by Republicans. They had all this family there. Why they ended up doing this I have no idea, but what happened that morning was, there was some procedural thing that was going on on the House floor. We had Speaker Bledsoe up there, he was running the show. For some reason the Minority Leader Ruth Wright, and the Majority Leader, Chris Paulson got into it. Both of them are lawyers and they love to spar.

They actually very much respect each other but they would get up there and argue and fight and all of that. So something happened, I have no recollection of what the incident was but they got up and down, up and down, arguing and debating and Speaker Bledsoe let this debate go on. The two of them were really getting at it and it was getting very contentious and we were tense. We were freshmen but we were tense. Something made Pat Killian get up and speak to the issue.

L.B. A new legislator.

P.K. Yes, now you realize that you're never told to keep your mouth shut as a freshman but you're such in awe of the building, and the process, and the people and I felt, I'd been on city council, I didn't feel like I was a neophyte to politics but there is no way that I said anything for the first month that I was there, at least, particularly I wouldn't have said anything on the first day. But Pat Killian, her first day as a brand new legislator, gets up and interjects herself in the debate between Minority Leader, Ruth Wright and Majority Leader Chris Paulson. Then when she got up, Jim Pierson got up and said something. We were all in the back, because I was sitting toward the back of the House, people were appalled. I remember Jo Ann Groff and Peggy Reeves saying, oh my word, why are they doing this? Well Speaker Bledsoe got upset about it. It was just totally bad protocol, bad process, bad procedure. So he let this debate go on. I always teased Pat and said you're just trying to impress your family who's up in the gallery. Course they just couldn't believe they did it. Years later they said can you believe that we were that naive and stupid that we did that. Well anyway so Speaker Bledsoe decided to punish the House and he finally adjourned, it was way after 12:00 and most of us had lunches set up. I had reservations at the Profile for my group, my campaign manager and campaign staff so we adjourned about 12:15 and he told us we had to be back at 1:00. If we weren't back we would be fined \$10.00 a minute. The Sergeant-at-Arms would collect the money. This was our first day on the job and I said well this is crazy. All these people who are here for lunch, I said, I'm not going to come back. I was in my forties and was fairly experienced and I wasn't going to let some rule that sounded like I was in elementary school dictate me coming back. A bunch of people didn't come back on time. I came back as quickly as I could, but you can't order a lunch and eat and be back in 45 minutes. So anyway we all trooped in and he had started at 1:00 o'clock just like he said he was going to start. The Sergeant-at-Arms walked around and he collected, it turned out it was just \$10.00, not \$10.00 dollars a minute, but collected \$10.00 dollars from us and of course they put it in the coffee fund. But was that a lesson to me in the protocol of the House, the respect you have for the process, the authority that the Speaker has, because Speaker Bledsoe was trying to teach us that also, and the whole decorum of the operation. It was a lesson I'll never forget. We used that example for every freshman orientation in our caucus after that. We used that example and said do not say anything, don't even whisper that first morning on the House floor except to say yes when you're sworn in.

L.B. Well then you don't think it made any great affect on your family because they were used to your public service.

P.K. Right. Right. My husband loved it. He just really enjoyed the campaign and campaigning and he was the kind of man who was content to live in my shadow. He often said, maybe if it had been twenty years earlier he wouldn't have adjusted so well. He loved me being in there. The problem though, and I think most people would say that, you tend to be over zealous. I went to every meeting I could. If there was a group of three people, I was there. So I was gone constantly. Because I was so close to my district and I had already been on city council, I felt a real obligation to try to engage the public and to keep them up to speed on what I was doing. I'd have lots of town meetings and in fact Jack Fenlon, Senator Jack Fenlon and I often times held them together. It took it's toll on me physically because I just ran around all the time. I can just remember that Peter Blake once had in his column in the Rocky Mountain News, talked about us being a part-time legislature. I said partime, give me a break on that.

L.B. Your day starts when the telephone rings at 6:30 or 7:00 o'clock and it doesn't stop until 10:00.

P.K. That's right.

L.B. Especially if you're in session.

P.K. Well I had quit my job. I had worked for a manufacturing company. But because our children were grown up, and in fact at the time I was elected, we had one child out of college and the other one almost ready to graduate. We just decided that we had the luxury of needing to do it full-time, which is a wonderful gift that not everybody has, particularly the younger people who get elected. So the timing in my life was pretty good. I think I was 42 at the time. So it was a good time for me because I could afford financially to do the job full-time. So I feel real blessed to have that opportunity. It was definitely a full-time job. I really got tired the last couple of years going to meetings and all of that. I had a hot line that citizens could call in on a daily basis and get an update on what was going on in the Capitol. I would do that during the 120 days' session. People really liked it.

L.B. In the last two years, you had the additional job of leadership.

P.K. Right. Which is really a job that I didn't recognize it. When I was thinking about running for leadership, I went to Scott McInnis, who at that time was the House Majority Leader. I asked him, "Give me some advice, should I run for leadership?" He said, "well I want you to know that the main job of leadership is to be a babysitter. So if you want to be a baby sitter, run for leadership." Well, he was kidding and exaggerating.

L.B. Only in a way.

P.K. A lot of it is talking to your caucus members and holding their hands and keeping them on board.

L.B. Selling Democrat policy on the bills.

P.K. Back to the effect on your personal life, I think any political job whether it's at the local level up to the national level, you have to have the support of family or it doesn't work.

L.B. Many families have broken up because of their service in the legislature.

P.K. The thing that happens is sometimes it gets to tilt your perspective, because there's a lot of adoration in this job. You get invited to things and people ask you to speak and people recognize you at Safeway and you can kind of get off kilter. Kind of get an exaggerated opinion of your importance. I think that sometimes that is where it affects your personal life more than it should. If someone gets a big ego on this and thinks there is a lot of self-importance, sometimes you lose your perspective that you're just a regular person too and you'll be out of office a year and people won't remember your name.

L.B. That's right, another election comes up. Peggy what was the first bill you introduced and what happened to it?

P.K. Well I carried a nice little bill for the Department of Administration, because a friend of mine, Vicki Kendrick was the legislative liaison. She gave me this nice little bill, which I have no recollection of what it did, it didn't do anything very significant but it was significant to the Department of Administration because it corrected something in statute that needed to be corrected. I went over and talked to some Republicans about it and it turns out that John Irwin, a really fine State Representative from Loveland, I told him about the bill. The bill had come through Finance Committee that I was on and he was on. So I went over to him and I said would you help me on this bill if anybody gets up? It was my first bill. He was a kindly old gentleman who liked to help freshmen no matter if they were Republican or Democrat. So he said sure. He liked to be asked too. I really liked him and he liked the Peggys he always said. Peggy Reeves and Peggy Kerns, he always liked the Peggys. So I got up there and I presented my bill. He stood up in his chair, it was second reading. People were busy some people were paying attention, some weren't cause it wasn't that big of a bill, but he stood up in his seat on the House floor and walked to the side and some people were kind of looking at him, is he going to speak? But he just stood there and he nodded to me, he was giving the message to the Republican side, I support her bill, and not only do I support her bill I'm here to defend her if I need to.

L.B. How wonderful.

P.K. I know, wasn't that just a great thing. So the bill got through and passed unanimously and passed the Senate pretty comfortably. I always remember that because it was a lesson I learned about respect for the process. I think that's something that I hope term limits doesn't affect, is that's it's not partisan. It shouldn't be partisan. It shouldn't be a Republican thing or a Democrat thing. It needs to be the issue and respect for the process. What John Irwin was teaching me and other freshmen was, you know, she's a Republican and I'm a Democrat, she's a freshman and I have more seniority but I respect the process. Her bill was ok and I'm going to make sure it gets through. Wasn't that a wonderful way to teach that lesson.

L.B. Yes and Ron Strahle was the one who taught me a great respect for the process. Regardless

of what side you are on out there on the floor, you always kept a certain decorum on the House Floor and you never went beyond that. Never into a shouting match or name calling, it just never happened. He really knew about procedure and I really learned to respect the procedure. Peggy what major issues were you involved with and what was the outcome of some of these issues?

P.K. I was very interested in a lot of things. So I spent the first couple of years sort of poking around, figuring out maybe where I might have an impact. I was very much interested in criminal justice issues. Sentencing laws, prevention things. Very much interested in education, reform measures.

L.B. Was Don Mielke there at that time?

P.K. No. He was not actually.

L.B. He had already left at that time.

P.K. Yes, he was a lobbyist when I was there my first year. I was actually in government reform. I carried the first welfare reform pilot. Colorado was one of the first states in the nation to do our own welfare reform experiment. Claire Traylor was the Senate Sponsor.

L.B. What kind of reform was this?

P.K. We did the kind of things that now everybody thinks is what should be. People had to work. they had to have earned some income in order to stay on welfare. But we also raised the cap. They could earn more money than they could under current law at that time and still maintain the health insurance, the child care subsidy. One of the problems that the system did was it discouraged work because it penalized you. If you were on welfare and went out and got a \$5.00 an hour job, then you were no longer on welfare. So you lost your health benefits for you and your children your food subsidy, your transportation subsidy, whatever. So why would anybody go to work. If you had two little kids at home, you'd want to stay with your kids.

L.B. You had to have help.

P.K. Yes, right. So what we did, we raised the capital amount. We also did something innovative that said that in these pilot counties, and there were five counties that were picked, people could have the cash subsidy instead of food stamps. Actually Claire Traylor and I had to fly to Washington DC, to get a waiver from the Department of Agriculture. They did not like that piece at all. Course there were a lot of myths about welfare mothers will go out and buy drugs or bad food. They won't buy nutritious food for their children and that's incorrect. I mean, Mothers are like all mothers. Most of them want to buy good food for their children. We thought that when these women were to learn how to be off welfare, then they needed to act, learn to act like everybody else. That is, you have a budget, you have an income and you figure out how to spend it. The Bankers Association decided that they would, in these pilot counties, they would have volunteers sit down with the mothers who were chosen to

be on the pilot and teach them how to budget their money. It was just a rousing success. Then it was used as a model in other states and all that. So I carried that bill. I also carried with Bill Owens, who's now Governor, the charter school bill. He was a Senate sponsor and I was the House sponsor. We were the third state in the union to pass a bill to allow charter, public schools, to be formed by parents and teachers and community people. So I was particularly proud of those two bills and the third one I was particularly proud of, those two were in 1993, in 1994 I carried the bill, I started the bill in the House, a broad sweeping domestic violence legislation. It really changed how Colorado addressed domestic violence and in fact five years later, that bill is almost entirely intact. It really did a lot toward protecting victims of domestic violence whether they were women or whether they were men also.

L.B. Who was the Senate sponsor?

P.K. Mike Feeley was the Senate sponsor for that bill. Actually I got some mileage out of that bill, I was asked to speak at different places in the country. The charter school bill followed after me for years. I was on panels, wrote papers, in fact that was one of the main reasons that after I left the legislature, I was offered this job and went to Washington, DC to work for the U.S. Department of Education. Because administration was very strong for charter schools and I had carried one of the first bills in the country and then had been on the speaker's circuit, they asked me to come to DC and take that job. So it's interesting how one thing leads to another. I think in addition to the bills, I mean we all want to leave landmark legislation. That's the ego part, but the bigger thing is the relationships you build with your fellow legislators and also how you can help citizens solve their problems. Sometimes they don't take laws, they just take their state legislator calling somebody up and saying this person has a problem on this thing, can you solve it. That's a very gratifying part.

L.B. What were some of the issues that you worked on that are still ongoing. Education is always ongoing.

P.K. Education, very definitely. Last year or two years ago the legislature finally took the pilot and put it into a broad scale, across the state, bill and made some significant important changes. So that is being monitored. I would say the criminal justice issues are always ongoing. How do you punish the bad people and provide prisons for them and at the same time being realistic about it? How do you get violent people off the streets and incarcerate them for a long time? How do you punish people who maybe aren't violent but still have broken the law? I worked a lot with State Senator Sally Hopper and State Senator Dottie Wham on those issues. It's very interesting, during the eight years I was there, the criminal justice issues were usually carried by women.

L.B. That is surprising.

P.K. State Representative Jeanne Adkins was another one of them. We used to talk about it. Why are women taking on these issues?

L.B. Because Senator Wham was Chairman of Judiciary in the Senate.

P.K. Right, and Sally Hopper was on Judiciary. We were all on the Criminal Justice Commission that was in existence in that time. I think those are probably my highlights.

L.B. Criminal Justice Commission, that has been disbanded.

P.K. Right, it was disbanded. That got to be political. It was one of those funny things that happened. One member of the commission was extremely liberal and actually did not reflect the philosophy of any of us on the commission. But he was also quite verbal and wrote a lot of letters to the editors, wrote a lot of articles and he would always sign his articles with his name plus "a member of the Criminal Justice Commission" even though it wasn't the Commission that was supporting what he wrote. It sort of got in the political thing and it was disbanded, which was really unfortunate.

L.B. By doing that, someone just casually reading that letter would associate the Commission with the statements that he had written.

P.K. Maybe it would do that for other legislators

L.B. Peggy, How were the committees handled when you were there? Were there any changes in the way the committees were handled while you served?

P.K. Well I was elected in 1988 and the voters at the same time put in the gavel amendment.

L.B. Give a vote to every legislator.

P.K. Give a vote to every legislator, which eliminated the Rules Committee and in the Rules Committees, it still operates like that in Congress, and in many states, the Rules Committee actually decided what bills went to the floor. The bill would go to maybe Education Committee and then Appropriations. Then on its last stop on its road was in Rules Committee. Rules Committee would decide what bills went to the floor. A group of citizens, League of Women Voters and some others, decided that that was not a fair process. I would think you would get, the legislators who were there then would say yes it probably wasn't. Even though you would get other legislators of both parties that will say, you know my bill deserved to die there. It wasn't well thought out, I hadn't figured it out well enough. Better to die there than to take time on the House floor. It very overwhelmingly passed. I believe probably drastically changed the way we do business here. Because before legislators could carry any number of bills they wanted and carried a lot. Somebody told me one year he had 75 bills. When I came we could only have four or five and I had a hard time keeping track of those, let alone if I'd had 75. So I think one of the initial effects was it limited the number of bills that could be introduced.

L.B. Oh do you think gavel did that? That was by resolution.

P.K. I'm sure gavel did because suddenly if everybody had an unlimited number of bills that they could introduce, and there was no stopping, real iron gate for those bills, many of them might

have made it to the House floor and would have jammed up the calendar. I really think that was one of the first things. The first year we were allowed to carry four bills and I think then the next year, five and then I think five was the number we continued to carry. Another thing is it did provide more access to citizens. It meant for a less orderly process at the Capitol through the bill process. But it certainly allowed the public to have more of a say really. I don't know, I never operated under any other rules so I didn't know.

L.B. It made a big difference to the staff.

P.K. I can imagine it did, but in my eight years there were not drastic changes from the first time that I served in 1989. It was pretty much the same. The numbers on committees would fluctuate based on the election. The Democrats gained a couple of seats. I remember one year our numbers were real close, this was 1993, 1994. I think we were only three apart in the House so our numbers jumped up on the committees, but then the next election in '96 the numbers dropped. So the number of Democrats and Republicans on the committees would fluctuate just about every election cycle based on the results of the election.

L.B. On the percentage of Republican and Democrats, but the total number on the committees stayed the same.

P.K. Yes.

L.B. Eleven to twelve. I think most of them had eleven.

P.K. Right, I think one year, Transportation was increased to thirteen for some reason. I've forgotten now, I think that was after you left. We didn't see major changes. The change that we started to see as far as the process was when the voters passed term limits in 1992. No, it passed in 1990, because my class was the last class that could have served more than eight years. My class because we were elected in 1998, could serve ten years, so it passed in 1990 so it kicked in, in 1998. What we saw with term limits was a little different perspective when people came in. First of all the average turnover of legislators was six years or something like that both in the House and the Senate. So there were some glaring exceptions. Bev Bledsoe served a long time and some other people. But those people provided the stability and the tradition there where the majority of the body anyway moved in and then moved out and then were replaced. There were enough long-termers that the culture of the legislature pretty much remained the same.

L.B. Custom and usage of the rules.

P.K. Exactly. The traditions and even some of the traditions that aren't written like the dress code. You don't play practical jokes so much on the House floor. I mean it was that kind of thing. When those old timers started to go away, and some of them did just because term limits were there, they said, "Well you know I don't have to leave yet but I'm going to leave anyway." They sort of saw the end of their career. We had from the '92, '94 elections, we had quite a number of people who didn't come back. I think of Jerry Kopel for example. Wayne Knox, I guess he didn't come back. Then there were people on the other side like

Danny Williams, who didn't come back. Course Scott McInnis ran for Congress. Chris Paulsen didn't come back. There started to be fewer role models there. Because the role models had only been there a handful of years. Though I wasn't there last year when it kicked in finally, I just was told that once you had the stalwarts, the people whose names were known, throughout the state, the people who were identified strongly with issues, it was unsettling.

L.B. How do you feel about term limits?

P.K. I believe that, first of all, it's an arbitrary number. I would prefer that elected officials not stay forever. That they'd make room for new people with new ideas and new enthusiasm but what I don't like is some arbitrary figure picked. California says six years is term limits. Colorado says eight years. Some other state has twelve years. So I don't know what the right number is but I guess I'm very conservative on the issue in one way. I feel it takes away a voting right from the public. That when a constitutional amendment is passed that says only someone could serve a certain number of years, then that means the voters in that district can't do anything about it.

L.B. That's right.

P.K. It's their right, it's their constitutional right to be able to vote for the candidates that are presented. This arbitrary means they can't. Then of course somebody would say well people don't know who they vote for anyway or they don't vote. I say tough. You take what you get. The people who go to the polls should have the options and I don't think it solves the problem that people thought it would solve. I think they were looking at Congress, I think they were looking at all the wrong stuff. I decided not to run again in 1996, I had served eight years. I could have served two more. When constituents would say, "Oh why aren't you running, " I'd say, how did you vote on term limits in 1990.

L.B. Good question.

P.K. Most people said "I voted for it." Then I said you voted an eight year limit for me and I feel I need to honor the law. That was one of the reasons I got out and a couple of others felt the same way as I did. Our voters had said eight years, and our eight years was up and so I was going to honor the spirit of the law even though I didn't agree with it. Then people would say, " We didn't mean you." I said, "Well yes you did because you voted for term limits for state legislators.

L.B. What changes do you see in state government during the time that you served since you came in 1988? Do you see many changes in state government?

P.K. Well I think I saw women taking a more active role. There's no question, looking back on the pictures in the Capitol, the composite pictures, which everybody just loves to study, I mean that's our legacy, our picture's on the wall somewhere. When I look at those, it was a very male oriented group, white men, really. A lot of rural people, mountain people, and what's changed, I think visually, is the fact that the legislature is more reflective of our

society, of our state but that there is an increasing number of women. Women now hold more leadership positions. You know I had delusions of grandeur when our numbers were real close, I wanted to be the first female Speaker of the House. Didn't get that, but at some point we'll have that and we'll have it soon. I think we've seen the growth and confidence that women have and the authority they have and the power that they have in the legislature, it is a dramatic shift from maybe what it was really even like ten years ago.

L.B. That's with Norma Anderson becoming Majority Leader.

P.K. Right. She would have become Speaker if she hadn't been term-limited out. There was no question, she had the talent and the savvy to do that. I think sometimes women have been reluctant to take on those leadership roles, you know our kind of natural orientation is to defer sometimes to men. But when you have strong women leaders there like Ruth Wright, Dottie Wham, Sally Hopper, Peggy Reeves and some others, they become role models for other women then to take some risks and say hey, I can do that, I can carry that tough bill. I can fight with the big boys on the House floor. I can argue as well as anybody else.

L.B. How did you feel not only how did you feel but what problems did you find by having the minority leaders still continue as a member of the House when you became the new Majority leader? I know there wasn't any opposition to you doing this because Ruth Wright simply wanted to spend her last year as a member and not in a leadership position. Did that create any problems for you?

P.K. Well, actually Sam Williams succeeded Ruth Wright as Majority Leader, as Minority Leader. he put her right behind him. Actually Wayne Knox was right behind him but he put her right next, so she was really behind me. Because when Sam was Minority Leader, I was Assistant.

L.B. That's right, I'd forgotten that.

P.K. Right and which I thought was a very gracious jester on Sam's part. I think Ruth who was just a wonderful person, I think she'd had some problems, it was hard. She'd been Minority Leader for six years, I believe. She was strong and respected and very smart. I'm sure it was hard for her to be relegated to a secondary spot. Even though she still commanded the same respect and all of that.

L.B. That was by her own choosing.

P.K. That was by her own choosing. I thought what a grand gesture. She knew she was only going to serve one more term and she thought that, I don't like speaking for her, but I remember her telling me this, that she felt that because of term limits, this is another place where term limits maybe changed some things, because of term limits she would like to be there with a new minority leader to help guide that person rather than stay till the bitter end.

L.B. That was the same thing that Regis Groff told me, that he as minority leader in the Senate choose not to run because he felt another Democrat should come in and be trained for that

position.

- P.K. That's a tough thing to do but it's a very grand gesture. The little funny story about that is, someone said to Ruth, well but your little plaque with your name on it and your years of service won't be on the Minority Leaders desk. I think Lee you started this and it's a wonderful thing. The last seat that you sit in there is a plaque with your name on it and your years of service. So Ruth, even though she was Minority Leader for six years, her last term there, she sat in the second seat in the second row, and that's where her name plaque is. My last term, I was Minority Leader, so mine is up there. So anyway always kind of wondered if maybe we should change that rule or whatever. You obviously can't pick where you want your little name tag to be but it would be sort of nice, like in Congress, the Speakers, the Speaker is always there even if he isn't Speaker when he leaves. So it's sort of a remembrance of the position of leadership more than anything else.
- L.B. I remember I had some people who were very angry about that. A decision had to be made. There were those who said no. Where you sit last is where your plaque is going to be. I started putting the composite picture in the Journal. (Tape ended, new one ready to go)
- L.B. Do you think you would ever run again, like for the Senate?
- P.K. Well I had the opportunity when the Senate seat was open, actually Jack Fenlon again when he left the Senate, but because I wanted to be the first woman Speaker of the House, I stayed in the House. I don't know, I would never say never. I think if I went back now I would be better at what I did because I'd have a better perspective.
- L.B. You know the procedure, and how things are done. It makes a big difference Peggy to know the rules. If you know the rules you really can do more than if you don't understand them or you try to flaunt the rules.
- P.K. Right, well you used to stress that a lot Lee. Like in our freshman orientation you just said learn the rules. You can be effective if you know the rules. Somebody who knows them better than you can use them against you.
- L.B. Well my favorite rule is the one that says the Speaker rules. I think that's rule 46. See we did not go back to Mason's Legislative Rules. It always went back to the Speaker which was very important in a big House like we have that that kind of power rests with one person. Democrats or Republican. I've interviewed quite a few Democrats for this and one of my favorite tapes that I listened to was Allen Dines. He was talking about being, at that time he was Minority Leader, and then he served in the Majority, his freshman year there I think. It's fascinating how things have changed since that time and gavel had a lot to do with it. The urbanization of the Legislature had a lot to do with it, it used to be rural.
- P.K. Yes, the population shifted and when I was there, it was after the redistricting in 1992, I mean legislators went home at night. So the out of state people who were much fewer than they had been even just the year before, you know there wasn't that camaraderie as much.

L.B. They didn't reconvene at the Shirley Savoy. Peggy one of my favorite questions was given to me by Fred Brown, he's a political editor at the Denver Post. The question was, "What's your favorite place in the Capitol and what memories do you associate with that place?"

P.K. You know what, I never took a tour of the tunnels. I always meant to do that. I'm going to go back and do that. Yes there are such wonderful stories associated with the tunnels, who knows if they're true or not.

L.B. Probably not, but they're wonderful.

P.K. You know there's two answers, I guess. The one is I spent so many years, I spent 6 years in 271. Which my first year there, you changed. I guess it had been a different configuration before that, but when I came, I remember going to the Capitol right after I was first elected and the whole room was in an upheaval, desks were being moved out and all of that. It was a very pleasant place in there. I think there were 18 Democrats, some of the staff. The mail boxes were there. The xerox was there. Particularly when things quieted down, people got to know one another. I think although I would have loved to be in the majority, and had the offices, and even some Democrats had offices where there were two people or three people in them. In room 271 in cubicals, you could hear people talk, you would hear people talk on the phones, cause that's where you had your meeting. We were injected into people's lives in a different way. So we got to know each other in there and we became friends. You know Dan Prinster, from Grand Junction, Peggy Reeves, me, Renny Fagen and Jerry Kopel was in there.

L.B. Wilma Webb.

P.K. Wilma Webb was in there, Gloria Tanner, Don Mares until he went to the Senate. Tony was in there until he left. And we became friends in a different way.

L.B. Jim Dyer.

P.K. Jim Dyer was always in there. Always had that great old desk. He didn't use the institutional furniture and had this great wonderful desk. But we became great friends in a different way because we were all together in this big room. So we would go out at night after the business and get something to eat and talk and rehash things. That was a lot of fun. So my memories of 271 and the friends I made there and the social life that we developed with each other, was real important. The other place I remember was the basement ladies room. That must have been redone. The ladies rooms in the Capitol were just charming. They were just done in a kind of old fashioned way but in a feminine way. But the ladies room down near the House hearing rooms, there was an old lounge chair which I think is still there with a kind of divider.

L.B. A screen.

P.K. A screen, and I remember several times of either having a terrible head cold or being sick and people never missed. I always thought the Capitol was one of the most unhealthy places

you could be with the citizens. You never missed work when you were a legislator unless you were really sick. I remember going in there and resting and having it be a very pleasant place to be. So those would be my two favorite places.

L.B. I could tell you a story about the women's restrooms.

P.K. Well there weren't any for awhile, right?

L.B. Thanks to Arie Taylor, we got the bathroom upstairs off of the House Chamber. That was painted and Vonnie Osmond came down before session once and he put the wallpaper around and the chair and the shelf, everything. Very feminine and we had Arie Taylor come down and we had the ribbons across the door and had her open the women's bathroom. I mean we made it a big gala affair.

P.K. But I know the story behind the story, because Scott McGinnis told me this. He was a freshman and he was in awe. He was a Republican legislator from the western slope. He was in awe of Arie Taylor who was this very striking black woman who wore beautiful hats. He loved her voice, he loved hearing her debates, he said "I was in awe of her," he said, "I was afraid of her". One night they were working late and there wasn't a women's restroom close and the women had to go far to the restroom. One night Arie Taylor walked in with a roll of toilet paper and she walked down the center aisle and she's yelling at the top of her voice in a beautiful booming voice, "Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker." So Speaker Bledsoe, I think he was the Speaker, stopped. She said, "Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker." She's waving this toilet paper. She made this real funny little speech about having to a...how she was going to use the men's restroom or something. Do you remember this?

L.B. Oh I remember it, I remember when she introduced the resolution. She introduced a resolution when all the fellows were in Steamboat Springs to the Colorado Cattlemen's meeting. We were still in session, but most of the cowboys had gone. She got up and introduced a resolution and the resolution said that one session, the men's restroom that was immediately off the house chamber would be for the men but the second session it would be for the women. Everybody said, "ha, ha, ha, this is just great," and they voted for it. But you must remember that Arie was the one that got free restrooms at Stapleton Airport. She went out there one day and she had to have a dime to use the restroom and she said this is not going to happen again. She went into the men's room and it was free and she said the womens' are going to be free and she had a sit down out there or something. They took the little dime off all the women's restrooms, so she decided we were going to have fairness in the House of Representatives. The resolution passed, the men thought this was the biggest joke they'd ever heard. But the next session there was a new sign on the men's restroom that said for women only. It wasn't a year later that we got the women's restroom.

P.K. Who put the sign up? Did you put the sign up?

L.B. I didn't have anything to do with it.

P.K. HaHa! Yeah right. Well we all leave our legacy and I can thank her for the women's

restroom.

L.B. So that's why the little sign. If you read the little tribute outside the women's restroom, it says the Arie Taylor Chamber Pot. Don't you remember that's what it said? Anyway she was great. Arie, I just thought she was wonderful. After we finish this taping, I'll tell you a story about her and me.

P.K. Isn't it amazing to think that that wasn't too many years before I was elected to the House. When I mentioned that the increase in number of women and stature and power of women, it might have all started with having our own restroom off the House floor.

L.B. Because once in awhile, it would be so hard for the front desk to sit there. I mean you'd go on and on and we're not allowed to get up. At least the women could get up and go over to the ... it's 96 steps over to the Senate ladies room and one night we asked the Speaker to give us a 5 minute break, we just had to go across the hall. We were just as delighted as everybody to get the women's restroom.

Well Peggy, let me ask you if you think that people seem more pessimistic and skeptical and cynical about holding elected office and politics in general. Do you think there is a difference, or has it always been this way?

P.K. Well, I think there is a difference, and one of the things is the increased media scrutiny about people. We elect people like ourselves, because we elect our neighbors to do these jobs whether it's as a member of congress or it's the mayor of your city or whatever. Because we elect our residents, our neighbors, or community. Yet it seems as if we want perfect people. What I keep hearing is people say, Oh, I don't want the press to bring up something I did in college or something my spouse did or my kids did. I respect my private life and I don't want it exposed. That really bothers me. First of all I had no bad instances around that. So I try to reassure people that doesn't really happen but you know it does happen. There are things in all of our lives, because none of us are perfect, that may be embarrassing if an opponent brings them up or they get in the paper somehow. I see that as making people skittish. The other thing I've heard people say, because I've done my share of trying to recruit candidates, the other thing is people feel that it's a real invasion of their personal lives. It takes such an incredible amount of time and it's a job that fills the time that you have to give it. I mean if you have 24 hours a day to give to this job or 30 hours a day to give to this job, you'd always have something more to do. So people have to be disciplined in order to say this is the time I'm going to have for my family or myself and this is the time I'm going to devote to the job. It's hard to do that because there are always forces to encourage you

to go to one more meeting to do one more thing. I see people being more protective of their personal lives, saying I don't want that kind of imposition on my time. So it worries me because our government is only as strong as the people who vote in it and the people who we elect. If we don't respect that and nurture that and make that stronger, then what happens to our representative democracy.

L.B. It's so difficult for the young people to run for office, they have a family, they have a job.

They have to have the type of job that when they're employed, their employer will say, you can take this time off.

P.K. I always am a little critical of the business community because they lobby actively at the Capitol, have good public policy issues, but there aren't enough people like that who serve. Because there aren't the Coors and the Gates and the companies like IBM who let Tony Hernandez and Tony Grampsas and Paul Schauer serve. There aren't enough companies who say ok we're going to bite the bullet for a certain period of time because we want our kind of folk down there and we'll let them do that. There aren't enough people like that. The other thing that's a deterrent to running is the cost of campaigns are so much more expensive now and we don't even use TV for our state representative races that much. I mean some places do it, I think Colorado Springs does a little bit. But certainly not in the Denver area. You don't see any state legislature ads for an election on TV. But even just the cost of mailing to people, because we're becoming a bigger state, increased significantly in the eight years I was in.

L.B. The postage has gone up too.

P.K. Now look at fourteen years between the time I was on City Council. The cost of campaigns was immense. So people don't want to go out and raise the money. You raise it from your friends, your family, the special interest groups and it's hard to raise the money. Nobody likes having to ask for money. So that seems like a negative part of it. I always think that the best candidate is always a little naive. They don't know how hard it is to get elected and how much work it involves and how much money they're going to need to raise and they don't know how hard the job is. So they're a little idealistic and naive.

L.B. Do you think that the legislature is going to get older? You will have more older people running because they have the time and their career is over?

P.K. I actually think that there may be younger people because an up and coming something might say well I can only serve eight years so let me kind of make a name for myself. I don't know, that's an interesting question, and I don't know the trend. I also could see an advantage for someone saying, I can take eight years out of my career or what ever and just do it for that period of time and I may reap some benefits from it.

L.B. Say a young lawyer or someone like that.

P.K. Right.

L.B. Peggy do you have any stories about members or staff that you'd like to tell me about?

P.K. Well I think the thing that I'm left with is the relationships that you build. I remember a great time in 1993, 1994, we had a special session on education. Norma Anderson and I put together this bipartisan group to work on the issue. We met downstairs in Charlie Brown's office who's now head of Legislative Council. We had the black board and flip charts and we had this bipartisan group because we all cared about education. Chuck

Henning was head of that, he died a few years ago. Those are the times that I liked the best, when issues were not partisan but where people came together because they had similar philosophy and wanted to do something good for the people of this state. Those are the memories that I really hold dear. You tend to kind of forget when you fight with somebody. My advice to new legislators is always, don't take things personally and don't attack personally. You can argue on equal footing on any kind of issue if you don't make it personal then you can all go out to dinner afterwards and enjoy each other.

L.B. Then the next day they'll vote for your bill and you'll vote for their bill.

P.K. Yes. Chuck Berry was Speaker when I was House Minority Leader. We got along very good, so he would give me power that maybe another Speaker might not have given. As far as always honoring my appointments. Oftentimes in statute, the Speaker could make appointment to other kinds of committees, not the standing committees, the statutory committees. I can remember maybe only one time that he superseded my suggestion and he came and talked to me about it. That I thought was very respectful. That's something that was important to me because it gave me power within my caucus. It also meant we had a good working relationship most of the time too. There are cute stories with freshmen coming in that, trying to figure out the process and being intimidated and all of that and you know I just have a warm feeling sometimes, like seeing somebody like for example, Moe Keller, from Jefferson County, who turned out to be a wonderful legislator, that came to the House very much in awe of what she'd been elected to. Very driven by some things that she wanted to accomplish. What she did was figure out how to accomplish them. She out strategized a lot of times. I think Fred Brown or somebody did a story about her last year. How she was surprisingly successful for sort of a timid, shy person. But actually she wasn't. She was smarter than most. She had just figured out how to get her bills. Then you know there are those wonderful people who work for the House, our assignables, who would file our bills for us and be there, not to bring coffee, because that was not the way we used them, but really to assist us because we didn't have personal staff, but to make our jobs easier.

L.B. Now each legislator has an intern for the session.

P.K. I think that's very good.

L.B. They don't work on the floor like the assignables do but they work in their own area. They answer phone calls and write letters. I think there are fewer stenos now because of the interns. It is difficult to run an office down there when you don't have any help unless you're in leadership.

P.K. Very definitely with the number of phone calls that come in and people expect you to return their phone calls and to answer their letters. They do not know that you don't have staff. They just expect an answer back. You know the real reason we serve is to serve the public and I think probably my dearest memories are the ones where I served the people of Aurora. I would go to a town meeting and somebody would have a suggestion for a bill or somebody would call me up and have a problem with something and say why isn't this easier. I would realize they could be fixed legislatively. I had, for awhile, a teenage advisory group who....

L.B. Well that's interesting.

P.K. Actually it wasn't my idea, I went to Overland High School and talked to a class and the kids said hey we'd like to help you out. So we had a few meetings that session and we talked about some legislation. I think that session there might have been a bill to lower the driving age or something like that but you know, where you could help solve people's problems, was the most rewarding. One of my best memories, it was from a gentleman who was a World War II Veteran. He had never been able to get his Purple Heart licence plate. He was given a Purple Heart, but for some reason, he kept getting denied for his licence plate and he wanted his license plate. That meant a lot to him. You know he was elderly, this was only probably in the early 90's. It was easy for me to get his license plate and he was forever grateful to me. I kept in contact with him for years afterwards until just, I think this last Christmas was the first time that I didn't hear from him. He was just so grateful that his state legislator could get his Purple Heart...

L.B. Took the time for him.

P.K. Right. Well I mean what a wonderful way to serve the public and what a real gift that I had to do that simple thing and make somebody happy. Those are the best memories I think.

L.B. Did you miss not being here Peggy?

P.K. I was actually ready to leave. I felt that after 8 years I had just about done what I could do. If I could have, term limits was actually the reason I left. If I could have seen a longer career ahead, I might have served longer. As it turned out I could only serve two more years. I had carried some significant legislation that was making a difference in people's lives so I'd made a contribution in that way and I was ready to move on. I didn't really miss it. I get nostalgic though when I walk into the Capitol and when I see you.

L.B. I still miss it even though I serve on one committee down there. I still miss it. Well Peggy it's been wonderful to meet you. Thank you for letting me come today.

P.K. Thank you it's been a lot of fun.