Rex Buchanan: Good morning, I'm Rex Buchanan, former director of the Kansas Geological Survey. Today is November 9, 2023. We're here today to interview Nancy Jackson for the Kansas Oral History Project. Our videographer is former representative Dave Heinemann. We thank the Dole Institute of Politics at KU for allowing us to use the Elizabeth Dole Gallery and Reading Room for this interview.

Nancy Jackson has had an impressive career in the non-profit sector. Of particular interest for our interview here today, Nancy founded and directed the Climate and Energy Project (CEP) from 2007 to 2010. CEP received the Governor's Commendation for achievement in renewable energy and efficiency in 2009 and was featured on the front page of *The New York Times* and in Lawrence Berkley Lab and *Discovery* documentaries in 2010. Nancy earned a bachelor's degree in Humanities and an M.A. in Environmental History from KU.

This interview is part of the Kansas Oral History Project series examining the development of public policy at the nexus of energy and the environment during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In these interviews, we explore those policies through the eyes of experts, executives, administrators, legislators, environmentalists, and others. The Kansas Oral History Project is a non-profit corporation created to collect and preserve oral histories of Kansans who were involved in shaping and implementing public policy. Recordings and transcripts of these oral history interviews are accessible online at ksoralhistory.org and through the Kansas Historical Society in the State Library of Kansas. The Kansas Oral History Project is supported by donations from generous individuals and grants from Evergy and ITC Great Plains.

Thanks, Nancy, for agreeing to share your insights today and thank you, David, for volunteering with your videography skills.

So, Nancy, the biography begins in 2007. Obviously, you existed as a human being prior to that. Tell us a little bit about your background prior to the Climate and Energy Project.

Nancy Jackson: Well, that's the kind of fun thing in a way is that I had no business founding the Climate and Energy Project. Between college and graduate school, I had worked in investment banking and in some non-profit fundraising in Los Angeles. I moved back to KU for my graduate degree, studied under Donald Worster, a renowned environmental historian whose work was really inspiring to me and did a master's thesis on Flint Hills ranching in Kansas. I went on to edit -- and Rex, you and I had some dealings during those years –an award-winning series for the University Press of Kansas for 10 years. Went to KU Endowment for a few minutes. And then had an argument – he likes to call it a spirited conversation – with my former father-in-law in the kitchen when we were there for a holiday. He just sort of posed this question around climate change.

RB: Just so we're clear, we're talking about Wes Jackson.

NJ: We're talking about Wes Jackson, the founder of the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. So, we're having a conversation, and he says – we're talking about climate change – "how important is this to you?" I said, I think it's the defining problem of my generation. I think if we don't solve this problem, if we don't figure out how to live with it, how to reduce the impacts insofar as we can, then I think we've failed. And he said, "well how much do you care?" I said, a lot. He said, would you quit

your job? I said, in a heartbeat. We were on the phone the next day and had raised $250k to start the Climate and Energy Project, which was initially a part of the Land Institute. So that is how it happened. I then had to spend a good six months calling effectively . . .. The Climate and Energy Project in so many ways was the result of the generosity of experts everywhere, across the country and here in Kansas. I called the renewable energy labs. I called the Department of Energy. I developed a relationship with the former head of what is now Evergy, Jim Haines. I talked to everyone that would talk to me about the energy challenges that we faced. And I did a ton of research and six months later we launched in earnest.

RB: Could you talk – and we'll drill down into this a little bit deeper – but what was your relationship with Wes? That sort of provoked this. How did that happen?

NJ: That's a great question. I think that Wes is a collector of people who interest him. Obviously, he was related to me through the marriage of his son, but I think that he saw in me someone who like him could be a little bit of a dog with a bone. That if I grabbed onto a project I wasn't going to let go and I was going to make something big happen. I don't think either of us anticipated the impact that the Climate and Energy Project would have or how swiftly or how broadly. I think it surprised him. I know it surprised me.

RB: One of the things that I'm interested in here is, where does the Climate and Energy Project fit in with other organizations particularly within the state? Did you look and see a gap that you thought needed to be filled, was the role different? Talk about that.

NJ: Yes. The Land Institute itself was dedicated to principles of perenniality, sustainability. Sustainable agriculture and sustainable culture, all of that of course threatened by climate change, as you could argue almost everything is. The Sierra Club was doing amazing work in the state at that time. However, they were viewed as an extremely liberal, almost reactionary group within the state. They were having an impact, particularly legally, but culturally they really struggled to make a difference on the landscape in terms of hearts and minds across the state of Kansas. NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] had been somewhat involved. There were a number of organizations that cared and were working.

RB: The Kansas Natural Resource Council was pretty active as well.
NJ: Very active. Very active legislatively and very active in terms of citizens' groups, but again, largely based in eastern Kansas. What we had when the Climate and Energy Project was starting the principal challenge before us was, was the state going to invest in fairly gigantic coal-fired power in the western portion of the state. The argument in part that Wes and I got into in the kitchen, he was feeling like citizens in the western part of the state were being kind of duped, that they were being fooled into thinking that these coal plants were a good idea. My contention was, well they are a good idea for that place at that time. If what you're looking at from a local perspective is employment and the sustainability of an economy, a local economy, then it's hard to say no to development, to jobs, and whatnot. My argument back was, I don't think it does much good to argue that people shouldn't want something that makes all the sense in the world for them to want for a variety of reasons. I think it does make sense to provide an alternative that's

viable economically and environmentally so that they can genuinely see their future in another lane.

RB: Your argument, which I think is valid, is these folks are behaving rationally.
NJ: Absolutely.
RB: They're not being duped; they're behaving in what they view is a very rational fashion because the lack of alternatives as far as they see it. You open up a couple things I want to talk about before we sort of get to the nuts and bolts of that. One of which is that eastern Kansas versus – and Salina is obviously central Kansas and that's sort of what's associated with the Land Institute. Almost all of the environmental organizations that you ticked off and the other ones that you didn't tick off, but you could have, are either in eastern Kansas or maybe Wichita at best. There's virtually nothing west of Highway 81 in effect.
NJ: No, there's not.

RB: In some respects, you're serving a little bit of that role.
NJ: Yes, and I always saw myself not as an environmentalist *per se*, but rather as someone who was looking at a future, thinking about a planet that my children, and hopefully grandchildren will inherit, and I want to be livable. And ideally better than livable, beautiful as it is today. I wanted to do kind of the boy scout principle, let's leave this place as good as we found it. And what I realized and what was driven home to me throughout all of the work that we did with the Climate and Energy Project is that you hear these phrases like, you've got to meet people where they are, but that's profoundly true. We all have rational and

emotional but still reasonable perspectives that come from our upbringing, that come from our friends and our associates, that come from the work that we do. And a lot of the people in central and western Kansas felt disregarded if not disrespected by an eastern Kansas perspective that said that environment was more important than people, in their perspective. Which was fair. It did feel that way.

RB: I grew up out there. No matter what the perspective is, you get pretty tired of people who think they know more than you do about the part of the world you come from.
NJ: Exactly.

RB: It's pretty easy to resent that. You don't consider yourself an environmentalist?
NJ: No. I think I still don't. That said, I madly love the natural world. But I think when we call ourselves any kind of "ist" – spiritualist, environmentalist, economist – we're privileging a particular worldview. And I think maybe my conceit is that if I'm anything, I suspect, I hope that I'm a humanist. I care about people and it's through people that I care about the environment. It's hard for me to privilege one over the other. So yeah, I never kind of put myself in that category.

RB: That's interesting because I'm not sure humanist quite captures it either, because my guess is that you have a regard for the natural world that is just as significant or whatever word you want to use as your regard for people.
NJ: I'm going to push back on that a tiny bit and here's why. I think you're mostly, you're not wrong Rex, but one of the arguments that I've

had with a number of people over time, and I think I've probably had it with Wes is, is the natural world more important than people. I'll tell you, I had . . . we're being filmed by a former representative in the Statehouse in Kansas. With another such person at one point, I had a spirited conversation, and he was saying he couldn't stand environmentalists because environmentalists privileged the environment over people. In fact, he said, I think you all would like most of us to die so that the environment could be fine. I think, for me, (a) of course I don't take that perspective, (b) I will admit to being a person, I love the natural world for itself, but I love it through my humanness and I would tell you that a huge part of the reason that I would love to preserve it is as I said is really for my children, for my grandchildren, for other people I love and for many people I don't know but feel love toward. I kind of can't separate the two and, in fact, I guess that's it. When I studied environmental history, one of my objections is that we were setting people aside from the natural world when people are profoundly a part of the natural world. So, I'd prefer to think, if I am an environmentalist, it's an environmentalist from the perspective of people being very much included in that.

RB: I appreciate how deeply you've thought through all of this because it's real easy to toss off terms without really having thought them through. I'm going to ask one question that relates, we did these interviews, a series with folks talking about water world prior to this series we're working on now. One of the take home lessons I came out of that project with was that the folks that were very involved legislatively with water in the 1980s, 1990s were typically, the ones that were politically active as lobbyists were almost all women.

NJ: Oh interesting.

RB: I don't think you would define yourself as a lobbyist, but you certainly spent a lot of time in the capital building and you played something of that role, don't you think.

NJ: I do think . . . I will say that prior to Climate and Energy I had a skewed view of lobbyists. Certainly, I would see myself as an activist and an advocate, and yes, we were talking with legislators all the time. We weren't wining and dining them, we didn't have the money to do that. And I think sometimes that's the distinction between lobbying and not. But I developed a very sincere respect for all of the people who work with legislators to help them to understand issues from every perspective and certainly that is what we ended up doing. I think one of the things that distinguished Climate and Energy as opposed to many of its peers at the time, all of whom we worked with and appreciated. But we felt strongly that we needed to work from the bottom up and the top down. We weren't taking one perspective. Sierra Club had a fantastic legal strategy, as I mentioned, they used the courts really well. They also lobbied. And they did activate citizens in the eastern part of the state, less so out west. Our feeling was that we needed to have really, rich, honest conversations about our energy future with as many people as would have them with us. We were working with the faith communities across the state. We were working with Chambers of Commerce across the state. We were talking with educators. We really sort of looked at, who's everyone who could and should be part of this conversation and can we tempt them into it. Remarkably we had wind energy forums in the wintertime in Kansas that were attended by 100 or more people in small towns. It was a remarkable moment. In that way I

feel like yes, we were lobbyists, and we were lobbyists in the broadest sense because we were just trying to have a conversation around, where do we want to go, people, and let's do this together.

RB: I would probably argue from what I saw obviously at a distance also that you had terrific credibility with those folks, even with the folks that didn't agree with you. I would probably say that the lesson there was relatively few or even one person can make a difference if they approach it in a credible fashion. A lot of times environmental groups didn't have a lot of credibility because they had this knee-jerk reaction, we don't like what you're doing. I was always impressed at your ability to work with people from all political stripes and sides.

NJ: Thank you.

RB: That I think was one of things that really… I appreciate what you're saying about bringing those groups in, but it also comes back to a point person, and you were clearly that point person.

NJ: Thank you. This is something I feel extremely strongly about, so I'm happy you brought that up. Because I used to always ask, as a student of history, I was interested in that age old question of whether the individual makes history or history makes the individual. Of course, the answer is both. One thing I learned from the Climate and Energy Project, it's not that I was so, so special. I was lucky enough that it became my job. I got to wake up every single day and figure out how to make these issues intelligible, welcoming, how to have better conversations. The other thing that was if not unique, unusual, is because I'm not a fan of categorizing myself. You're exactly right, I have tremendous respect for people who come from all different points of view and I'm unwilling to dismiss those points of view or to demonize

those people really under any circumstances. I want to have a conversation because I am always convinced, and we're sitting here in the Dole Institute where I was a Fellow working on a project on red and blue in the United States. That project convinced me, and Climate and Energy even more so, that as Americans we have so much more in common than that which separates us. Every time we can find opportunities to dig in and say what's the future we want together, we can find remarkable ways.

RB: Let's talk about what the Climate and Energy Project did, because that's kind of what we're doing here. That time period. There are a couple directions I want to go. What were the issues that you initially focused on and then what issues did you sort of wind up focusing on? I know that wasn't a completely clear question, but I'll get to it. What was it at the start? Was it climate change, or what?

NJ: Effectively yes. The question was, what could we in Kansas do to reduce emissions. As I mentioned, there were these huge coal plants that were proposed. They were going to massively increase our emissions.

RB: We're talking Holcomb.

NJ: Holcomb, yep. The question was, is this the right decision right now. The only way to have that conversation in a meaningful way… We were still… It's kind of easier now that we've built out phenomenal wind capacity in Kansas to see that as a *fait accompli*, but it was not then at all. We didn't have enough transmission. We had a lot of landowners that were very skeptical about – and that's not gone – skeptical about wind development. Same with solar. There were just endless questions

about how the grid was going to respond. I mentioned the six months of homework that I did. I think one of the reasons Climate and Energy Project was credible is that I made it my business to learn about electricity. When I thought about climate, to go back to your big question, how do we reduce emissions in Kansas. We're a rural state, so transportation is not something that we're going to touch. We've got too many people that have to move and goods and services that have to move. Our biggest emissions were in the electric sector. Then the question simply comes, how can you decarbonize the electric sector, but do it in a way that's affordable for consumers and keeps utilities whole. Because we want that. We want our utilities to be healthy. Electricity's a really nice thing. Then the question became, well what do we need--. What do we need to do that? Well, we need more cities and counties that are willing to have wind development, we need transmission that can move that electricity. We need regulations that allow for that, particularly within the Kansas power pool. We need things to change at the state level. There were all these things that we could address. But the other thing, that's on the generation side. But the other big challenge is we know that there's enormous potential to simply reduce use so that we don't need more electricity, and that we don't have to do that by living in a cave. There are all kinds of really wonderful, easy things that can be done. We also created an energy challenge that had hometown sports teams that were competing against one another, so they really wanted to win. The fire department got involved. The schools got involved. The Chamber got involved, the downtown businesses did, so that these towns were able to reduce their energy use in meaningful and durables ways, showing that this is

easy to do, and we effectively have all of this energy that we don't have to generate because we've already got it.

RB: Before we go back to Holcomb, what was the role of Climate and Energy Project then in terms of energy production outside of coal-fired power plants? Was it primarily focused on renewables?
NJ: Yes. It was really wind energy at that time. It was the thing that we knew was going to be immediately economically viable, and easily integrated into the grid because we're lucky that we have plenty of natural gas capacity so we could follow that load.

RB: You had things that you were in favor of, not just things you were opposed to. You were in favor of conservation, reduction of use, in favor of renewables, not necessarily opposed to natural gas, I assume, right?
NJ: Right.

RB: But then Holcomb comes along. Before we go to Holcomb again, so the governor's moratorium [on wind development] on the Flint Hills, was that prior to Climate and Energy Project?
NJ: That had already happened.

RB: That had already taken place, all right. Holcomb comes along. How do you insert yourself into this process?
NJ: A couple of ways, and again the biggest was to simply question, at the Kansas Corporation and elsewhere, do we need this power. I mean, that power, most of it was intended as you know to be changed in phase and go across to the other part of [the U.S.] electric grid into

Colorado, where that part of the grid has a huge need for electricity. The question for a Kansas utility is, what is the service to Kansas. Is this necessary generation? What we were arguing was, let's ask the question of whether new power plants need to be built at all. If they do, what kind. What makes the most economic sense, what makes the most environmental sense, what is most sustainable in terms of utility investments. We were really just saying, let's have a conversation about all of the power. We've got nuclear in Kansas, we've got coal, we've got natural gas, now we have a lot of wind, now solar. Generation is growing though, much more slowly. That was really what we were trying to say is, look, let's have a real examination.

RB: But it, at least, from the outside perspective morphs into Holcomb, or no?

NJ: Yes, although I will say Climate and Energy… Certainly, I testified any number of times, about the Holcomb plant. What I was saying in that testimony always is can we please ask the question of what is smartest here. We are bringing coal in from [outside] this state. We are burning it; does it make sense from an economic perspective. If we generate [from] wind in Kansas, then our generation is here, Kansans benefits from that, and the fuel cost is zero. There's still cost for that generation. For sure it's not free energy, but what makes more sense for our state for every reason. That is the question that we were asking over and over. So yeah, the net effect was, should we build these coal plants. But what we were trying to get at is, could we make more rational decisions about energy broadly, generally, so that we're taking care of our future in every way.

RB: Maybe partly what you're raising is the state of Kansas has had sort of an energy office off and on, but not really. It's never really had an energy plan. For whatever reason, the state has never chosen to take that big picture look that you're talking about. Were you trying to fill a vacuum to a certain extent there?

NJ: Yes, we absolutely were. And we were really asking the Corporation Commission to just have these questions every time anything was proposed. Does this make sense? Is this the right choice, for now and for later?

RB: Where does it fit in with everything else that we were doing?

NJ: Exactly

RB: Because it never felt like anybody was doing that.

NJ: And energy efficiency, which was available as a huge generator of electricity, electricity that could be made available. That wasn't a focus at all at that time and it is much more so now. I'm really proud of that.

RB: Then maybe, and again, I'm looking back from the perspective now of 15 years later. Did the Climate and Energy Project, did you all try to motivate opposition to Holcomb specifically?

NJ: We didn't. GPACE which was another organization that Scott [Allegrucci] who had worked with us, went on to found, so Great Plains Alliance for Clean Energy is what that stood for. They did a lot of very active lobbying against Holcomb. They had a lot. They did a lot of work in the legislature. We did not. Again, it was a really interesting and wonderful opportunity for all of those organizations that were working on these issues to say, OK, what role do we play. Everybody sort of had their puzzle piece. Our puzzle piece and the thing that I felt passionately about was… We did go, I met with Sam Brownback a number of times.

We conducted a poll at one point. We knew he was going to be running for governor. We really wanted him to co-sponsor a renewable electricity standard that would mean that more had to come from renewable sources. That seemed highly unlikely. We were lucky enough to work with one of the terrific Republican strategists, that actually Bill Lacy of the Dole Institute introduced me to, and we did a terrific poll and some focus groups working with Independents and Republicans, not Democrats, asking them what kind of an energy future they would support. Overwhelmingly Kansans said wind energy is a great idea. It was a really wonderful opportunity to show then-senator and future governor of Kansas that wind was not just a viable option, but a highly competitive one. As you know, he came to really champion that and to call Kansas the Saudi Arabia of wind. I believe Climate and Energy Project had a little piece in making that happen. Those kinds of moves, Senator Brownback sent a letter of support to the Southwest Power Pool supporting rural changes that would make a lot of wind energy possible. There were all kinds of things like that that I felt like again to your point we could be effectively for and help really move both policy and practice with utilities and in real life in towns forward in a positive direction, but we were not doing a lot of fighting against [Holcomb].

RB: I'll get to sort of the upshot or the final result in terms of Holcomb in a second, but before I do, how natural was that lobbying? You spent a lot of time in the Statehouse in my memory. I saw you over there a lot, and I don't go over there that much, but you were almost always there. That must not have been what you envisioned when you had this conversation with Wes Jackson, was it?

NJ: No, you couldn't be more right. It was not native to me; it was not comfortable to me on any level. One of the wonderful things that I learned, and I know you know this because of your time there, this is a bunch of humans who are there because they care on some level. I feel I benefited so much from that experience because I learned better why people hold the perspectives that they do, how to have really respectful conversations, but also how to raise questions that would get somebody thinking. Also, it got me much better at bringing the kind of evidence that would matter to that person and I'll give you an example. When we first started Climate and Energy Project, I was very naïve. We distributed to every Kansas legislator the Executive Summary of the IPPC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] report. And I thought, it's so conclusive.

RB: [*Laughter*]

NJ: It's so clear. All these scientists across the entire globe are saying this is a problem. It was very instructive because of course what happened next is people were incensed and they wanted to know who I was, they wanted to know who was funding us, they wanted to make sure that I was aware that the UN is actually a communist organization and that none of this can be trusted. That was a really important wake up call for me, that I was having the wrong conversation. What I learned is if I was sitting with a group of farmers, for example, and we were talking about energy and climate they would say things like, this climate change thing, it's not a real thing. I would say, hey, you and I can agree to disagree on that, but did you know that K-State's weather station has been measuring temperatures for a hundred years and their data's conclusive that the warming is notable and sustained. And then I could

send that data and that was data that made sense to them, that was data that they respected and that was a really important lesson.

RB: Yeah, you could cite K-State and you had a credibility you wouldn't have otherwise.

NJ: Yep.

RB: I don't mean to go too deeply into this, or maybe I do. In some respects when you went into that position, I always pictured Wes going and lobbying the Kansas legislature. It's almost incomprehensible because they already know what they think of Wes.

NJ: That's right.

RB: And Wes probably already knows what he thinks of them. To a certain extent you were a little bit of a less known quantity. You waltzed in without a lot of baggage. Is that part of the reason you were successful?

NJ: I think it was partly that and, you know, I'm a registered Republican – I know, it's crazy. I grew up a Democrat, I grew up in California in the Monterrey Bay area. I would love to believe that I'm a fair-minded person, and what I was told a lot during those years was that people had a hard time categorizing me. People were surprised that I would have a really factual conversation on energy that didn't just pretend that we could get rid of coal overnight, that didn't just pretend that fossil fuels were evil and could be relegated to the dust heap. I don't believe that. Fossil fuels provide a lot of mobility and a lot of warm homes, among many other things that we are not willing to give up. I think, you're right, I came with no background, no baggage, nobody knew who I was. I studied really hard so that I could have factual

conversations and I could push back when somebody was trying to take the argument further. I think I earned a lot of credibility by being willing to have a different kind of conversation, by knowing exactly how to back it up, by having a ton of data behind me all the time. I was not having an opinionated kind of conversation. I wasn't trying to convert anyone to my point of view. What I was trying to do is to provide all kinds of possibilities for coming together to do smart things together, whatever our opinions might be. I think that that was different.

RB: To go back to this issue of gender, do you think that a female – and again, I know you weren't technically a lobbyist, but you were…
NJ: I registered as a lobbyist.
RB: Did you? Ok, I guess I didn't know that.
NJ: Yeah.

RB: Are female lobbyists less threatening to the legislature than male lobbyists? Does that have anything to do with your success?
NJ: I don't know, it's a great question. Certainly, there are some very, very successful women working with every statehouse in the country. But there are a lot of men that succeed in that too.

RB: There are, on this particular issue, I almost said a surprising number [of women], I don't know if it's a surprising number. I guess it was to me a little bit when I thought about it, and I've tried to understand it, and I'm not sure I do completely.
NJ: I'm not sure I do either. I will say I think that women as mothers have a certain kind of credibility around environmental issues for exactly the reasons that I started with here, that this is about my love

for my children and wanting to have a better world for them, so I think maybe there's a little bit of that. There may be a slightly less threatening aspect. But I'm wondering if part of that isn't simply an artifact of when you think about the men who are lobbying the legislature, many, most have been working with particular industries – telecom, oil and gas, utilities, whatever it might be – for quite some time. They had very established practices. None of them would have had the leeway to include wind energy because it would have been a conflict on some level. I don't know how much of it is people who are newer to the game or whether there is a difference in a willingness to hear a message from someone who's maybe less combative, more collaborative. That's stereotypical, so I always…

RB: It is harder for me to picture some of those established lobbyists being able to come in and add this to their portfolio at that juncture. It almost had to come from somebody that did not have that established reputation either direction.
NJ: Exactly.

RB: So, the Holcomb fight plays itself out. The Governor, in effect, [Kansas Department of] Health and Environment basically won't approve the license. I realize that wasn't your primary focus, but that must have felt like a victory up to a point.
NJ: What it felt like to me at that time, so as you know, it wasn't actually denied, it was a long waiting game. It was, try again, try again, try again. Ultimately, it just timed out. What I felt like at that time was, this provides an opening for a society that's learning more and that is developing these alternative energy generation sources to prove that

viability. It wasn't so much that it felt like a victory, although for me the victory was simply in, oh yay, we have an open playing field now, and there's an opportunity for every energy source, including efficiency, to prove itself and to show what it can do, and that's happened. In retrospect, more than at the time, it's really thrilling because I think it opened up a landscape that simply didn't exist before.

RB: Yeah, because in effect as that argument or that process or that deliberation goes on and on and on, over time people begin to say, it's really a moot point. It doesn't make any sense economically; it doesn't make any sense in a lot of different ways. It's almost at the end of the process, it doesn't matter whether you approve it or not. They did eventually approve it. It doesn't really matter because it didn't get built anyway.

NJ: Exactly right. Part of the reason for that is because hundreds of megawatts of wind generation were built all over the state, but largely in the western part of the state. I think that's important.

RB: As you look back on that – I asked the same question of Jim Haines and he didn't particularly like the word – I used the word, do you feel vindicated. Is that how you feel about it?

NJ: Well sure, yes, on some level I do feel vindicated. I appeared at one point during this time on the [Mike] Huckabee show, the former [Arkansas] governor, they said, will you come on to be an advocate for cap and trade. I said, I don't love cap and trade as a policy, but sure, I'll come talk about it if you want me to. I'm not an advocate, but yes. They had me come. What they didn't tell me is that the chairman of American Electric Power was also going to be on the show, Steve Forbes

was going to be on the show, notoriously anti-renewable energy at that point in time. And they had five citizens who said they were going to lose their businesses because of cap and trade. We were all asked to wrap up and the guy that I was there to debate was a professor at the University of Arkansas who said that climate change was not a thing, was not real. So, I felt that I had kind of won that debate in our conversation and then all the other people came, and I was booed by the audience. We were asked to wrap up and say what our big takeaway was for the audience. And the guy who said that climate change wasn't real was a huge nuclear advocate. I just said at the end, he spoke and said things about we should build a ton of nuclear plants and I said, I mean, I believe that the American people have spoken, and certainly in Kansas they have, and what they've said conclusively is we would love to use more renewable energy because the fuel cost is zero, there's no storage problem after the fact, and we have local economic development as a result of it. It's a win, win, win, which caused them to boo me. So, I do feel like looking back at all of that now and what actually happened in landscape, that's where I feel vindicated. I believe when we have better information, we can make better choices. When we're doing it not because we're reactive emotionally against the people involved or whatever it might be, but rather really just looking at what makes sense for us that we actually come up with a good answer. And in Kansas we did. In that way I absolutely feel vindicated.

RB: Probably more of it, I bet more than you expected at the time, particularly wind generation. As you drive around the state today, wind farms [are] everywhere. You surely wouldn't have seen the extent of that development at that time.

NJ: I did. That was my dream and that was my conviction and what's been really cool about it is that in a state where the aquifer is uneven and depleting and there are a lot of farmers whose livelihoods are threatened, the possibility that actually energy development on their land can help them across kind of a divide is really cool. I think that every reason that I thought people would find to love all of these different options, they have. It makes me deeply happy and proud.

RB: I remember, you may not remember this, you and I were at some of those cap-and-trade meetings from Midwest Governors Association, I was looking at that as a policy that at one time looked like a possibility and then very quickly went away. So why did you leave the Climate and Energy Project? You left in 2013?

NJ: I left in 2010. Went back to KU Endowment. That's a great question too. The practical answer is the easy one, and then I'll tell you the truth. [*Laughter*]

RB: We always want the truth.

NJ: The practical answer is that in 2008 the economy exploded and my then husband was a carpenter and in 2009 there were six months where he had no work. We had kids, and we were looking at college in the not-too-distant future. I thought, OK, somebody around here's got to make sure that we're solid. So practically, that was the decision. I needed to make sure that my livelihood was stable for the family. The real answer, if I'm being honest with myself and with you, is that that was hard. The years that I led the Climate and Energy Project and raised all the money for it. I was lucky to have a spectacular team, just a handful of people, three or four, we were five at our height, most of the time we were four. They were amazing superhuman people. Running a

small non-profit like that, where you're responsible for raising the money, being the battery for your team, being an energy, being an idea machine, but having your ideas be executable, help write, all of that. That's hard. I had small children, and I was not very available to them those years. But much more, the reason was, there was very little funding for the Climate and Energy Project that came from Kansas. Most of the funding came from national sources, largely foundations and then a few individuals over time. The foundations, the national foundations who were so good to me, so good to us at Climate and Energy were very, very focused in those years on an international treaty. They were looking at Rio, they were looking at Sweden; Sweden when I left. And they were putting an awful lot of eggs in that basket, in the basket of an international treaty. I, and everyone, knew that that couldn't work, and one of the reasons it couldn't work is it would never have been ratified, even had it been signed because of places like where I live. Nobody had done any of the hard work to generate support for the kinds of policies that would be necessary to reduce emissions. This was a longstanding deep abiding sadness of mine, that I could not get mostly, if we're honest, coastal funders, New York, and California funders, to long term care about Kansas. They cared about Kansas when Holcomb was happening, but as soon as that threat had passed, then they decided to put their eggs back into the international treaty basket rather than continue to fund… Now I will say, Climate and Energy is still alive, it is still thriving under the extraordinary leadership of Dorothy Barnett, and she has gone back and gotten sustainable funding from these same people. But at that moment, our very existence was always kind of tenuous, precarious¸ because I could not count on long term investment in what I thought was incredible, groundbreaking work, but

it just didn't matter as much because it wasn't international policy. I understood their preoccupation, but from a practical perspective, I wish there had been more foresight still to recognize that if you've got a gigantic portion of the country that is opposed to this kind of policy, then you should do some work, like we did to make it clear that this is not a threat, in fact, this is a good thing.

RB: In some respects, you sort of put your finger on the issue that there's no shortage of lobbyists in the Kansas Legislature. Most of them are over there because they're getting paid by corporations. What is the corporation that pays the Climate and Energy Project to go over and fight that fight? The environment doesn't have a voice economically in that way.

NJ: Yep, and I will say, as a student of policy, of history, of social movements, the non-profit sector tends to be underpaid, unstable. People are knocking themselves out because they care so deeply, but their families are struggling because of it and whatnot. You find yourself frustrated. As a student of history, the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency, created by Reorganization Plan No. 3 in 1970] is signed into law by none other than Richard Nixon, intended to be the voice of the environment, to preserve our natural resources, yes for the good of humans, and I don't see a problem with that. But then has no way to do its job because the lobbyists for industry are more powerful than the bureaucrats who see policy and do action. And in fact, I will say, one of my big inspirations at the beginning of Climate and Energy Project was a foundation program officer who said to me that his greatest fear, at that time he thought cap and trade was going to happen and he said that his greatest fear is that cap and trade or some substitute for it would be

put into place but that the work would not have been done on the ground to implement that policy in a meaningful way. He used the EPA as the obvious example. I think you're right. Tthis is where, when you think about the work that the non-public sector does, it's always for those who don't have champions. Whether that's dogs and cats at the Humane Society or the homeless or battered people, refugees. The non-profit world works to support those who don't have a powerful voice. It's such incredibly important work and it's always precarious and we're so lucky for the people that are brave enough and self-sacrificing enough to stand in those places and stick. I didn't.

RB: The words are right there, non-profit, and that's behind the eight ball right out of the chute, to mix metaphors.
NJ: Yeah.

RB: What about the role of state government here? You talk about EPA, obviously we have the equivalence on the state level. We've talked about, we've kind of beat the legislature to death in this process and analyzed your role with them. What about the state agencies? I don't mean to put you on the spot, or maybe I do. There's a Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and there's the Kansas Corporation Commission. There is no energy office *per se*, some of that is subsumed under KCC. Do you view the state agencies the same way? Are they similarly hamstrung? What was your experience like there?
NJ: Governor Sebelius originally, when questioned about Holcomb the plants out there, said we might as well build them because if we don't Oklahoma will. That turned out not to be the case of course, but initially

this wasn't her topic. Secretary Bremby at Kansas Department of Health and Environment came to believe that it would be a dereliction of duty to approve coal plants at a moment when climate change was an existential threat to humanity. He makes that very still extraordinarily brave, unique decision, which made many, many, many things possible. I found terrific partners in KDHE. I think that in terms of civil servants across the board we have incredible people, really smart, dedicated people working in all of those agencies who are given marching orders by whatever administration is in charge at that moment. That's a tricky system because you've got wonderful people who are ready to do their job, but they want to keep their job and they're not going to do something that someone's telling them right now is not their job. That's what very frequently happens, and we see it at the federal level, we see it at the state level, we even see it in municipal governments. In climate terms municipal governments are maybe the most important because they have all kinds of purchasing power about decision making about green spaces and public transportation and all those other things. I love democracy. I don't want to trade it. I don't see a better system. But the fact that we go through, for the most part, four-year blocks at the state and the federal level, in terms of these giant policy directions, that is troublesome because the civil servants are just getting ready to implement the one policy when the boss changes and so does the priority. It makes it really tough to have forward movement. I'm not sure if this was the question that you were asking, but I do feel like we have amazing people who want to do great work, it's just that that always needs to be in service of something and when that something changes constantly, which it does…

RB: One of the lessons though, just in the few interviews we've done so far in these environment and energy conversations, is the incredible impact of federal policy on what goes on. When we were doing water conversations, a lot of that is just driven at the state level. Some at the national level, but a lot of it is state. When it came to energy decisions over and over again it feels like you're almost a punching bag for what gets decided nationally and nobody really foresees all the implications of those decisions. You and I also had a conversation about climate change with Dave Kendall as part of that documentary [*Hot Times in the Heartland*]. One of the lessons I took away from that series of interviews is individual action ain't going to get it done. That collective action is, there's only so much individuals can do and at some point, it's a collective issue. I'm not quite sure where I'm going with this question, but you put those two things together it's got to be collective issue and a lot of times it's federally driven, isn't that a prescription for trouble?

NJ: It is, as we see. What's interesting is that many, many other countries have signed onto international treaties around climate. Now are they keeping their word, not entirely, but at least there's a word to keep. The place that individual action really, really matters, the more that we become activated as consumers, as citizens, the more that we see an opportunity to actually affect something as existential and gigantic as climate change, early on one of the biggest communication problems was it seemed so huge and to be such an unstoppable train that even if you cared why do anything because it was out of the station. I think that making it clear what individual action can contribute is incredibly important because it gives that sense of -- this is actually a problem that can be addressed. We have the power. Because then you

begin to have a conversation around what the policy can be. Unfortunately, we started with policy around a thing that nobody believed in and had arguments about the policy instead of actually beginning with the part where which is what Climate and Energy Project was trying to do. Hey, we can do this people, we can do this without pain. One thing I love to just say with regard to all of this, COVID happens, another at the time existential crisis. We didn't know what it was going to be. We didn't know what was going to happen. We decided to make as did everyone almost – not everyone – massive federal investments in I would suggest if we were willing to make a concomitant commitment to climate, to clean energy, to energy efficiency, and to long-term carbon reductions and being smart and creative in all of the ways that that can happen, that we could get there. I think one of the things that's been a bill of goods that's been sold to all of us is it's too big, it's too expensive, it's too impossible. No, it's not. We just spent a ton of money on something because it was important. When things are important, we do. We do it on wars. That's where I feel like the individual piece is getting to a place where we can have a great conversation about a future so that, that's the top and bottom piece, so that when there are reasonable solutions available, we can accept them as a society and not be scared that they will doom us to economic failure.

RB: To go back to my question, in some respects your town versus town competition was an attempt at collective action on an individual basis.

NJ: A hundred percent.

RB: You were trying to get those towns where they live, which is competition with the next town over, which they love to do on the football field.

NJ: Right. What we had, people recording every time that they changed a light bulb, and it had a little ticker tape, so it was gamified, and people could see their actions right there in front of them. But then there was also the school district that was working and parents that were a part of that. We had the fire departments that were actually, if a town had a couple fire departments, the fire departments competed with one another. In a couple of towns, we had downtown restaurants who for Valentine's Day all had candlelight only, the lights were off, and they were just reminding everybody turn off your lights. It was just lovely, organic, funny stuff. We had superintendents that dressed as Captain Power something or other. It was creative, it was fun, it engaged people's creative and competitive spirits and then they saw a real result that they created individually and together. As soon as we know that we can do those things, all of this gets a lot easier.

RB: I always tell people; Kansans will do almost anything you ask them to and almost nothing that you tell them to. In some respects, that's what you were doing was asking, OK, if you do this, let's see what happens.

NJ: Absolutely. Let's experiment.

RB: You always strike me as a pretty optimistic person. So here we are in 2023, coming off the hottest few months that we've had with a series of fires and floods and weather events. How optimistic are you today?

NJ: My optimism has waned quite considerably when it comes to climate change. I am the eternal optimist in the sense that I still deeply believe that conversations can happen that would get us out of this. I think that one of the heartbreaking elements of our global situation right now is that we are faced with, literally, an existential crisis. If climate change is left unchecked and worsens, which it is, so are our emissions that are contributing to it, then at some point this planet for most intents and purposes unlivable for humans. At that same time, at that very moment that we need to be having searching conversations and unified effort, we find ourselves more divided than we've ever been and struggling to even have conversations with neighbors we used to like. And that has put a huge damper on my optimism. I will say the question that I used to ask myself, does a person make history or does history make the person, and it's of course both. I will tell you that I am hoping so much for a person and or people who pop up and help us to put down our differences and to pick up the many tools that we have in our tool belt to battle not just climate change but so many other things that are happening internationally that are devastating.

RB: It does feel like our political system is fraying at exactly a time we need it. One of the lessons I think we took away from these water conversations was the impact of one person, particularly the governor in terms of priority of water issues. When it was a priority for the governor the water issue is elevated, even though they might care if it wasn't, if they didn't make it a priority then it went down the other side of the arc in terms of its importance to the state. I know we didn't come here to have a conversation about the importance of people in history versus collective events, but that does seem to be one of the

takeaway lessons is the importance of individual people in those roles and their willingness to take them on.

NJ: Enormous. Governor, Senator, we all should be thinking really hard when we vote. When I did this fellowship with the Dole Institute and I went and talked with strategists in Washington DC, they asked me what my premise was of the study, and I said I believed that Americans are connected by vastly more than what divides us. They basically all said to me, duh, that's my job is to find the division points and then grow them because I want you to vote for my person. I think that we have a tendency to allow those very smart people to distract us and to focus on things about candidates that probably don't matter as much and that one of the most important things – you're right – if you care about the future of the planet and the people on it, which I do, if water matters, if climate matters because water matters, soil, all of the things that sustain us as people here, then the governor matters, so does the mayor, so does your city council member, so does your county commissioner, actually all of those roles are individuals who make a huge difference. Senators and presidents. Presidents really matter when it comes to all of this and nobody's running on a climate change ticket. But it's important that we think about that as some significant part of who we vote for.

RB: That may be an appropriate place to end, particularly when we're in a place like this. I come at it from a scientific community, being politically engaged is not always looked upon as the most, it's not like people signed up for it when they went into science. Yet, I remember once being asked a question about what do we do about water issues. I thought long and hard and eventually the real answer is, well, worry

about who you're voting for and how engaged you are in the political process because if it's going to be a collective response, that's kind of where it starts. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that I should have covered in this process or anything you want to add to what we've talked about?

NJ: I don't think so. I think I'll maybe amplify or echo something that I said earlier, probably several times, which is I have come to believe that any of us who want to make important changes, social changes, are going to do so much better if we find the way to engage the people who disagree with us with respect and we find a way to have conversations with those people that are real where we're not trying to convince them, we're asking smart questions and we're getting a back and forth going that gives us someplace to go. I think oftentimes when we think of ourselves as advocates, we think that our role as an advocate is to just keep saying the thing that we say, and it's not persuasive. If what we actually want to do is to move conversations and culture, then I think it's really critical do so from a place of openness and respect and intention and to just keep showing up, to be persistent in those uncomfortable conversations but to be generous in them. We're not trying to bludgeon somebody into believing what we do, we're trying to figure out what do you believe and where do we find common ground here, because that's always, it's hard, but it's so much more productive.

RB: I remember one of the Douglas County [KS] commissioners one time saying the best question is always, help me understand where you're coming from here, because you can't really have that conversation until you attempt to understand where the other person

is coming from and too often that's the stick that gets missed when you knee-jerk respond to somebody you disagree with.

NJ: Absolutely.

RB: I appreciate your time and I appreciate the conversation. It's a fascinating time and I always appreciate the level of thought that you have put into what I think was a real interesting time in Kansas history. It doesn't seem like it was that long ago that you ought to call it history, but I guess it was, so. Thank you very much.

NJ: Thank you.

