

Women of the Senate Oral History Project

NANCY KASSEBAUM BAKER
United States Senator from Kansas, 1978–1997

Oral History Interview
August 17, 2017

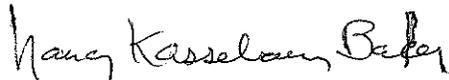
Senate Historical Office
Washington, D.C.

**AGREEMENT AND RELEASE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
U.S. SENATE HISTORICAL OFFICE**

I, **Nancy Kassebaum Baker**, agree to participate in the Women of the Senate Oral History Project and understand that the physical audio recordings and transcripts of my interviews are and will remain the property of the United States Senate.

In entering into this agreement, I understand that all or portions of my oral history may be made available to the public in an online feature on the Senate website, may be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any other medium (consisting of all forms of print or electronic media, including the Internet or other emerging, future technologies that may be developed) that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate. I also approve the deposit of the recordings and transcripts at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and any other institution that the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In consideration for my inclusion in this project, I understand I am entitled to receive a copy of the transcripts of my interviews. While I hereby relinquish any intellectual property rights or interests I may hold in the content of my interviews, I acknowledge that the Senate has the discretion to decide whether or not to make all or any part of my oral history available to the public.



The Honorable Nancy Kassebaum Baker

Dated: 5/30/2019

I, Betty K. Koed, accept the interview of the Honorable Nancy Kassebaum Baker for inclusion into the Oral History Project of the U.S. Senate Historical Office.


Betty K. Koed, U.S. Senate Historian

Dated: 6/7/2019

Introduction

Elected to the Senate in 1978, Nancy Kassebaum was the only woman senator when she took office. By the time she left office in 1997, the number of women in the Senate had grown to nine. Known for her moderate but independent stand on issues, Kassebaum worked tirelessly on policies such as reducing the budget deficit, international arms control, ending apartheid in South Africa, and reforming liability laws related to general aviation. In her last term, she chaired the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources—only the second woman to chair a Senate standing committee. Kassebaum retired in 1997, but she remains an influential role model for women seeking elective office.

About the Interviewer: Betty K. Koed is the U.S. Senate Historian and Director of the Senate Historical Office. Koed earned her Ph.D. in political and public history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, before joining the Historical Office in 1998. In 2016 Koed was awarded UCSB's Distinguished Alumni Award. Appointed Senate Historian in 2015, Koed supervises all historical and archival projects, provides talks and presentations to senators, staff, and the public on wide-ranging topics of Senate history, and conducts oral history interviews with former senators and staff. She oversees more than 10,000 pages of historical material on the Senate website, is senior editor of the Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, and provides research and reference assistance to the Senate community, the public, and the media. She is a former officer of the Society for History in the Federal Government and has served on the Editorial Board of *The Public Historian*.

Women of the Senate Oral History Project
Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker
Kansas (1978–1997)

August 17, 2017

BETTY K. KOED: Hello from Washington, D.C.!¹

SENATOR NANCY KASSEBAUM BAKER: (laughs) I'm really kind of glad I am where I am!

KOED: I think I can understand that. (laughs) Well, I really appreciate your willingness to work with us on this project—this Women of the Senate Oral History Project. We launched it last year. We hope to have it completed by 2020, in time for the centennial of the women's suffrage amendment. And we have now interviewed about a half a dozen former senators, and we'll be interviewing current senators as well as female staff. So, it's been a wonderful, informative, and enlightening experience for us.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I can imagine, and I really think it's nice to have it. It's a great idea, and it's a wonderful initiative undertaken by you and the United States Senate History Office. I remember being asked who was the first woman senator and I said Hattie Caraway, but I think I'm wrong. I believe there was someone before her, briefly.

KOED: Correct. Technically, the first female senator was Rebecca Felton of Georgia, who came to the Senate in 1922 for a very short appointed term. And then Hattie Caraway became the first woman elected to the Senate. So, you're correct in a way.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And she was called "Silent Hattie."

KOED: She was called "Silent Hattie." I've done a lot of work on Hattie Caraway's career through the years. I found out that she was pretty silent in the Chamber, but she wasn't at all silent in committees.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: (laughs) That's true.

KOED: Which seems to be a pattern among early women senators, and women members of the House as well. It's an interesting story.

¹ This interview was conducted via remote video connection between the Senate Recording Studio in Washington, D.C., and Kansas State University in Manhattan, KS.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, but it's great to have that all out there for people to know.

KOED: Yes, it's a much neglected story, and so we're trying to rectify that to the best of our ability.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Now, you know, Sheila Frahm was for a time in the Senate and is here in Kansas.

KOED: Yes. We hope to interview her as well. She's on our list.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Okay, good.

KOED: Have you had any contact with her at all in recent years?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, I haven't. And I intend to. She's out in—they live out in western Kansas, but she's active with things here. Not politically so much, I don't think, but sort of like myself active with other things that she's done. She is active on the board of the Kansas Historical Society and so forth.

KOED: Ah, interesting. Okay, that's good to know. Well, I hope to be in contact with her as well.

Let me pause for just a minute on a technical thing. [Addressing the technical team] I'm getting a lot of interference sound from there. Is there anything we can do?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don't know. I don't hear anything.

KOED: Do you hear it, too?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No.

KOED: Okay. We'll see if we can work on that a little bit. We're getting a bit of a hissing sound behind your voice on that side, so they're going to see if they can get that fixed for us. But in the meantime, we'll just charge ahead.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: All right. I don't hear it, so I'm not sure.

KOED: Well, good. I'm glad. We're probably getting a very nice recording on your side.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Unless—maybe when I move—if I move, it shifts something around. Do you hear it if I move some?

KOED: No, I think it's something in the connection, so we'll let them work on that. They'll get it cleared up for us.

Well, let me ask you, first of all, when you were a child, before you ever considered going into a political career, did you have any specific female role models that guided you?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I suppose my mother, simply because she was the one, growing up of course, that was most involved with activities at school and what we were doing. I never ever thought of myself being actively involved with politics. It had never been anything I planned, even clear up to my running for the Senate. But I grew up, as I've said before, talking at the dinner table. We always—dinner was at six and if you weren't there at six, you just missed out on part of dinner, and we talked world affairs and politics and so forth. It was mostly my dad that did the talking, but we all were there listening. And Mother was always very supportive of my doing things.

Growing up where I did—we lived out in the country—actually I started a pet shop with a neighbor across the street—Little Tots Pet Shop. And it was during the war—World War II—and gas rationing was on. Mother said, “Well, I'm not driving you in town to do anything.” And so at this pet shop, we raised canaries and advertised in the paper and we had a nice sort of thing going. And my brother collected snakes and then we sold them in the pet shop. So it was kind of a non-traditional growing up.

And I think that was a great balance, because it was, as I say, during World War II. Polio was something that my parents [worried about], because friends had lost a son to polio. My parents believed you shouldn't swim in chlorinated water, so it was all right to go over and swim in the river, and that's what I did.

KOED: (laughs) It had a lot cleaner water.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That was my growing up time. And history—I loved reading history, but I can't point to anyone significantly that would have stood out at that time as far as a woman that I thought of. I've often thought back and wondered if I would have ever been prepared to tie myself to the gates at the White House and been that courageous for that struggle.

KOED: Yes, that's the bold step. Interesting. Of course, you came from a political family, with your father.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: So political discussion was, as you say, a constant in the household.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, and I enjoyed it a lot, yes.

KOED: So you were a very well-informed political person from an early age, even if you weren't active in politics itself.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I can remember when we lived outside the city limits, my little neighbor friend Betty and I built a dandelion rope and we strung it across the road and we'd yell, "Willkie or Roosevelt?" (laughs) That's how we decided we could do a poll. Of course, no car ever really stopped and they were bemused at two little girls holding this dandelion rope. I loved tacking up posters—in those days, you could [do that] on telephone poles—and whatever campaign was around that was interesting. So I grew up being very interested in politics.

KOED: That's sort of like early campaign experience. (laughs)

KASSEBAUM BAKER: True.

KOED: Before you came to the Senate—When you came to the Senate, you came in the wake of Margaret Chase Smith. I'm wondering if you ever knew Smith or if you had any interaction with her.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, I did, but after, because she left—let's see, I came in '78, and I think—

KOED: She left in '73.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, she had just left. And I know that when I was elected, at some point I made a remark that I was not elected as just a woman senator, I am elected as a senator, and women have just as much interest in foreign policy as they do in economics. And she got word to me, "Good for you! That's exactly the way I felt, too." I did visit her, though, in Maine with Olympia Snowe. And we had a wonderful visit in her home. She had a nice museum there. A little museum. And it was wonderful visiting with her. I admired her a great deal.

KOED: Yes, she remained a role model for many years long after her career.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's right.

KOED: She left a legacy.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: She did. For one, standing up to Joe McCarthy—Senator McCarthy.

KOED: Right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And she was determined that— I think it was her courage to stand up, and she was one of the first Republicans of note to really publicly speak out against McCarthy. So she was a role model in so many ways. Her husband had preceded her in the House, and so she was there for a while before she ran for the Senate, right? She fulfilled his term in the House and then moved to the Senate.

KOED: That's correct. She did. She served another four terms in the House, and then she came to the Senate and served four terms in the Senate. So, she had a long career.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yeah, and then didn't Bill Cohen defeat her?

KOED: Well, first William Hathaway defeated her and then Cohen came a little bit later.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, yeah.

KOED: I think he was a one-term connection in between the two.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I think so, because I think he came in maybe when I did.

KOED: He did. He came in the same class you were in.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: In my class.

KOED: There was just a single term in between them there. Well, I think that at the time you decided to run for the Senate in 1978, there was just one woman senator at the time, and that was Muriel Humphrey, who was serving out a short appointed term.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: So, in essence, there were no women in the Senate. Once Margaret Chase Smith left, it was sort of an empty place for a while. Tell me about your decision to run for the Senate. Why did you decide that in 1978?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, it seems a bit of a leap, actually. I had been involved in community things, and then [was] a 4-H leader. My four children were in 4-H. And as I said, I came to a fork in the road where my life changed and my husband and I were going to be separated and moving towards a divorce. I wouldn't have given up my children's growing up years—the football games and the basketball games and wrestling matches—at that small rural high school. They were graduating from high school. The youngest finished his senior year, because he wanted to complete the wrestling team in high school. And many of my friends had said, “This is a good time for a woman to run.” I had gone to work a couple of years before, just as sort of a chance to get away and think about things. I was in Senator [James] Pearson's office, from Kansas, for a year as a caseworker, which helps you really see the inside of how an office works and what you really need to do. But I came home, and I was glad to be coming home—that was 1976—because I had no intention of going back to Washington.

It was an open seat. It was the Pearson seat. A lot of people thought that Senator Pearson would run again and he decided not to, so it was an open seat. And it ended up there were seven of us in the primary, I believe, so a large primary. I said, “You don't go into this just for the fun of it. (laughs) You think sort of strategically.” It was a great advantage to me to have that many in the primary.

KOED: I would think so.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes. I've often looked back, because I think even the Republican National Committee came out in January, and I hadn't even announced yet, but they knew I was thinking about it. I said, “I'm not going to announce until the first of May.” And they said, “Well, but you need to have things set up right now and you need to be raising money.” And I said, “Well, you know, I have a lot of good friends who are willing to spend a lot of time. And I've always believed that it's best to have people right there who know you and know Kansas who will be helping me.” Well, I think they were a little surprised and felt I was terribly naïve, but that's the way it was. I had friends who donated [their time] every day—one as treasurer and one who was really, in many ways, the manager—close women friends in Wichita and around the state. It was an enormous advantage. And then my oldest children took turns driving me, and it was very much a hands-on campaign.

KOED: And a completely volunteer campaign.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes.

KOED: So, you didn't have a professional campaign manager or that type of stuff.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No. Once I won the primary—well, it was not a professional—but he had been on Pearson’s staff and I had known him and he came back and then took over doing the press work, but he was Kansan and had been on Pearson’s staff. I think I said they were cowards. They didn’t volunteer for the primary, because they didn’t think I would win. (laughs) That’s what my treasurer said, too, and he was a volunteer and lived in Wichita. I knew him and his wife. And he said, “I didn’t think you’d win. I probably would have never signed on.”

KOED: Well it does seem like daunting odds. You were facing seven or eight males plus another female candidate.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That’s true.

KOED: Jan Myers.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Jan Myers, the only woman in the Kansas Senate.

KOED: Oh, right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, and she had announced first, early. And so then I backed off and I said, “Oh, I don’t know whether I’m going to do this. She’s already announced.” And weeks and weeks went by and then I thought, well, that’s the wrong attitude to take.

KOED: You were concerned about opposing another woman?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes.

KOED: Interesting.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I think what really made a difference was so many of the candidates in the primary were really kind of grouped around more the eastern part of the state. And while Wichita is not what you call necessarily the middle, it was more oriented west than so many of the others. And that does make some difference. And I think, as there was a grouping that way, that’s what hurt a little bit. Wayne Angel, for instance, Norm Garr and some others, and probably even Jan, they were all—they tended to be, you know—from one area.

KOED: Okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: You do look at those things.

KOED: Sure, sure, interesting. Well, as you were running for both the primary campaign and then the general election campaign, did gender become an issue in those campaigns for you at all?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I know that abortion was always an issue, but when I announced I was going to run for the Senate, my dad called from Topeka. He said, “What do you think you’ll be asked in the press conference when you announce?” And I said, “Well, I know the first question will be, ‘What’s my position on abortion?’” I said what it was then and I never changed. I said, “That is an issue that should be addressed by the family and the church.”

KOED: And that continued to be an issue throughout your time in the Senate, and still, frankly, today.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, I think it’s become more heated and really brings into it today the intensity of a dislike, and I had people at that time who supported me although they disagreed with me on that topic.

KOED: Right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And they said, “Well, at least you always said exactly where you stood and you didn’t try to say something just to be political one way or the other. Expansion of ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was a big issue. And that’s one reason I didn’t get support from the women’s groups—national—because I said, “There’s a deadline that’s been set by the legislation that has been approved for that. If we’re going to go back and use that as an example of always expanding if we haven’t gotten what we wanted within that time limit, I think that’s a problem. I support the Equal Rights Amendment, but I don’t support expansion.” And I remember I got a telegram from Alan Alda after I won. (laughs) He said, “You’ve come in like a lamb. I hope you go out like a lion.” (laughs)

KOED: Well, that’s sort of a good observation.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That’s right. So I always signed on, then it was reintroduced, and I signed on as a cosponsor. But we’ve achieved it anyway now, you know.

KOED: Did you get any questions during the campaign about, first of all, running as a woman and what a woman could bring to the Senate? And secondly, running as the daughter of a very well-known politician?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, quite often I got, “You’re just running on your dad’s coattails.” And sure, the name obviously was a help more than a hindrance. And finally I said, “Well, what better coattails to run on?” (laughs)

KOED: You might as well take advantage of it! (laughs)

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I’m a believer in the importance of knowing your own self and what issues you believe are important, and feel honesty in explaining why you feel that way. It was at the time of the Tractorcade—the Tractorcade because the Kansas farmers—

KOED: Yes, that’s right, when all the tractors converged on Capitol Hill.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, they did. I met with them. That was their second year that they’d come to Washington and they were furious with me because I would not support 100 percent parity for wheat.

KOED: Oh, okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And I was fortunate that Bob Dole felt the same way, but in the general election, Bill Roy—Dr. Bill Roy—did support it. So it was an issue, because a lot of Kansas farmers were really hurt. It was very hard to meet with them. When they came to Washington, I went down to the Mall also and met with the Kansas group, and they came up to the office, it was a tough time. But I said, “You know, if we pass a 100 percent parity, what next? And what do you say about the implement dealer on Main Street who’s going under?” Because, obviously, it affects everything when our agriculture community is suffering. So, it isn’t the answer. And I think one way we encouraged some solutions was better assistance to small banks and their loan ability.

KOED: Right, but that was not necessarily a popular stand to take for Kansas.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, it wasn’t. But, you know, again—and also there was the American Agriculture Movement that was very supportive of the Tractorcade. A lot of animosity through the trilateral, they call it the “trilateral group”—Posse Comitatus and everything and the Rockefellers were ruining the country. When David Rockefeller once came by and introduced himself at the office—probably I’d been there already a year or two—I said, “You know, I feel like I know you because there are quite a few Kansans that speak about you.” (laughs)

KOED: On a regular basis. (laughs)

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's right. So, it was a tough time. A lot of the farmers, I'm sure, that felt really strongly about some of these issues did wonder what this little lady was doing. I'm sure there was some of that.

KOED: I'm sure that was a very—the Tractorcade, for instance—was a very male-dominated event.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But you know, women were just as hurt as men. And I knew some whose farms were struggling out west. No, it was a hard time. I think the fact that I had been involved with 4-H, that sort of was oriented in that direction, that didn't help much. And the issue that later became even bigger than anything was the NRA [National Rifle Association]. And you may be getting to that.

KOED: Right, it's a difficult time.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I probably would not be able to be elected today in Kansas because of that.

KOED: Oh, interesting. Okay, well we'll move in that direction. Let me stay with the campaign for a minute to ask about press coverage during your 1978 campaign. Did you feel you had good press coverage, fair press coverage? Was it gender-oriented in any way?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don't think it was gender-oriented. With the number that we had in the primary, it was really hard to have a debate. But we did do a fair amount of all-together questions. And then there were several debates with Bill Roy, who actually I admired quite a bit. He'd been in the House and he was a lawyer as well as a doctor and very effective. I was always wishing I had taken debate, but I hadn't, so this was all new to me, too. To a certain extent, maybe just the genuineness came through, because I didn't try to out-strategize myself, because I didn't know other than just answering what I was asked.

KOED: Yeah, okay. I'm going to pause just a minute to say to my staff here that I'm still getting a lot of interference on my line. Do we have any way to kind of clear that up? And I've lost all sound now.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I hear you.

KOED: That's the main thing I need to know. Okay, let's continue on then. Okay, we've got it set. All right. So what do you think was the deciding factor in your winning that 1978 election? Or do you think there was a deciding factor?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, to a certain extent. It was at Labor Day time, and we were just getting ready to start really getting involved. The primary was over, and now it was the general election. And Bill Roy—Dr. Roy—made public his tax returns and requested I do so, too. And I said, “Mine is a joint return with my husband and myself, and we’re separated. And I don’t feel it’s fair to him for me to reveal that tax return.” Because actually it would have been harder on him than me. And I refused. And my polls just went (whistle sound). I had a lot of Republicans who were saying, “You’ve got to do it. You’ve got to do it,” clear up to about two weeks before the election. And I said, “You know, why now? I’ve made the case of why I didn’t, and I don’t intend to do it. It would be very hypocritical, for one thing. And it’s just about two weeks away.” I had the governor and everybody say, “You’ve got to do it.” And I said, “No.” And furthermore, Bill Roy went way too early. I always said to him, “Why’d you go so early? If you had gone three weeks before the end of the campaign, it would have been a different story.”

KOED: It wouldn’t have given you time to bounce back.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, and everybody was tired of hearing you say it.

KOED: Do you think there was anything in particular that helped you to regain your status after that, in October?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don’t know. You know, how do you know? One thing I’ve always encouraged other candidates because I—I think radio is good. I think a lot of people listen to the radio that might not always be turning on TV. And we played a lot of really popular—by popular, I mean sort of patriotic-type music that was good— and then just say “Vote for Nancy.” I think that’s one good way to have people thinking happy—have positive music like patriotic songs.

KOED: It helps you make a connection. In the end, that’s what really matters. If you can make a personal connection with people.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, and I always used just Nancy. “Vote Nancy.”

KOED: Oh, is that right? Did you run as Nancy Landon Kassebaum? Or did you run as Nancy Kassebaum.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, Nancy Landon Kassebaum. I had a lot of people wanting me to drop Kassebaum and just use Landon, and I said no. That was at the beginning, actually, of the primary. I said, “No, that’s my name and I’ll stick with it.”

KOED: Did the fact that you had separated from your husband and were heading towards divorce, did that play a role in your decision to run?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, probably. I don't know that I would have if that hadn't been the case. I look back, but as I say, I came to a crossroads that would be changing.

KOED: Yeah, interesting. Well, after your election, thanks to an old Senate custom, you gained a few days of seniority, because you took office early. You took the oath of office on December 23. Tell me about that.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And that was smart. I didn't realize— That was because Senator Pearson announced he was stepping down.

KOED: Ah, so it was Pearson's idea?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don't know whose idea it was. No one ever wants to own up to it, and certainly Howard Baker doesn't. (laughs)

KOED: He eventually got rid of it.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's right. It was Howard Baker who got rid of it. The same thing happened with Dave Durenberger, because Muriel Humphrey stepped down to give him some—and I said it was because I didn't have any real status that gave me any standing. So by golly, here was this little whippersnapper, the first of the class coming in. It gave me seniority in picking Senate committees.

KOED: Even a few days makes a difference.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, it does.

KOED: And it's interesting that there were other members of your class—Durenberger was there, but you also had people like John Warner and Thad Cochran. There were several others that were in your same class that did the same thing. They came after you, but they—it's like you set a trend there. And then the last few days in December are filled with people taking office early that year.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's true. And see, Dave Durenberger didn't have a whole lot more points for having run for office for anything before either.

KOED: That's true. That's right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: So, you know, but I have to chuckle, because it was Howard Baker, when he became majority leader after the '80 election, that was one of the first things he did was to change that rule. (laughs)

KOED: Maybe it was your class that pushed him over the edge. There were so many that took advantage of it.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It was.

KOED: And you came in with a large and distinguished class. I mean, Carl Levin, John Warner, Bill Bradley. This was an important class.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, sure. But see, I think it was a Republican rule. I'm not sure, because each side has its own designation.

KOED: Well, tell me about that day, when you took the oath of office. Didn't you take the oath of office in Kansas first?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I did. And, you know, that was truly amazing. The secretary of the Senate came out. When I look back on it—and Howard came and Bob Dole and there were others there. It was in the Topeka capitol building, in the legislature there, in the senate, but having the secretary of the Senate come out—Mr. [Stan] Kimmitt.

KOED: Did he administer the oath of office—the secretary?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, right there. And largely because of my dad, which was very thoughtful.

KOED: Oh, okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Because he would not have been able to go to Washington.

KOED: Oh, okay. I wondered why you decided to do it in Kansas.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, no, I wouldn't have decided that. And I redid it in Washington.

KOED: Of course, yeah.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But that was the decision, and I don't know who made that decision. It was nothing I had anything [to do with]. I was really very surprised, and naïve enough, to wonder why we were doing it.

KOED: Yeah, well it must have been very special, though, to be able to do it there in the presence of your parents and your family?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It was. You see, Dad died in 1987 and he was 100 when he died.

KOED: Oh, wow. That's amazing. That's wonderful. And your mother?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: She lived to be 97. But she didn't die until '96.

KOED: Okay. That's wonderful. That's good genes in that family.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's right. Yes, there were. And Dad was right involved until he—I think he wanted to reach 100 and then he was ready to go. President and Mrs. Reagan stopped by on their way back from California in September. They were on their way back. It was Dad's birthday. His 100th birthday.

KOED: How special. That's very nice.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, it was.

KOED: When you came in with this large and distinguished class in late '78 and early '79—I think it was a class of about 17 members—it was a pretty big class, but you were the only woman in the class.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: And you were joining a Senate that had no female members at that time. Were you at all concerned that you would be looked at as window dressing—as the token woman in the Senate?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, occasionally, but I said, "If I worried about whether no one was paying attention, or weren't bothering to pay any attention to me, I would be losing valuable time." So, I just didn't think about it one way or the other. I did make that statement, I think, when I was asked to. What convention would that have been—the '84 convention? Was that in Houston? Because they were going to have all the Republican women speak on the first

night, I think, and I said, “Look, I’ve been asked to be the marshal of the grand parade in Abilene, Kansas, and that’s where I’m going to be, rather than a bauble on the tree.” (laughs)

KOED: What was your welcome like when you got to the Senate?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, fortunately, I think everybody kind of was surprised to see some little person trotting around. I didn’t ever really desire to be particularly saying anything or making some big statement about something. It really was very natural, I think. And maybe it was because there were so many of us that were new. Rudy Boschwitz was new. See, that’s two new senators from Minnesota—Durenberger and Boschwitz. I do remember— I was on the Budget Committee, and I remember being called to the White House to meet with President Reagan. And of course, he was new in ’80. (laughs) And it was a contentious budget issue. I’ve always felt that President Reagan was always so easy to be with and around, and I appreciated very much his sense of humor that somehow always came at the right time. But he got so mad at some of us, and I don’t think I was one of them speaking at that moment, but he flipped off his glasses and he said, “It won’t be that way. It’ll be this way!” (laughs) And we all paid attention then! I think it was addressed mostly to those of us who were freshmen.

KOED: Oh, my gosh.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But it was a Budget Committee issue. I’ve always remembered that. I thought, “Well, when the going gets tough, he lets you know.”

KOED: Yeah, you’ve got to keep going.

Wait, hold on one moment. [Addressing technician] I’m definitely losing quality in my audio control. I’m starting to lose some words here and there.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: (laughs) That’s just as well.

KOED: Is she there?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I can hear.

KOED: Senator, would you mind if we take just a couple minutes break and see if we can fix our connection a little bit, because we’re starting to get some sound quality issues.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Okay, sure.

KOED: Thank you so much. I’ll be back with you in just a minute.

[Interruption]

KOED: We're a go. Okay. Can you hear me now, Senator?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Just fine, thank you.

KOED: Excellent, thank you for waiting for us.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That's fine.

KOED: Tell me a little bit about what it's like to be a freshman senator and a freshman female senator coming into this institution. Is it intimidating? Is it encouraging? Is it fun? What's it like to be in that experience?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It wasn't intimidating and actually probably I had a lot of advantages, because everybody was rather curious about hearing and seeing a woman senator at that point. I was invited to give the speeches or talks, which I didn't do a lot of, but then I was appreciative of an awareness that actually I think was an advantage.

KOED: That's interesting. I never thought about that before. You probably got even more attention from the press, for example, than the average freshman senator.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I didn't want it to detract from what any of the others were thinking and, you know, if I was asked to do this or that and someone else was wondering why they were left out—of the men. So, it proved to be more of an advantage than would have been in any way a disadvantage. And I think the next one to come along would have been Barbara Mikulski. Oh, Paula Hawkins.

KOED: Paula Hawkins came in for a single term in 1981.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: And then Barbara Mikulski came in in 1987.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, not until '87?

KOED: Yeah, I think that's right. Let me check my notes to be sure I have that right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, I think she was a little earlier. I thought she would have been about '82—Barbara Mikulski—'83. Maybe not.

KOED: I'll have to go back and look at my notes. I think it was mid-'80's, about '85 or '87.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Okay, could be.

KOED: She came in after Paula Hawkins had been in office, so she was kind of in the midst of that career.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: So, within a few years, you had other women senators there as well. You weren't the only female senator.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: Tell me a little bit about Barbara Mikulski and working with Barbara Mikulski. Did you do any legislative work together?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, we did, particularly a little bit later when she went on what is now called the HELP [Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions] Committee. It was the old Labor Committee. She was on that committee. It would have been later. That was the one committee we were on together. And we worked on several issues, particularly healthcare, and then she and I worked very hard in my third term on trying to improve some of the things we felt were needed at FDA [Food and Drug Administration]. We could never quite get it past full committee. It wasn't until after I left, and she sent me a note with the legislation they finally passed, and said, "Thanks to what your input had been, we finally got it off and going and it passed." So, I enjoyed working with Barbara a lot.

KOED: I'm getting ahead of my story a little bit, but when she comes into office and then when you get into the early '90s, you gain more female senators. How did you go about building camaraderie amongst the female senators?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I had never—You know, there was a group that met with the women in the House.

KOED: Oh, okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I never really—I met maybe once or twice. Barbara was big on that and I just never did as much as I probably could have or should have. We used to have dinner, maybe once a month, with what we called some of the smaller, shorter people like Donna Shalala. I don't think there was any other senator that joined us at that point, but with Barbara that became big. She was very active in keeping the women's group together.

KOED: And continued to be throughout her career.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, even more so.

KOED: Interesting. Well, back to your freshman term. There's an old adage that freshman senators should be seen and not heard and should be quiet for a while. Did you give a formal maiden speech? And if you did, do you remember it?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I did and I didn't realize that I should have notified the then majority leader, who was Howard Baker, because they always like to have at least the majority leader of my party on the floor at that point. And it was on limiting to two terms.

KOED: Oh, was it?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And of course, I ran for a third term. (laughs)

KOED: I know you favored term limits in the beginning. So that was the topic of your maiden speech?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It was. And I came to realize that wasn't the answer and I still believe that. But no one was on the floor, I think, except Howard Baker. None of the others. There wasn't anybody really listening. (laughs)

KOED: It wasn't a big event when family came to sit in the gallery and all that type of stuff?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No.

KOED: Okay. Tell me about your relationship with the Senate leadership at the time. I assume you had a pretty good relationship with Howard Baker. What about Robert Byrd?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, I really didn't, because he only met with committee chairmen.

KOED: Oh, no kidding?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: That was his group. And then we always had the Tuesday Republican lunch, which I think is still [going].

KOED: Right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And then it broke into Wednesday being those of us who thought of ourselves as a little more moderate, so it was essentially morphed into the same group pretty soon because no one wanted to miss out on what was going on. Everybody met on Tuesday for sure, and that was the leadership of the Republicans. I think the Democrats did the same. But, actually, Howard retired from the Senate in 1984, so I never really saw him at all. I never really knew him very well at all. I knew him and I knew Joy, his wife, briefly, but I never really knew them that well.

KOED: And then did that relationship with the leader change then when Dole came into the office—became leader in '85?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: You mean with me?

KOED: Yeah.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, I think he still carried the same meeting with committee chairmen.

KOED: Okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And I didn't become committee chairman until—I was chairman the last two years I was in the Senate, at the Labor Committee.

KOED: Right. So most of the interaction between leadership and members was only with the chairmen of the committees.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, when we had really controversial legislation, the leader usually called everybody in, or particularly the people in the committee that were involved with what was on the floor. That was true with Baker and it was certainly true with Bob Dole. Bob was really intent on having everybody there and he liked to shape the legislation. I think Howard was more hands off and let those who were fighting the issue fight it out, either within conference or certainly more on the floor. I think Bob tried to get it worked out in conference and then went to the floor. I didn't always agree with Howard Baker. I didn't always agree with

Bob Dole. With Bob, I greatly admired Bob and still do, but I know at times I was a thorn in his side. “Why in the world am I having to contend with my junior senator here?” (laughs) But there were a few issues. It was pretty much the way we always met. We always met everybody on Tuesday. But Bob, more than Howard, as majority leader, really liked to have all Republicans meet on a contentious issue, particularly the committee that was involved, and I think that was probably a good thing.

KOED: Were there any times when you were the lone Republican holdout on something that he really wanted passed?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, you probably know of one.

KOED: I’m trying to think if I’ve come across any.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don’t know.

KOED: You opposed the Balanced Budget Amendment, I know, but you weren’t the only opposition to that.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No, it was with President Bush—George H. W. Bush—and the nomination of John Tower for secretary of Defense.

KOED: Oh, right, which was a very contentious process.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right. I was the only Republican to vote no, but there were two votes that were no, so I was not the deciding no vote.

KOED: All right, so you didn’t have to be put in that spot.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But, you know, I had a long talk with John Tower. He had left the Senate and gone to work with some of the big industries that were involved with military work and Defense Department work and I said, “John, I’ve gone up to the room,” where you could go and sign in and look at papers that weren’t available unless you were authorized to be in the room, and I said, “There are times that I just feel you’ve been too close since you left the Senate, with work that’s going to be hard for you to separate yourself.” He said, “You know, Nancy, it’s like the fox guarding the chicken coop.” (laughs) And I said, “Well, you’ll know where the chickens are, that’s for sure.” (laughs)

KOED: That sort of sums it up.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I said, “I just have a problem.” And a lot of women were opposed because of stories of drinking and so forth and that wasn’t it at all. It was really that connection. I told President Bush the same thing. But that’s the one vote. I don’t really think there would have been any when it was just a one vote difference.

KOED: Tell me about your first major legislative effort. What was the first legislative issue you really dove into?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I know the ones that I consider most successful really didn’t happen until after 1994, so as someone said, “You should have stayed another term. You maybe would have done even better.” (laughs) I think it was maybe not legislation so much as I was pretty involved with the Foreign Relations Committee. I cared a lot about issues dealing with arms control issues and so forth. I was asked to lead a U.S. group to the first election in El Salvador. It was when we were still supporting the opposition in El Salvador and the president, President [José Napoleón] Duarte—parliament was running and I was asked to go and be an observer in that election. I was the only senator. Bob Livingston was from the House and [there was] Father [Theodore] Hesburgh. So there were about six of us, maybe seven, but no one else from the Congress. It was very interesting and a lot of press were covering it. You could hear gunfire still in the streets and so forth. I went to a couple of polling places. I went out in the country, I remember, and seeing a dairy farm where there was no refrigeration. It was an extremely interesting trip for me. I tried hard to learn some Spanish, and I didn’t do very well. That’s when there was a lot of press coverage because it was a big issue—El Salvador and Nicaragua both—so I was involved in both those issues at that time. And then I chaired the African subcommittee. One thing I did do there, eventually, was override President Reagan’s veto of sanction legislation against South Africa.

KOED: Right. This was during the debate on Apartheid.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes. And we did override that veto.

KOED: You know, it’s interesting as you’re speaking, it occurs to me that if so much of your focus is put into the Foreign Relations Committee, as yours was, it’s less legislative-driven than a lot of other committees. You know, if you’re on the Agriculture Committee or something, you’re dealing with bills all the time, but the Foreign Relations Committee deals with issues in different ways.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And it had always been a great interest of mine, even before I went to the Senate. I was always interested in foreign policy. But Bob Dole was on the Agriculture Committee, and so you’re not on the same committees. But another one that I was involved with was Commerce Committee. Ultimately, legislation I worked on for years became

finalized in 1994 and that was the General Aviation Revitalization Act, which was very important, not only for Beech and Cessna, but Piper, which I think was based in Florida at that time. They were just struggling because of the high cost of insurance, which they really were unfairly being targeted on. And of course, the trial lawyers were very opposed. I worked on it for I don't know how many years, trying back and forth. [Ernest Frederick] Fritz Hollings on the Democrat side was very opposed. Bob Packwood on my side. And Dan Glickman, a Democrat in the House. We were both sponsors, he in the House and me in the Senate, of that legislation. And it wasn't until 1994—he had been defeated in the House by that time and gone to be secretary of Agriculture—Dan Glickman had. It was toward the end of my time.

KOED: Yes, that was a major accomplishment for Kansas as well, because Kansas has such a strong interest in aviation issues.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, and some railroad issues, too, which I was involved with, so it was a committee I was pleased to be on. It was an important committee. And again, later, I worked on a lot of healthcare issues and education.

KOED: I was going to mention that. You worked a lot with Ted Kennedy on healthcare issues, correct?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Right.

KOED: Tell me a little bit about that. What was that effort like?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, the first real effort on it was when Hillary Clinton's bill came early on in President [William Jefferson] Clinton's presidency. I forget what the year was.

KOED: Right, '93.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Was it '93? Ted was chairman of the committee, now the HELP Committee, it's called.

KOED: And you were ranking member?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And I was ranking member. We spent almost two weeks in hearings on that legislation. I learned more about healthcare and legislation in those two weeks than anything. And we held a number of hearings and went extensively through it. Met with Hillary Clinton. I tried to explain some of the things that troubled me. It was just one-on-one with her and her staff and mine—Susan Hatton, who, when I got on that committee, became my staff member there. It never got out of committee.

KOED: It seems to me it set the foundation for a lot of the debate over healthcare that followed.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, it did. And eventually, of course, I become chairman—so that’s the only reason it’s named Kassebaum-Kennedy. Ted, when he cared about something—and he did care about health legislation—really worked hard. We had a lot of opposition, even to the legislation we put together that was called HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act]. We worked hard to get that approved. I mean, there was a lot of opposition—we had opposition in the House. Once we got legislation put together in the Senate, then we tried to see what the House was doing and where they were. A lot of time and effort. Jobs were difficult at that period of time. It wasn’t passed until 1995, I think—late in 1995. Senator Dole had trouble with it. A lot of Republicans didn’t like it. Ted and I had said we won’t allow any amendments, because everybody wanted to add amendments to it. And if we did that, the central theme was if you had insurance and you lost your job or were changing jobs, you couldn’t be denied because of a prior health condition.

KOED: Right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I suppose one of the most interesting sticking points on it was medical savings accounts. That was interesting, because it was something Senator Dole cared a lot about, and so did a lot of Republicans in the House. Well, we argued to keep it off the bill. We took the bill to the floor and Senator Dole had an amendment on medical savings accounts. He was getting ready, of course, to retire and run for president. I just could not vote against him on that. And I told Ted, “We’ve got to find a way to work this out.” And we did. We got some language that would allow—watered down a teeny bit—but medical savings accounts. The House was upset about it, but we all agreed and we finally got it finished and it passed and was signed into law. It was never really, however, followed through. As I understand it, medical savings accounts never saw the light of day, until later when legislation was passed.

KOED: When you came into the Senate and throughout your Senate career, was there ever a committee assignment you really wanted that you couldn’t get?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: At first, it was Foreign Relations Committee.

KOED: Yeah, it took a while to get onto Foreign Relations.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But that’s where seniority helped.

KOED: Yes, those few days.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And we were limited not being in the majority until after the 1980 election.

KOED: Right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Once that was opened, I was sort of right up there. I think Senator [Charles] Mathias was ahead of me and on committee, so that was the main one. And Ag was never open. Certainly a Kansas senator would take Agriculture.

KOED: Right. Was there ever any suggestion that, as a female senator, you should be on certain committees? Was there any stereotyping in the kinds of committees female senators would serve on?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Not that I know of.

KOED: Okay. And through your years, who do you think were your closest or most important allies in the Senate—whether it be in legislative issues or just in the working day business of the Senate.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, I would hesitate to say. You know, Olympia Snowe came to the Senate as I was leaving, but I was a good friend of Olympia's and converse still with her every now and then when something comes along—wondering what she thought about what was going on. I'm a great admirer of Dianne Feinstein and got to know her when working on gun control legislation. And if ever there was a controversial legislation that I worked on, that was it, and particularly supporting banning semiautomatic assault weapons. Hateful, hateful phone calls. My receptionists were in tears. So I took to answering the phone and one fellow said, "I want to tell that aarrrrrrr." I said, "Well, you're talking to her."

KOED: (laughs) I bet that surprised him.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: "Your dad would be rolling over in his grave if he knew what you were doing." I said, "Well, you know, neither you nor I know for sure what he thought about it."

KOED: (laughs) Only he knows that for sure. Do you see that as a missed opportunity?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: We passed it.

KOED: You passed it, yes, but then it got so watered down through the years.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, it came up for reauthorization and the majority leader at that time was Bill Frist from Tennessee, and he said, “The public does not support this,” and led the fight against it. And so it was defeated.

KOED: Okay, so that’s what I’m remembering.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But I wasn’t there at that time. I was married to Howard by that time. I’ll have to tell you (laughs), we were all gathered as a family and I had made reservations for a couple of cabins in Estes Park where I planned summer vacation with grandchildren and family. And Howard said, “Well, I’ve never met your family and I would like to.” This is when I just had dated him for a couple of months or so. It was all kind of a whirlwind. I said, “Well, come on out.” It was the time of the Democratic convention and we were getting ready to watch President Clinton speak. It was ’94—no, ’96.

KOED: Nineteen ninety-six.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, ’96, of course. So, we were arguing at the table and somebody said, “Well, Howard, what do you think?”—about whatever it was we were arguing about—and he said, “You know, my rule is we never talk politics or religion at the dinner table.” There was sort of stunned silence and I said, “What do you talk about?” (laughs)

KOED: What is there to talk about?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And that ended that conversation. That always carried through, even after I married Howard. He didn’t like to get into a real discussion in politics at the table.

KOED: That’s interesting, because I always have this impression that most politicians talk politics all the time.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, not with me. (laughs)

KOED: Not with you. Not at the dinner table. That’s interesting.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Particularly if we disagreed. Now if we agreed, he might be more— (laughs)

KOED: During the latter years of your Senate career, we had a few, I guess you could call them uncomfortable periods in the Senate—uncomfortable events. One was the Tower nomination that you already mentioned. Another was the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings

in 1991 and then the Bob Packwood situation in 1995. What was your reaction to those two events and how did you deal with those?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Clarence Thomas—I said I would not take a position until they completed the hearings. A lot of women were opposed even then, at that point, but in listening to the hearings—and of course, a good friend of Senator [John] Danforth who was a strong supporter and had been on his staff—I saw nothing in the hearings that, while I might not always agree, would cause me to say I wouldn't support. So, I announced my support for him after he was passed out of committee. I got a call, I think it was on Friday evening, from Paul Simon, senator from Illinois. He said, "Nancy, I think you ought to know something that's going to break tomorrow. Anita Hill." And then he talked about it and he said, "I think you're going to want to consider what you are doing on that. And we're going to demand hearings." I said, "Paul, I can't be a supporter of that. I made that decision after I said I would listen to the hearings. Why didn't this come up sooner? Surely someone knew about it before right now." And I stuck with that position. I was inundated by phone calls.

KOED: Were you?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yeah, from women opposed. But it had tremendous appeal. I remember going to a football game out here at Kansas State on a Saturday. It must have been Saturday hearings they were having, at that point. I could not believe people were tailgating, listening or watching that hearing.

KOED: No kidding?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And I walked into the stadium and was chatting with people, and they'd say, "Well, how are you going to vote?" I was truly surprised.

KOED: And did you find a real gender split there between those who supported him and those who supported her?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I couldn't tell. I mean, at that point, it was genuine curiosity. I mean, it was like a Watergate hearing. I'm amazed.

KOED: At the time, I knew a lot of women who were on both sides of the fence on that issue.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I'm sure, yes. I think that's true. Of course, I heard from a lot of friends I knew at home here that were really very opposed to him at that point. And I said,

“You know, I said I was voting for him on what I heard through the original hearing. This has come up late, and I just think it’s not fair.”

KOED: And did you think, at the time, that the event would have an impact on the Senate in any way?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don’t know. It’s hard for me to judge. It didn’t seem to at the time. I think, as I look back, it might be a vote that I’ve been somewhat disappointed in, but I still feel it was handled wrong. Someone must have known about this before the termination of that first hearing, when he was approved.

KOED: There have been a number of women who went into politics after that who cite the hearings as the motivation for getting involved in politics. Carol Moseley Braun was one among those, for instance, who did that.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, and I enjoyed working with Carol. That’s true. I would say another issue that came up—of course, abortion has always been controversial—was gun control. I think a lot of women, even more recently after Connecticut and the tragedy there, women really began to—I went to a walk on the Mall of mothers against, not drunk driving at that time, but it was against guns, because I had close friends whose son had been shot on the street in San Diego by a gang that had to shoot someone to prove a point. Because of them, I went. And I was just really quite moved by—and I knew Sarah Brady and Jim Brady, too. So, I had been a big supporter at that time of that issue.

KOED: Let’s talk about that other event we mentioned, and that’s the Packwood case that came in ’95. Now you had worked with Bob Packwood.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I had.

KOED: It must have been a very difficult thing to go through.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It was. It was. And looking back, I feel it was maybe unfair to judge him as we did. You know, it had gone on so long and he, I felt, was losing more and more credibility. He had me come—well, and Senator Durenberger resigned for reasons earlier, too, that were difficult. I guess, at that point, I just had to feel he was not going to be able to work in the Senate, and maybe that was a poor judgement to make. But that’s when I said—I felt—not just because of the accusations of women and so forth, but you lose a certain ability to really engage yourself, I think, in ways that people don’t look at you one way or the other. And maybe they looked at me the other way because I did call on Packwood to leave, but that’s probably a

vote that I would really question myself on now, although I would have thought he would have found that something he should have done at that time, himself.

KOED: Yeah, it was certainly an event that left the Senate somewhat shaken, I think, because it put people on sides.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, it did. But so did the Tower vote.

KOED: So did the Tower vote. A very difficult vote.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: But let me just say, the Senate at that time was not as divided rock solid Democrat or rock solid Republican. There were those votes and there were even those that maybe would have been more rock solid, but we knew that it was important to be able to keep that communication open.

KOED: There were more moderate factions, at the time.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, and while Senator [Fritz] Hollings was really opposed to my legislation—general aviation legislation and the liability insurance—and Hollings could be very vociferous, and yet I regarded him and the Hollings as very good friends. And [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan was another one who took me to task on the UN [United Nations], when I had an amendment that I wanted to take a certain amount of money—I forget now, maybe \$300 million out of the UN budget—until they could present a more detailed budget of their operations and just specific operations that were influenced by that money. I said, “I’m a supporter of the United Nations, but I think it could be even stronger if there was better management and accountability with the budget.” Well, Moynihan, one night, got up on the floor and, “You’re gonna kill New York! You’re gonna kill New York!” And he just went on and on, and I thought, oh my. (laughs)

KOED: There was no moderate stance for him.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Nobody was going to help me or him. But I was a very, very great admirer of Senator Moynihan and he was a good friend, but I tell you, he let me have it that night. (laughs) I don’t even remember what we finally did. I don’t think we ever got it passed.

KOED: I don’t think it did pass in the end. No, I don’t believe so. So why did you decide to retire in 1996?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Eighteen years. I was anxious to come home. I announced in November of '95, so people would have plenty of time to think about it—that I was not going to run for a fourth term. I wanted to come back home. I had a farm, where I am right now.

KOED: Yes, that's understandable.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: So, as I say, again crossroads that I had not anticipated nor had I ever thought of marrying again, and there I did. So split [between] Tennessee and Kansas and we were four years in Japan, when Howard was ambassador.

KOED: That's right, during the ambassadorial days.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I remember him coming for the first time at the farm, and he said, "I just can't get used to waking up and seeing a cow out the window." And I said, "Well, I'm glad to see a cow out the window. We're a cow/calf operation." (laughs)

KOED: They didn't have as many cows in Tennessee?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Not out the window.

KOED: Not out the window. Well, in the few minutes we have left today, I'd like to sort of draw back from your career, specifically, to talk a little bit about women in politics generally, which is sort of the large issue of what our project is about. And let me ask, first of all, do you think that women, as members of Congress, legislate differently than men? Is there something that makes their service different?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don't really think so. I don't know what you might be getting from others. It so often depends on who you're working with, you know? Ted Kennedy and I happened to both care about health care. And it's interesting that I lost a son to the same type of brain tumor he had.

KOED: Oh, you did?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, glioblastoma. The same as John McCain and Beau Biden.

KOED: That's right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And I had talked to Ted about it at the time, after I was home, of course. My son was 48 and he was in movie work. So, I think it depends on who you're working with. If you're working with somebody on the opposite side and it's a congenial

working— Now, as I used to joke with him, Kansans think I'm working with the Wicked Witch of the East, you know. How could you work with Ted Kennedy? Well, I could in that issue, and it wasn't that we agreed on many other things necessarily, but he was a good legislator when he cared about it. I think that has something to do with it. I'm a strong believer in women being involved. And I'll tell you what, I believe it starts at home. I think it starts in one's community— maybe it's because it did for me—and knowing your community and knowing how you have issues coming up in your community that affect your community and/or your state. Not that you need to be in office, but you need to know what they are and be there engaged in seeing that something be changed if you didn't agree. And I feel that's still true. I'm still engaged in working some with healthcare issues and education.

KOED: You know, over the last 20 years since you left office, we've seen a steady growth of women in the Senate. We're now up to 21 women in the Senate, and it was usually two while you were in office. After we got past that 1992 so-called "year of the woman," when we gained four more—and so you went from two to seven, which was a big jump—we've had a steady climb of about one or two with each election.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And probably more, even. I would say more, because I think more women are involved in realizing— You know, we care about children's health, our own and others. We care about those issues and there is a role for us to be involved. I said the thing I was glad about after there were even two of us, three of us, it's no longer a big deal. Women are there and they're going to be there. I was not a lawyer. I sometimes think that would have been an advantage, but I also think a lot of it is really understanding your state and your people. Look how long Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein served in California. And a lot of it is your staff. I've always said, "I'm only as good as my staff." I was very fortunate in having wonderful staff all the 18 years I was there.

KOED: And you had female staff members. Susan Hatton, for one, on the committee staff.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, she was head of my committee staff.

KOED: People often ask me the question, "What difference does it make today that we have 21 female senators instead of two or three?" If I asked you that question, how would you answer that question?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I guess it's just that I think women are more visible. Women are more willing to be engaged. I think I myself was engaged, like in the head of the Women's United Way—in those days, there were the men's and then there were the women's united campaign fund. And there was the Women's Symphony Committee and head of the Institute of

Logopedics, which was helping Cerebral Palsy children. There were things like that, or 4-H leader, that you did without thinking in the more political arena. So, now you see it more in your state legislatures. You see it more in your county and city commissions. And I think, then, it seems a natural progression. I see a granddaughter I have, who's a junior in college, I hate to say at the other school down the river, University of Kansas, but she's a politician already. I said, "Now, Nelly, you don't need to sound off on everything!" (laughs) But they let me know when they think I should sound off more. (laughs) Again, that comes from discussions around the table. I think more women, when they are there in a family that's discussing politics and are discussing the issues pro and con, it's a tendency to get involved. And I just think that happens now because more women are more engaged in their state and communities, too. Now I don't know if that's an answer or not. Money's become such an issue, and that's too bad.

KOED: Yes, and money was for a very long time a barrier to women in office, but they're moving beyond that barrier, I think.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes, they are.

KOED: But money, generally, is the issue now, not so much in its gender aspects.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: You know, I worked a long time on campaign finance reform. Fritz Mondale and I were co-chairmen of a group that President Clinton asked us to do.

KOED: Oh, that's right.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I don't support federal financing, and I told them I didn't at the time. Fritz did. But I said, "You know, if every month the newspapers printed exactly who contributed and how much to a person's campaign, if the public cares, then it's right there." If the public doesn't care, you're going to develop so many regulations and paperwork that it doesn't matter. You can get around it, so I think there's a way.

KOED: Yeah, at least put it out there.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Put it out there.

KOED: There's a story that I hear told from time to time around the Capitol. There are a lot of myths being told in the Capitol. I don't know if this story is true or not, but it concerns you, so I want to ask it to see if it's true.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Oh, dear. Okay.

KOED: As you well know, not until the 1990s did women get a restroom near the Senate Chamber of their own, so there is a story that, back in the '80's, one day you walked into the senators-only restroom and surprised the male senators who were in there.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No.

KOED: As a vote of protest. Is that true or false?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: False. False.

KOED: That's false. (laughs) Good, I can correct that.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Yes. I always used, if I had to, the public restroom over in the Capitol.

KOED: Did you?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: It never was a big issue with me—it became a big issue with Barbara [Mikulski]—or I went back to the office. But what I didn't do for a long time— There is the Senate Dining Room, as you know, and then there's the Senators' Dining Room right across the hall, where no one, not even staff, is allowed. I didn't go in for a long time.

KOED: Why is that?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I just didn't want to. I wasn't quite sure. There's where my own timidity maybe took hold. And Bob Dole was the one who said, "Come on, we're going in." So that's when maybe people thought, well, look who walked in. But it wasn't the restroom, I can assure you that's a myth. (laughs)

KOED: Maybe that's the origin of the story and it just evolved through the years. (laughs)

KASSEBAUM BAKER: We'll clear that one up.

KOED: I have one more question, but before I ask my question, let me ask you, do you have any particular story or anecdotes of your Senate service, whether it deals with women senators or the Senate as a whole, that you would like to share with us?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I've shared several. I valued my time there. I came home quite a bit. I never socialized a lot in Washington, because I came home. As long as my parents

were living, I would speak around the state in a couple of places and then always spend the night in Topeka and help take care of my folks—Dad, and then when Mother lived 10 more years, but she was at home always. She had Alzheimer's. So, I didn't do a lot of socializing. I had really good friends I liked a lot that weren't in the Senate. Yes, Katherine Graham was one. I admired her a great deal.

KOED: Okay. Did you, yeah. Well, here's my final question. Did you, or do you now, see yourself as a role model for women in politics?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: No.

KOED: No?

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I'm happy if people think that. I don't ever want to discourage anyone and would encourage. I believe it's important to do. And I go back to being able to study history, study politics....we all can learn. I can learn a lot. As I talk to my granddaughters or grandson, none of them, except the one I mentioned, all have worked when they graduated in an NGO group or something that has taken them different places and done different work. And I think that's very valuable. You may not be head of the board, but you're engaged in doing something that helps somebody.

KOED: Well, I can tell you, as I interview people for this project and others, your name is one that often comes up as a role model, so you leave that mark even if you're not willing to accept it.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, I'm honored. I'm honored. Thank you, Betty, and I think it's a great project that you're doing.

KOED: Thank you, and I appreciate so much your willingness to give us your time today. Thank you.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Well, probably too much. You probably have heard more stories than you even wanted to hear. (laughs)

KOED: No, I could go on for another couple of hours, easily. But I'll let you go for today.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Thank you.

KOED: And I will follow up with you as we continue with the project and get this processed and keep you informed.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I would be really remiss if I didn't mention the third project that was passed almost as everybody walked out the door in '96.

KOED: Okay.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: The creation of the Tall Grass Prairie National Preserve.

KOED: Oh, okay, yes.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: I worked on it a long time. And that issue was kind of like the Hatfields and the McCoys, and I would be really remiss if I didn't say how much it means to us here in Kansas to have that, particularly through here. It's a beautiful part of our state.

KOED: Yes, it certainly is. And that was sort of a crowning achievement for you towards the end of your career, so I'm glad you did mention that.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: And Dan Glickman was, again, someone who worked hard on that at that time too. Okay. Thank you, Betty.

KOED: Thank you very much. I'll be in touch. Thank you.

KASSEBAUM BAKER: Okay, bye.

KOED: Bye.

[End of Interview]

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