

NRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW:

EUGENE GLOCK BY JIM BARR,  
August 6, 2013

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1 PROCEEDINGS, August 6, 2013:

2 MR. BARR: This is Jim Barr. It's August 6<sup>th</sup> of  
3 2013. I'm interviewing Eugene Glock here in York.

4 And, Gene, if you got a -- kind of, give a summary  
5 of your background and --

6 MR. GLOCK: Okay. I'm Eugene Glock and, believe  
7 it or not, I was born here in York, Nebraska. I've lived  
8 all my life at Rising City, but my grandparents lived in  
9 York when I was born. And so, my mother came down here and  
10 stayed with her folks for the last few days or weeks before  
11 I was born, and I was born here in York Hospital. But I've  
12 lived all my life on the farm near Rising City. I lived at  
13 one place for 20 years until I went into the service. And  
14 then, when I came back, I moved to a place two miles from  
15 it. So, I'm a farmer, tried and true, I think. And I've  
16 been more fortunate than most people to have a lot of great  
17 experiences. I went to Ag College, called East Campus now.  
18 And from there, I farmed a year and then was drafted into  
19 the Army. When I got out of the Army, I got involved with a  
20 lot of things. I've been on a lot of boards, school boards,  
21 elevator board, the -- you name it. I've been involved.  
22 And I became the first president of the Nebraska Soybean  
23 Association. And from there, I got on the American Soybean  
24 Association Board. And after that, I got acquainted with  
25 Bob Kerrey. And when he became governor, I started my real

1 involvement with water. I served on the Butler County Soil  
2 and Water Conservation District Board for, I think, 12  
3 years. Ten or 12 years. And I served as the chairman of  
4 that district for the last few years that it existed  
5 because, while I was on the board, is when the NRDs came  
6 into fruition. After serving on that county board, I worked  
7 at the Butler County FSA Office or, at that time, ASCS  
8 Office. Before serving on the BCSWCD, I worked at the Butler  
9 County Soil Conservation Office. I not only laid terraces  
10 out, but helped with land-leveling. We did a lot of  
11 surveying and plotting and so forth. But I've been involved  
12 with water all my life. That's the life-blood of our state.  
13 And so, when Bob Kerrey was governor, I served on his --  
14 what he called the Water Congress -- Water Independence  
15 Congress in 1981 and '82. And then, after he got elected to  
16 the U.S. Senate, he asked me to serve on his staff as his  
17 agricultural representative. And I did that for 12 years  
18 and then returned to the farm. And I live on the farm now.  
19 I still help my son irrigate, and I help my son with all the  
20 farming. But, naturally, at my age, it's limited. Some of  
21 the things I don't do any more. There's an advantage to  
22 being retired. You get to do what you want to do. And so,  
23 I do what I want to do.

24 MR. BARR: In the early years of the soil and  
25 water conservation districts, what kind of involvement did

1       you have, again, in terms of them?

2               MR. GLOCK: Well, I started out in 1955. I got  
3 out of the service, and I needed a winter job. And so, I  
4 worked for the, at that time, ASCS Office in the soil bank  
5 years, '55, '56. And I got involved with the Soil  
6 Conservation Service office, because we were putting in  
7 terraces even at that time in the drought. My parents  
8 insisted that we had to have all the land terraced, and we  
9 gradually were putting terraces in.

10              I found out they needed some office help at the  
11 Butler County Soil and Water Conservation District, so I  
12 went to work for them, and that was in the height of the  
13 irrigation development. So, my first job was, naturally,  
14 running a board that did topogs. And then, I graduated to  
15 running the instrument as we did topogs, and I learned how  
16 to plot topog maps and how to plan land leveling. I still  
17 remember you've got to have four parts cut for three parts  
18 of fill. And I did that for several years.

19              And then, I got on -- in that time frame, I got  
20 elected to the Butler County Soil and Water Conservation  
21 District -- or Board for the county board. I served, I'm  
22 not sure how many years, but it was -- I served until the  
23 NRDs came into being.

24              MR. BARR: When was the first time you heard the  
25 idea of a natural resource district and what kind of

1       involvement and -- did you and the other board members have  
2       at that time and --

3                   MR. GLOCK: I can't give you the date, Jim.  
4       Everything has floated away in the old memory. But I do  
5       know that our board -- oh, there was a 'Popa' (Bob Bell from  
6       Bellwood) and there were several really good men on that  
7       board. And when they first heard about the concept of  
8       natural resource districts, I admit we unanimously opposed  
9       it, because we were doing a very good job of conservation.  
10      All of us were dedicated to getting conservation on the land  
11      and conserving water and soil. And we didn't think some of  
12      our neighboring counties were doing all they could. But --  
13      and I'm not sure if it was Dayle Williamson or who it was --  
14      but after we heard about this concept and discussed it and  
15      vetoed it, somehow our work unit conservationist, I believe  
16      it was Arnold Davis at the time, evidently talked to some of  
17      the -- to Warren Fairchild or Dayle or somebody, and they --  
18      one of them came out and talked to us at one of our board  
19      meetings. And I remember it distinctly because we weren't  
20      too happy that we were going to have to sit and listen to  
21      some guy from Lincoln come out there and tell us how to do  
22      our business. But as he explained the situation, we  
23      discussed it at the next meeting and Arnold pointed out to  
24      us that, while we were really doing a good job in Butler  
25      County, we were putting terraces and everything on, there

1 were things we wanted to do on Skull Creek and Oak Creek,  
2 and they were streams that went into Saunders County or came  
3 out of Saunders County. One of them goes in and out a  
4 couple of times. And we couldn't do anything to those  
5 streams without cooperation from Saunders County or, north  
6 of us, Colfax County. And as we discussed it and as they  
7 had pointed out, whoever came and talked to us, those county  
8 lines would go away under the NRD. You would do things on a  
9 watershed basis. And that appealed to us. And that turned  
10 us 180 degrees. Then we did what we could to support it.

11 MR. BARR: Do you remember anything about the  
12 organizational period of the NRDs and how that went about?  
13 And, if not, that's okay.

14 MR. GLOCK: I don't remember specifics. All I  
15 remember is that there were some, I don't know if you call  
16 them disagreements, but there were some misunderstandings  
17 about how all this -- We had been making those decisions,  
18 and how those decisions were going to be made at the local  
19 level if you went to an NRD system, those were questions  
20 that were raised, but they were satisfactorily answered.  
21 And we never had any regrets. I know we had a meeting, a  
22 reunion, 10 or 12 years after the fact, and we all agreed  
23 that, boy, that was a good thing to do. And in my opinion,  
24 the NRDs really fulfilled their purpose, especially early  
25 on, in getting conservation done in a manner that was

1 efficient. Because, when you did it by county, sometimes  
2 you could do a better job by combining the efforts of the  
3 two counties and do one bigger project rather than several  
4 small ones and you got more bang for your buck. But I am  
5 not sure in later years, now, I'm not sure they're doing  
6 quite as good a job on the conservation side, but it's not  
7 their fault. Because the federal programs that have come  
8 into existence and some that came and then disappeared have  
9 had a great deal of influence on how NRDs can address it.

10 MR. BARR: What has -- as your view of how  
11 conservation is done in respect -- irrespective of who's  
12 doing it -- today and the status of the land today as  
13 compared to over the past that you witnessed?

14 MR. GLOCK: Well, I'm very disappointed in what's  
15 happening now. Within our neighborhood in Butler County I  
16 could take you to a number of farms that should never have  
17 been farmed. They're just too rough. They needed to stay  
18 in grass. But when \$7 corn came along, there were no  
19 federal programs or state programs that could match the  
20 incentive of those dollar signs from \$7 corn. And so,  
21 people broke up land and are trying to farm it that it's a  
22 shame. We get a hard rain and you can see tremendous  
23 erosion. Not only gully erosion, but sheet erosion. And  
24 so, to me, I wish we could find a way to strengthen the hand  
25 of the NRDs. Because if you leave it to the NRDs, if they

1 had access to a pool of funds that they could use to address  
2 the specific problems in their NRD -- and NRDs have  
3 different problems, too, in different parts of an NRD. It's  
4 different if you're at the base of the river or if you're up  
5 at the beginning of it. And they don't have the freedom to  
6 do that because they don't have the funds to address it  
7 properly.

8 MR. BARR: When you look at the organization of  
9 the special purpose districts into natural resource  
10 districts here in Nebraska and compare it to other parts of  
11 the country, and, in some instances, there's been some  
12 effort to do that, replicate that other places, but to my  
13 knowledge, it hasn't happened anywhere, do you have any  
14 thoughts on why it might have happened in Nebraska and not  
15 happened anywhere else?

16 MR. GLOCK: Well, I guess, the short answer is  
17 timing. Because when we did it or when Nebraska did it back  
18 then, the political atmosphere was not as poisoned as it is  
19 now. And people were more willing, even though they might  
20 be a flaming liberal or a real hard-headed conservative,  
21 they were willing to work together to do something that was  
22 going to be good for the country. And it was very easy to  
23 see that NRDs were the most efficient way to take care of  
24 conservation. And that's the main goal of it. But other  
25 states, when I was with Senator Kerrey, he worked with some



1 other states because they got envious when he'd talk about  
2 what we were doing. And when they would -- they'd get all  
3 excited about the thought of having these NRDs based on  
4 watersheds, and then they'd start thinking about the  
5 politics of it. And the politics is what has been the big  
6 drawback. It wasn't money or anything else. It was  
7 strictly politics. Because people who have control -- Well,  
8 I guess, money's involved. People who have control of those  
9 funds, if you throw them into an NRD, then all the funds get  
10 put together and they lose their control over their specific  
11 little bit of funding. And that is a great drawback to  
12 people being willing to take forward steps. Senator Kerrey  
13 talked about it a number of times as we traveled, about the  
14 success of the NRDs and how it could be translated to other  
15 states. And try as he may, he had a lot of support from  
16 other U.S. Senators even, but they said, in their own state,  
17 it would not work. In fact, the Senator and I  
18 discussed -- because I spent a lot of time on his staff  
19 attending meetings on the Missouri River, the compact, and  
20 they had two different organizations there. And if you  
21 could have had a giant special-use district for the whole  
22 Missouri River, that would be a great thing to do. But you  
23 really have a divide there. You've got the upper river and  
24 the lower river and all the states. If you make those state  
25 boundaries go away, then they lose some control and they do

1 not like to see that happen. Although, it should happen, in  
2 my opinion.

3 MR. BARR: Do you have any other general  
4 observations about natural resource districts or  
5 conservation in general or -- that you'd like to offer?  
6 This is just wide open. Anything you'd like to  
7 (indiscernible) --

8 MR. GLOCK: Well, I'm disappointed that we don't  
9 have more people who understand that this nation is strong  
10 because we've had a strong work ethic and a strong  
11 agricultural base. But the base of that agriculture is the  
12 soil and water. And we do not seem to treasure that like I  
13 think we should. But the NRDs come very close to being the  
14 best way I can see to keep that ethic in place, because the  
15 people that serve on those boards, and I have my  
16 disagreements with some of their decisions, but generally  
17 speaking, they have the good of the soil and water at the  
18 heart of the decisions they make and they try to do the best  
19 they can within the political structures that they have to  
20 live with. But I see nothing better than the NRDs that we  
21 can come up with.

22 MR. BARR: Anything else that you'd like to  
23 answer?

24 MR. GLOCK: No, I just --

25 MR. BARR: I really appreciate you -- Go ahead.

1                   MR. GLOCK: I'm so happy that you're keeping a  
2 record of this, because, possibly, the next generation, if  
3 some of them listen to, not what I have to say, but what all  
4 the interviews you have, how this thing evolved and how  
5 successful it's been, maybe, I hope, there'll be some people  
6 that say, well, maybe these old guys knew something we don't  
7 know. We'd better try something of what they did.

8                   MR. BARR: Well, thank you very much.

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