

INTERVIEWS WITH GOVERNOR JOHN CARLIN

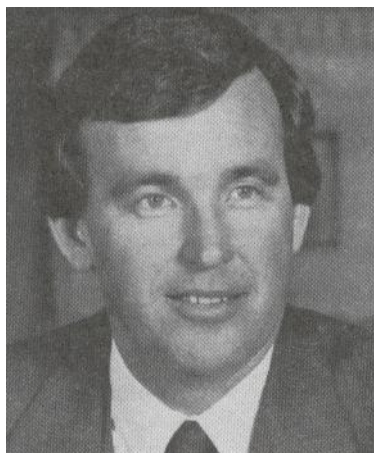
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GOVERNOR OF KANSAS: JANUARY 8, 1979 – JANUARY 12, 1987

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Dr. Bob Beatty, Producer, Kansas Governors Recorded History and Documentary Project



Governor John Carlin

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Q. Governor Carlin, could you tell us where you grew up and where you were born, and about your background?

A. I was born in Salina, Kansas at St. Johns Hospital in August 1940. I grew up in that area on a farm near Smolan. I was active in the 4-H and graduated from Lindsborg High School, and went to Kansas State University. It was not Kansas State University then, I can't remember quite what the title was. Got a degree in dairy science and came back to the farm.

Q. So you grew up on a farm?

A. Yeah.

Q. What was it like for you as a boy?

A. Lots of work, lots of fresh air, outdoor activity, lots of time in the barn. With the dairy operation going seven days a week there's no day off. Cows are milked twice a day. I look back and it was a great opportunity growing up to develop a work ethic and an appreciation for some of the basics of environmental issues as to what makes agriculture work and it certainly served me well in a variety of things I've done over the years.

Q. Not all kids who grow up on a farm go to a university, let alone go into politics. Was there anything from your parents, did they stress education or were they involved in politics?

A. Education was always considered important and the discussion of politics was very frequent. My folks weren't active in politics but they took an interest. Never in the context of running for public office or making any plans, just following what was going on and taking an interest on the issues.

Q. Was it expected that you were going to go to the university or was that something you decided on your own?

A. It was expected. I think my folks intended that I would get a college education and it would be in agriculture, specifically dairy science. Then I would come back to the family farm with my father for a short period of time and then ultimately by myself run the dairy operation.

Q. We did read some biographical material that said you cast your first vote for Harry Truman in the third grade.

A. I remember. I remember primarily because President Truman didn't do very well in Smolan Grade School in the fall of 1948. But I was very proud, even at that young age. It was clear which side of the aisle I was to sit on and I voted for Mr. Truman. I can remember following the 1948 conventions in both political parties on the radio.

Q. And I also read something about you making a presentation to President Eisenhower?

A. That would have been some time later, either the late winter or early spring of 1960 or 1961. I was one of six 4-Hers across the nation that had the opportunity to present to then President Eisenhower as he was leaving office. I think it was his last year, which would have been the election year of 1960, now that I've had a chance to put the numbers together in my mind, to go to the oval office and make the presentation of the report to President Eisenhower.

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Q. Was that an experience that had much of an affect on you? Did it make you become more interested in politics, visiting the White House?

A. It was a fantastic experience. But I didn't have the Clinton experience with the photo with President Kennedy that started supposedly his political career. I was still headed towards agriculture and a focus there. I was very proud to have the opportunity and in particular to be a Kansan and to be able to present the report to one of our own.

Q. After you graduated from Kansas State you returned to the farm, is that correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. Tell me a little bit about your first run for office. What prompted to make that leap into running for office?

A. There was no plan to run for public office, that I can assure you. Living on a farm in Smolan, the Sunday Salina Journal came about 11 o'clock on Monday morning. So my first look at the Sunday paper was usually while having what we would have said dinner then (we call it lunch now). It would have been dinner at noon. And there was an article inside, I don't think it was a cover article, but inside the front page of the Salina Journal was an article. This would be September of 1968. There was an article about the legislative candidate for the Democrats who had moved out of the district we happened to reside in. I wasn't even aware of what district we were in to be honest with you. And he was no longer eligible. The Democrats were desperately looking for someone who might have an interest in filling this void. I can't explain why really, but it just kind of struck me as, "Hey, this might be interesting." Back in Smolan in 1968 we still didn't have a dial telephone system. It was the old crank on the wall with neighbors listening in. I went over to a pay phone in what used to be an air base, Schilling Project, not too far from the farm, and called the County Chair, somebody I never met, and said I would like to talk to you about that. From that discussion in September there was still time to get my name on the ballot. I ran and I lost. But it started my interest in public service in an elected capacity.

Q. You decided to run two years later?

A. That's right.

Q. Was this traditionally Republican area you were in?

A. Very much so.

Q. How did you win that first election?

A. I think because of the dairy farm. I mean, it was interesting to go door to door and with the family helping do that work and connect John Carlin, candidate for legislature with the dairy farmer in Smolan, Kansas. I say that because in 1970, this was a successful run. It was primarily a Salina district, it wasn't a rural district, and it was Republican. A lot of folks were folks who had milked cows, if not their folks, their grandparents had. There was always a tie to that. Seems like everywhere we turned people had a connection with somebody that was a dairy farmer. And they associated a dairy farmer with somebody that worked hard and they felt good about, because there weren't any issues that dominated at all. It was simply a personality contest going door to door. And I had a very personable opponent. I think it really was that. That's the only explanation I have, that I could win in a district like that.

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Q. Let me ask you about the next leap. Can you recall possibly the time where you, after getting to the State Capitol, sat down and thought about the Governor, that's a job you might be interested in. What point did you start thinking about that?

A. Again, it was never a plan at all. I recall some people floating my name – and it would have been 1974 when Governor Bennett was running for re-election - that I might make a Lieutenant Governor partner for Vern Miller. But it didn't go anywhere and I didn't take it very seriously at all. In the election of 1976 when the Democrats took the majority in the House and I had been the minority leader and then became the Speaker of the House, I can't give you an exact time, but sometime in that first year of being Speaker I remember having lunch - I made the transition I think by then from dinner to lunch in Topeka – with my very good friend and then Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Fred Weaver from Baxter Springs. Fred and I had lunch at a Chinese restaurant over in North Topeka. And my memory is for the first time the idea came up there.

I don't remember if it was something I raised or something Fred raised, but for the first time there was a discussion about “maybe,” and this would have been in early 1977 for the 1978 election, that consideration ought to be given to running for Governor. One of the reasons I was willing to do it was not just because of issues that were evolving and the experience I had had in four terms as a state legislator and being in the leadership for several terms. I was never one that would have stayed doing something forever. There were folks in the legislature that had been there for 20, 30 years. That was not something that I would ever have been comfortable with. I was in the process of giving everything I had to that legislative opportunity. So it was as a combination of issues and challenge, but also in that I was willing to move on it and take the risk of losing and returning to the farm and not worrying about it that I was willing to consider running for Governor.

Q. How did the Democrats actually come in control of the Kansas House, was there an unusual situation involved with that?

A. Very unusual. When I was elected in 1970 and started my experience in January of 1971, my memory is there were 41 of us. And it takes 63 to have a majority. And then out of the 1972 election we went to 45. In the election that wasn't much of a change. But there was some really great talent added to our ranks in those early years, talent that wasn't satisfied with just being there, they wanted to do things. Not in a partisan way. They wanted to be part of the dialogue and in making decisions.

It was obvious that as a minority and very small minority we weren't really that influential. But then with growing interest we went to 56 out of the 1974 election and we really got serious about the opportunity. And quite frankly, we snuck up on the Republicans. It was before partisanship really took on the vicious feel I sense and fear is out there now too frequently. I'm not being critical of either side. If there is any blame, it goes both directions. And we had a few issues that worked our way. But for the most part we recruited great candidates.

And like I say, we got ahead of the partisan flow. There was no combined Republican effort to shoot us all out of the water at the level there is now, in any way, shape or form. I'm not saying there wasn't an effort, they were competitive races. But I think to some degree at least we snuck up on them and we lost that majority the next election. Came back one time, held it for another two-year period and the numbers now are back to where they were in 1971 when I arrived in Topeka.

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Q. You decide to run for Governor. What did you decide was going to be your message, what were you going to emphasize as a candidate?

A. Education was a strong issue. I don't mean that in comparison to my opponent saying education wasn't important, but there was a great deal of emphasis on that. There had been a number of issues that came along in the legislature regarding tax issues, particularly in terms of being more progressive, trying to be fairer to lower income folks. So a lot of issues we put forward, some we actually had success with in getting a Republican senate to support. But a lot of issues that we couldn't get passed that we made into issues.

One of the evolving issues that some of my friends on the other side have made light of for many years - but I'm still very proud of the campaign we ran - was making utilities a significant issue. I say that because - and I would remind Kansans - that's when Wolf Creek was being built, our first and only nuclear plant, and it was very controversial in a variety of ways. I raised several specific ideas on how I felt if I was elected Governor we needed to deal with it, where the laws needed to be changed, where I felt that the Governor should play a significant role. Not just appointing commissioners to the Kansas Corporation Commission, like judicial appointments, then just let them do their thing. I felt like that there was too much at stake with what was evolving and there needed to be an aggressive program.

My memory is that we had a six-point program that we took to the people. It was the principle issue from some time in September through the election. And I'm proud of the fact that five of the six were put into law early in my tenure and had a very substantive impact on that plant coming on that allowed some balance. The practical aspect was we had to do the best we could for the consumer, but bankrupting the utility was not the answer. So we had to carve out ways and we had to change the law that allowed the Corporation Commission to evolve rates that protected both sides for the best interest of everyone long-term as best we could, because the decision had been made to build the plant prior to my time. My challenge was bringing it on in the best, most feasible way.

Q. You ran against...

A. 1978 against the incumbent (Bennett).

Q. It was somewhat of a surprising victory?

A. I don't think you can overstate that. The first edition of the Topeka Capital had my opponent winning. That came out in the Wednesday morning edition, the Harry Truman Beats Dewey type of headline. I won for a variety of reasons and issues. To be quite honest with you, I won because I didn't raise much money. That may seem a little strange to you, but the answer is really that. I had so little money that I was only on television statewide the last week. Now think of that compared to today's elections where for not months but years you have television, certainly many, many weeks of television for any serious campaign. But I could only be on the last week.

I say that because people misread the polls. I was down. In fact, the Sunday Capital before the Tuesday election had me down 16 points: "Latest poll: Bennett leads Carlin by 16 points." Well, the problem with the poll was it was like 48% to 32%, which meant there was still a lot of people that hadn't made up their mind. When they polled, my TV hadn't started. There were thousands of Kansans who didn't know who John Carlin was until the last week of television. And they decided they weren't that thrilled with the incumbent or they would have been casting their polling answers with the incumbent. Once they felt comfortable then the incumbent held his 48- 49% and I went to the 50 percent. (Official result: Carlin: 49.4%, Bennett: 47.9%).

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If I had raised a lot of money, I very likely might have lost because it's a Republican state and there was an incumbent, a very competent incumbent. We had our major differences on issues but there was no personality set of issues. We respected each other. If the Republicans would have had polling early enough to come back it could have been different, because they allowed my program on utilities to go without a response. They couldn't see it in their polling doing anything. Well, I started in September but I didn't have any television message to get out. And let's face it, it's a reality, you reach the masses through the mass media. And I think that's the explanation.

I could feel it. When I was campaigning the last weekend compared to having worked almost two years campaigning, you could feel it. Going to bowling allies, people recognized me. They were positive. Before I had to go in and shake hands, explain who I was, telling them who I was, what I was doing. And they were polite, but now it was like they were connecting. And they connected the issue with the person and the decision they were going to make on Tuesday. And I won.

Q. Interesting question in that you only have that one week of advertising that you did, what did you decide to emphasize in that one week of television, was it your background, your six-point plan or both in the 30 seconds or 45-second ads you were running?

A. In a 30-second message we tried to get across the utility issue. And it played right into our hands because we were running that and the incumbent had ignored the issue and had not taken it seriously. His advisors were I'm sure telling him, "This isn't polling, it's not working, let Carlin spend his money on this issue," and they found out too late. I understand their tracking polls over the weekend prior to Tuesday showed what was happening, but it was too late.

Q. So in a surprising victory can you tell us the moment you were told that you had won, who told you and how you were feeling at that moment?

A. I can't really give you a very good answer on that. We spent a lot of the evening in my Speaker's office. That's where we were trying to keep track, evaluating the counties as they came in. We started feeling fairly good as early as 8:00-8:30 just based on what the earliest precincts showed us. We had no polling to show where we were. But we started to confirm the good feeling we had the last few days that, hey, we were going to do okay, that this wasn't going to be over real quick.

But it was well into the night before it was confirmed. Like I say, the first edition of the newspaper had already come out because Bennett led most of the evening. It was in the late returns that I was able to secure the victory. What was it 15,000 votes? (Note: The results were 364,738 for Carlin and 348,403 for Bennett – a 16,335 difference).

Q. As soon as you found out, what do you say to yourself, this is the first thing I want to do when I get into the office?

A. Well, one of the things that I learned about this - and tried to do something as I was leaving the Governor's office – was that immediately there wasn't that much help for a variety of reasons. I don't think there had been a tradition in Kansas to have a real formal transition where the outgoing Governor and staff had a program or something. So we were starting from scratch. And we certainly didn't have time and we didn't waste time in the campaign focusing on what are we going to do if we won. I mean, issue-wise, we were prepared. But the structure that has got to be put together, all the decisions very quickly on, like the swearing in, the inaugural activities, obviously we hadn't thought about.

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But a first budget, a first legislative session, some of the specifics all came at one time and with not a lot of help, and certainly understandably so because I had defeated an incumbent, an incumbent whose administration assumed they were getting a second term. I don't say that critically, I understand why they would have assumed that. Why would they even have thought they might lose? So they weren't prepared. It was a shock. So it was not a model transition from anybody's point of view. And out of that experience, when I left office, I really worked on putting a plan together. In fact, we published with the National Governor's Association sort of a transition plan that I thought might be helpful in other states as well.

Q. What would you describe as your gubernatorial style, did you think of yourself as an activist Governor?

A. I don't know if activist is the right word but I certainly believed in taking charge. I always looked back and felt like my experience in 4-H and judging team work at Kansas State University, often both livestock and dairy judging teams, gave me decision-making skills, opportunities to learn about communicating because there was a lot of oral reasoning involved in judging competition.

I wasn't shy about speaking up. I wasn't shy or uncomfortable about making decisions. And so I wanted to be involved. Yes, I had a Chief of Staff. Yes, I had a Cabinet Secretary. And I certainly delegated a lot of areas, almost all the specifics, because they weren't areas where I brought expertise. But in the bigger picture, putting a budget together for example, I was very actively involved in working with key partners and staff that was available then to me from the Executive Branch in putting that first budget together and putting the legislative package together. I had people that helped me work the legislature but I was very actively involved myself. So I was very much a participant. I didn't exaggerate delegation, I can say that for sure.

Q. Did you feel you had the right training in the sense that you were working in the legislature before becoming Governor?

A. The legislative experience helped in a couple ways. First of all, it was very educational on the issues. When I was elected, I knew very little or nothing. There were no issues involved when I started my campaign for the legislature. So those eight years, those four terms were really eight years of education on the issues facing Kansas and the responsibilities of the legislature with the Governor. So that was very good. I would have to say the rest of it, sure, there were leadership opportunities there as well. Some of it came before that helped make it possible to come in and have confidence that I could take this role that suddenly I had won.

Q. What does the job of Governor entail? I guess I would like to ask you first, if you can recall literally an idea that then went on to, you know, working up that idea and into a plan of action and eventually ended up being a bill and signing that bill? Do you recall that process, being Governor and can you take us through that process and your role in that?

A. An example that comes to my mind is the water plan that we put together. I had a very capable person in Joe Harkins running the water office. It was very easy for me because of my agriculture background and his expertise and experience to come together and agree the state of Kansas needed a water plan. We also were aware that this brought controversy and certainly would bring different points of view. So we worked in a very open way. We recognized that both houses of the legislature were controlled by Republicans, and that they were going to have to be major partners.

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I think of Senator Angel, for example, as one in particular, and Representative Heinemann. Both were from western Kansas. Although water is an issue all across the state back in the 1970's and early 1980's, I think that most people thought well, that's a western Kansas irrigation issue, that aquifer going down type thing, and people that live in the east didn't have to worry that much about it. But we recognized it was statewide and we had to have key leaders like Heinemann and Angel working with us. On the Democratic side, Senator Feliciano from Wichita was one of the key players. But it was a very open, back and forth exchange. Joe Harkins and his staff worked very closely with me with he and his staff developing specifics, slowly step by step putting the plan together, back and forth very much openly working with the legislative folks and leadership on this issue, and then over time, developing something we could take to the legislature.

Because we had bipartisan involvement from the get go we were able with a lot of public hearings, a lot of work involved, to get it passed into law in my tenure. I was very proud of that. I was told that not too long ago that Joe Harkins has been brought back to maybe put some new fire to that water plan that we put together many years ago.

Q. Did you ever have a time when you were told that the legislators don't think this particular idea is very good and you said I'm going to do it anyway and sort of take it to the people or did you always try to go through the legislature because it wasn't worth the time to fight them?

A. In the end you always had to have their help and cooperation. Nothing is going to go into law without 63 votes in the House and 21 in the Senate and two of those votes coming together in a conference committee usually on anything controversial and ultimately needing those 63-21 series of votes. When it came to the funding issues, which were such a challenge in my first term and of desperate need, we had economic problems, declining revenues, so I chose to go to the people then.

My first initiative was a severance plan in my first term. We were one of the few oil and gas states that produced a severance plan. I took it to the people, got input, took it to the legislature, was not successful. But I made it the cornerstone of a re-election effort in 1982 and then with a successful reelection was able to start to garner the kind of support that was necessary to put it into law. But it was clear that it was not going to be enough. The economy had continued to deteriorate. The legitimate needs of the state had continued to grow. And so I took a discussion, literally across the state in a series of town meetings and public press conferences laying out where we were, laying out the challenges, laying out the options, alternatives, what we could do if we were willing to be supportive of additional revenue measures. And in the process we developed very strong editorial support across the state for investing in the future of the state, for doing what was right for the state. And so I was able in my second term - even though the legislature was even more Republican - to come back and to get the votes and the support necessary from a Republican legislature to pass a very extensive redoing of the taxes both from income, sales tax, user taxes, including somewhere in a couple of these areas for transportation the gasoline tax, because highway needs were very evident.

But I think the key was going to the people first and being very open and clear about the issues, very clear about the needs and gaining support, so that when I went to the legislature they were aware that I was building some public support. They had the experience with me on the severance tax where they had to in the end come around and be supportive. Again, working very closely with them, and not making it partisan, making it Kansas oriented, what's best for Kansas. We were able to put together a revenue program that allowed us in very difficult times to invest in education and invest in transportation and take care of our people at a level that certainly is not ideal, but that was comfortable for all of us trying to do our best for the people of Kansas.

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Q. What was the most rewarding part of being Governor?

A. I think the most rewarding part was doing things that were good for the people in terms of legislation, in terms of the budget, in terms of programs, in terms of service. But I would mention one other area I took very seriously and that was the appointment of judges. I worked very, very hard to attract and to appoint the best men and women to the bench. Because I knew, it's not rocket science here, that most judges were going to be on that bench far longer than I was going to be in office. And so, maybe over time, maybe the most significant contribution I would make is who I put on the bench and their contributions to the state.

I recall my first appointment, selecting a Republican over a Democrat and I took a lot of heat. You know, I had just won an election, Democrats were thrilled, but for my first district court appointment was a Republican in southeast Kansas. But I took a lot of heat. I tried to demonstrate right then, not only did I believe that the person I selected was the best for the bench at that time but that I also wanted to send a message that I took this responsibility very seriously. Yes, I would appoint Democrats and I appointed a lot of Democrats to the bench over time. But that didn't mean Republicans were automatically disqualified.

Q. The opposite question, what was the most frustrating aspect of the job and maybe something you hadn't anticipated?

A. One thing that was very frustrating for me - and again it happened with my party friends who worked so hard to help elect me - were the laws and the system for personnel had changed dramatically. You have to keep in mind Robert Docking was not only a good Governor but a very popular Governor and had pleased a lot of Democrats across the state with what I'll call patronage, which was legal and appropriate and accepted at the time. But things changed due to spin-offs of what was going on in Washington and so forth. The rules changed and the Governor could no longer dictate who got those highway jobs in counties across the state.

So it was frustrating to work the political scene, do what was right and ethical and legal in a system that had changed. But people had a hard time understanding that across the state. So it was very frustrating in my tenure. You know, I understand the two-party system. In my current time, I'm an independent. But in my previous lives I was, yes, I was a partisan Democrat, although I always felt like I tried to be very positive and constructive with that. But we have a party system. There is a certain adversarial aspect of our operation that is good and can be very, very healthy. So it was uncomfortable for me. I wanted to be sympathetic. But somehow we never, for the most part, got that message across. The times had changed and we had to change as a party and as a state and things had to be done differently.

Q. Looking back, when you look at your eight years, is there anything you wish you could change?

A. I could look back and I could say, you know, in hindsight if I could do things differently I might have made some appointments differently. I might have selected some people differently to the staff. I certainly learned a lot as the eight years went along. I'm quite sure an objective review would say I was a better Governor in my eighth year than in my first because I had a lot to learn. So yes, if I could take that experience, and particularly take the experience that has flowed since, yes, I would go back and do some things differently.

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I can't think of anything dramatic that I would do differently. I vetoed a lot bills and I stand by those vetoes to this day and am proud of the fact that my Democratic colleagues upheld all of them despite the fact that Republicans tried to override every one of them. We were able to sustain the vetoes, which is important and is important for a Governor. It applies to a President. If your vetoes have no respect, then the Legislative Branch is going to run all over you.

Q. Is there anything unique about Kansas that might make the Governorship better, more challenging, interesting than other states?

A. That's a good question, one that I would need some academic political science folks to really help me with on the specifics. But states vary dramatically in terms of the power that's put in the Governorship. We do have a strong Governor's position in our constitution. The Governor plays a very significant role. And there are states interestingly enough, Texas is one, where the power is divided much more and there are more elected offices. Some of those elected offices in other states have great power, power that in the State of Kansas has placed in the Governor to a significant degree, at least in terms of selecting and appointing key folks that are going to lead and make executive decisions. So Kansas is certainly one of the states where the original founding folks put a constitution together where the governorship was going to be a powerful position, but not dictatorial.

There's a balance of power, but within the executive branch it's a very powerful position. And that's where I should make it clear: I'm not talking about that in Kansas the Governor has more power than in other states over the Judicial Branch or the Legislative Branch, I'm just talking about the Executive Branch itself.

Q. If a person is elected Governor of Kansas what do you think that person will need, the sort of skills needed to be successful? Do you think there is set of skills that a person should have in that four or eight years?

A. I would say this, if I was responding about almost any state or any public official, I think leadership skills and decision-making skills are absolutely critical. The Governor makes a lot of decisions, and some people can make decisions and some struggle to make decisions and so that's something I always look to. Of course, I've been removed from the state, so this comment doesn't reflect on any of my successors.' But just watching people here in Washington for example, having been through now two administrations and dealing with a lot of executive folks, you can really tell the difference in working with entities whether they are comfortable making decisions.

You know, at some point, yes, you want good decisions. But at some point one of the worst things that can happen is for a decision not to have been made or put off too long. A lot of times you can make a decision, then if it's the wrong decision make a correction and go on instead of stewing on it over and over and over again. I remember one experience and I will bring it back to my current job. When I first became Archivist of the United States I was being briefed by a group of fine people on my staff who had been reviewing a set of forms. You know, in a bureaucracy, there are forms. I didn't have any expertise to evaluate them, so it was more of an educational process for me. I asked, "Where are we on this, how long have we been working on it, what's gone on?" And this committee and this effort had been going on for ten years, reviewing, nobody was willing to pull the trigger, nobody was willing to move forward. That's an isolated example that doesn't in any way reflect across the board what I inherited here, but I use it as an example. I mean, they had done a lot of study, a lot of analysis but couldn't make the decision because with the decision there's risk. With decision it leads to accountability. And some people don't quite have the personality or the set of experiences in life that allow them to just do that.

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Again, I go back to my agricultural upbringing on the farm where you made decisions every day, and that judging experience. Although I was never a debater I was a very strong supporter of the debate program because it also trained you to make decisions. I mean, there in the real world, in real time in a debate competition, you had to think and you had to explain yourself. And that's helpful in public office regardless what state.

Q. Do you think that helped you win a second term, that the voters appreciated that quality?

A. I think so, but I have nothing to back it up. We certainly as an administration demonstrated we weren't just treading water. And as I've observed again not in Kansas but having being back here watching other parts of the country and the east coast and so forth, there's a tendency today to do that. In terms of Congress it seems that, you know, you want to get beyond the next election, that making tough decisions now, oh, they might be unpopular.

I personally believe people are ready for tough decisions. They are ready for the truth, ready to be told the reality. But there's a tendency - and this is across the board, this is not making a partisan statement in any way, shape or form here - there's a tendency to get through the next election. And maybe times have changed a lot and maybe dramatically and I certainly acknowledge things are much more viciously partisan today than in my tenure in public life. But I certainly took from my experience and also felt at the time that just taking a "Here's where we are folks, here are realities," approach worked, saying "I'm not trying to dictate how we proceed, but here's some of my thinking," and then bring people along, that you can bring about change. But change requires first of all, leadership. And secondly, the capacity to make decisions, good decisions, and move things forward, and be willing to take some risks to make things happen.

Q. What would you like Kansans to know and remember about John Carlin's two terms and Governor Carlin's tenure as Governor?

A. Oh, so much time has passed, I imagine most of the viewers-- I would have to say something here, they will say, well I kind of remember when we had that farmer as Governor.

Q. We talked a lot, but to sum up.

A. I think I would like them to know we worked hard. I say "we" because it was done as a team. And again, I want to remind people it was done as a team including Republicans and working with Republicans across the state. A lot of my allies were business folks, Chamber of Commerce folks putting together a transportation program, certainly that side of the equation really came on board.

I would want folks to know that we tried to honestly address the challenges we faced at the time and that we worked very hard to do what was best for the people, that we felt like our responsibilities were not just for the short-term but the long-term. We had responsibilities to future generations as well as to do our best in a time in which we had the opportunity to lead what I've always considered the great State of Kansas.

Q. And the last question and then you're done. You ran again in 1990, correct?

A. Correct.

Kansas Governors Recorded History and Documentary Project.

Q. And did you run because you felt there was some unfinished business or you wanted to continue to do what you were doing, or was it a combination of both?

A. I ran because I felt there were additional opportunities. I certainly left office never thinking I would run again, I was looking for other opportunities. I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching at Wichita State University for three semesters and getting back in the private sector doing entrepreneurial things. I think it was looking at the issues, looking at the direction of the state, feeling that in some areas where some things had been started and they weren't going necessarily how I felt comfortable with and saw that maybe there was an opportunity to provide some additional leadership for the state.

Q. Was it disappointing not to win?

A. It was, but, like I've always said, you know, losing can be helpful. I probably didn't think so that night, but it opened up new opportunities. And it's very, very likely I wouldn't be sitting in this room doing this interview today if I had won. And certainly the opportunity to be Archivist to the United States has been an incredible one. A fantastic set of challenges. And so certainly looking back in hindsight, it worked out beautifully for me and opened new doors that wouldn't have opened if I hadn't have taken on a challenge that probably wasn't the right one. It was time to move on and do something different. I had had my two terms. I probably should have been smart enough to know that was enough.



Governor Carlin, 2005

2nd Interview with former Kansas Governor John W. Carlin

*Manhattan, Kansas, March 10, 2008,
Interviewed conducted by **Bob Beatty**
and **Mark Peterson**, Washburn University*

Q: When you won the 4-H competition as a boy, it was a contest-winning project. What was it about?

A: Well, more of that history than you'll ever want. That would have been in about 1959. In my second effort I competed on a promotional talk at the local level. I won. I won at the regional and somebody who was judging at the regional - and I can't remember if it was Dale Apel or not, was a former Saline County 4-H agent that was working in the State office - recommended that I give it at the what was in those days the 4-H roundup. And from that the state leaders picked me to represent Kansas in the competition as to which six 4-Hers nationally would be selected to give the annual 4-H report to the president. And I was one of six. Three young women, myself and two young men.

Q: Six from the state of Kansas?

A: No, from the nation. Interestingly enough, the woman who won from Texas served on my foundation board at the National Archives. But that's how I got to the Oval Office when Eisenhower was president, and because I was from Kansas, I got selected to be the one actually to make the presentation of a Dogwood tree to be planted at Gettysburg. Now, the only thing that's of interest in that story is our host was, Conrad Hilton, *the* Conrad Hilton. What I'll never forget is that he took us to dinner in Washington, D.C. And we were at some nice, fancy Washington D.C. restaurant with a band, and it drug on forever and he kept dancing with this young lady from Texas. And we young 4-H boys sat there and had no idea how to compete with him. We weren't comfortable asking the young ladies to go dance. So it was us sitting there making small talk while Conrad Hilton was out dancing with this young lady, 4-Her, from Texas. The interesting follow up conversation, as adults now, was that he followed up after that and made contact with her a couple of times in Texas. Nothing got out of hand.

Q: You said that you lived in Saline County, and this is a heavily Republican area and Virgil wanted to know, "Why was he a Democrat in this area?" Was it you or was it a family tradition?

A: Family. My folks were Democrats. I was raised with what I call the more progressive philosophy and was comfortable with it. And I was a township Democrat committeeman in the sixties for Smolan Township. So there was no long range planning about what would be best. I grew up in a Democratic family and stayed with it.

Q: You were born in the mid to late 1930's, right?

A: No, I'm not quite that age. I was born in August of 1940.

Q: So your parents farmed in the depression out there?

A: That is correct.

Q: Did they ever make any comments about Roosevelt's New Deal programs and their impact on farming and all that?

A: Yes. I really don't know if the Democratic family part goes back beyond my parents to be honest. But I do know there was a linkage. I didn't ever hear my parents say, "We're Democrats because of..." but I heard a lot of general comments about the fact that they were Democrats. It wasn't like there weren't any. And the ones who were, they would associate with Roosevelt and what was done for us out there, just in terms of the Dust Bowl. For example, planting all those Osage Oranges up and down the mile lines to break the winds. And the tragic thing that's taking place now is that they are being torn out because everyone wants every inch to plant to wheat with the market the way it is.

Q: In your original transcript; you give the story of making the phone call. I think Virgil is sort of questioning was he [Carlin] really not involved in local politics before that phone call?

A: Before that phone call, there are two things. I was a Democratic township committeeman. The one thing I had done politically was in the 1960 primary. The son of a neighbor, John Shultz, he was working for Frank Theis, a name you should maybe connect with because he was a long time federal judge out of Wichita, very active in Democratic politics, and was running for the U.S. Senate against [Joseph W.] Henkle, who was Governor George Docking's lieutenant governor. Young Shultz comes to me and says, "Will you contact all the Democrats in Smolan Township?" It took me, off and on, some time for about three days. The Smolan Township primary, and I can't give exact numbers, but it was something like 44 to 2 for Theis. And it wasn't because people liked John Carlin, and they didn't know who Theis was - but because somebody asked them. That's what I teach today. That's the reason Obama beats Clinton in the caucus states because he's got people on the phone asking for their vote.

Henkle was more well known, and I would've bet you he would've carried Smolan because there was no reason for them to vote for Theis. Not a name they were familiar with. Theis didn't have enough money to make much of a campaign in the primary. But it really taught me a valuable lesson. Now, going back to your question, that did not generate any interest in politics, in running. I mean, my story to whoever did the first interview is the honest to God truth. I mean, reading the [Sunday] *Salina Journal* on that Monday in September, an inside cover story, "Democrats looking for a candidate," I can't explain to this day, why, suddenly, out of the blue, I went over to the pay phone - we were still on the old crank system - and called the County Chair saying I was interested.

Q: Do you remember, in the first interview, you talked about your first run for office in 1968, that phone call and you lose, and then you run again in 1970 and you win. Do you remember whom you ran against?

A: Yes. In 1968, there was the incumbent Bruce Johnson, farmer/rancher, and friend of my father's. In 1970 I beat Gary Sherrer, who was debate coach at Salina Central at the time.

Q: You mentioned in the first interview that there were no giant issues; that it was just two people and their personalities going door to door.

A: The only explanation I have is that because it was an urban Republican district and I'm a rural Democrat. So how did I win if it was just one nice guy against the other? I think the difference was - and totally unfair, I'll be clear about that - I think there was not the most positive perception of teachers in general going into politics at that time - but there wasn't anything in the campaign out in the open.

The big factor was that I was a dairy farmer. And in 1970 almost everybody in the district was only one generation, at the most, removed from being on the farm and milking cows and they associated milking cows with working hard. And if I milked cows, I would work hard, and they'd kind of like to have a hard working representative, and I think that's why I won. I mean Gary is attractive, articulate; you know, he had everything going for him, including that he was a Republican in an urban district. So how did I win?

Q: When we talked to you in Washington, you expressed a desire to return to Smolan and get back to the cows.

A: Yes. Now, not to return to milk cows. The dairy operation was gone. First leased to Lawrence Mayer at Gypsum, Kansas, and the second move to sell out in '82 or '83. Total dispersal. To get back in it would have been a huge capital expenditure and secondly I didn't have anyone that wanted to do it with me; so it was never even a thought. The thought I was talking about would be to return to Smolan, that would have been before any discussion or thought with Kansas State.

So yes, I was more in the mood that I'd be 65 years old and it was time to retire. And then somewhere along that time, at some dinner in Washington D.C, sat next to a heart doctor, who told me, without being asked, he said, don't ever retire. He said that's the worst thing you can do for your health. He said you can take on a less stressful job, that's smart. You can take a little longer vacations, that's smart. But he said don't retire! That's the worst thing you can do for your health.

I decided I wanted a simpler, easier to manage life. It allowed me to have a very, very small mortgage and be semi-financially secure and work but not have to have quite the job. I'm full time now, but over half of my time I work for free. I chair that national commission [the Pugh Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production], I have a staff in Washington, I get my expenses when I travel back there, nothing more. And then I serve on the Kansas Bioscience Authority and it takes a significant amount of time to stay on top of it and be a responsible member of the authority.

[In answer to a question, Carlin said he was with the National Archives from 1995 until 2005 and then came back from D.C. to begin teaching at K-State in 2005.]

The first class I taught was Kansas Politics, and then they decided that they have very good people that can teach that, so in the spring I taught practical politics for the first time, and the last two falls I've had a public administration graduate course in leadership.

Q: In terms of your legislative years, were there one or two legislators who stand out in your memory?

A: I ended up speaker my last year. My last year, there were nineteen Democrats in the senate, so we ran things. Because there was Norman Gaar, Republican, Westwood, and Ed Riley, Leavenworth was a Republican, you could count on on a lot of issues. We had three or four Republicans who on a lot of issues could partner with Democrats, and then with the house majority we had a good run there.

But individuals? I would point on the Democratic side, to my mentor, who had a huge influence directly and indirectly, [Richard C.] Pete Loux [Wichita], who passed away a few years ago. He was minority leader in the house when I came there in January of 1971. He gave me an opportunity to help him, and it was him allowing me - and my willingness to work - that allowed me to build support to where I was starting up the ranks rather quickly. Because I was only there four terms, and was assistant minority leader my second term, and minority leader in my third, and speaker in my fourth. But Pete Loux was key, direct and indirect; indirect because he accepted an appointment from Bob Bennett to

join the corporation commission, which allowed me to run for minority leader, and then to be speaker when we took the majority after the 1976 election. So he had a huge, huge impact on my career.

You know in terms of Republicans, Norman Gaar was a very, very significant state senator in those years. Republican, lawyer from Johnson County. He was labeled an arch opponent and enemy of Governor Bob Bennett, and I really don't know how accurate that is. They did oppose each other quite frequently, and Gaar, who was majority leader, was comfortable - Bennett is governor at this time, they were former colleagues in the senate - Gaar was comfortable on many occasions working with us, the Democrats. I don't think it was anti-Bennett. Gaar was a progressive Republican, and saw things that should be done and was willing to work with us to do it.

Q: Now, had the profound ideological split in the Republican Party surfaced at this time?

A: Not quite yet. No, it did not. It had not. . . .

[There follows a relatively long exchange about the workings of the legislature during the Bennett years, and the governors threatened vetoes; but his failure in most causes to follow through on the threat. Thus, with some Republican support, Carlin's legislature was able to move programs forward, and Carlin has no memory of override attempts, unlike when Carlin himself was governor.]

Q: What did you get through in your four terms in the legislature that you remember most especially as being good?

A: Well, I don't have as good a memory of that as I do of my years as governor, I really don't. One of the things we did was highway funding. We had what we call the Graber amendment on the floor of the house - Walt [Walter W.] Graber, Democrat, Pretty Prairie. My example here is when we had fifty-six Democrats, we were in a minority, and there was this highway bill on the floor, and we offered Walt Graber's amendment, and I have to believe it was one that was helpful to the rural Kansas. That's my memory. And the Republicans, I know, believe they lost the majority because of that. I think it was more than that. I think we fielded a great team, and they had never been opposed for so long. We kind of caught 'em napping. They just couldn't believe that this state would elect a Democratic majority. We championed it the amendment, and we got it passed, is my memory, and then we used it in the election against Republicans who had voted against the Graber amendment. So we picked up a lot of seats in rural Kansas and out west.

Q: [Gov. Carlin was asked about reapportionment of the mid-1960s]. He said "it had changed before" he got to the legislature, and also:

A: On reapportionment the issue during the seventies when I was in the legislature was getting a map the court would approve. And so I served four terms, my memory is four different districts, because it changed every time. I might be wrong, maybe it's just three different, but I know I started with strictly a Saline County district, most of it in Salina, and then rural Saline County; I had portions of McPherson County for at least one term; and then I ended up with Saline County and Ellsworth County. And so I know I had at least three different districts, and it was all because Docking was governor, and he wouldn't sign it, the new legislative district map, just let it go to the court, the court would throw it out, but it would serve for that election. We'd have to come back in and we'd draw another map and send it to the governor; so at least twice and maybe three times the courts threw it out before we got a map they would accept, and so it was an issue while I was a legislator.

Q: So the east coast of Kansas' (Wyandotte, Johnson, Douglas counties) influence of the distribution of power was in transition while you were still serving in the legislature but it was really the old, rural based politics that tended to control and govern?

A: And to some extent it's still there. Because the rural folks, including myself, we've done really well in terms of leadership positions. The two leaders now [Neufeld and Morris] are from way out there. [Mike] Hayden [Republican, Atwood] was from way out there; [Ross O.] Doyen [Republican, Concordia] was out there; Carlin was out there; McKinney today, out there. My explanation, which you'll be interested in, I think, is that one of the advantages of growing up in a rural community, if you have a little bit of talent, you get a lot of opportunities to develop it. You will not only be president of the local 4-H club, you'll probably be on the 4-H council in a leadership position, you'll probably be a leader in the church, you'll probably be president of your high school class, and have numerous opportunities to develop these skills - speaking skills, decision-making skills, overall presentation skills. I think that's the only explanation you can give of why; now there are other factors, sometimes Wichita fights Kansas City, but I think it's more than that.

Q: So, you go to the legislature in 1971, you have a few years under Bob Docking; tell me about Bob Docking.

A: My observation and experience would be that from a political point of view he had a master thinker in Norbert Dreiling. The lawyer from Hays was not just your average Democratic politician. He was smart, savvy, and there was a clear focus on Docking winning and Docking being reelected. And I don't know if Norbert gets the credit, who gets the credit, but Docking in my lifetime mastered the concept of repeating one's message and staying focused. Now, don't take this wrong, and I know it had no connection, but he was almost like the Chinese when I went there as governor in August of 1979; I came away thinking, "They must have only one speechwriter, they have the same message." Docking had one speech and for eight years, he used it, and it worked. I mean we all had it memorized. I'm exaggerating here, but he had a line that was in every speech, "austere but adequate," and he ran on that.

He never made the mistake of talking too long, which is smart politics, and he really cultivated his supporters in every place in Kansas. I mean he put together a team everywhere, and he was loyal to them, and every time he went to that area, they were never forgotten. And so there was a team across Kansas that would just live and die for Bob Docking. They would do anything for Bob, because he remembered them, he respected them, he never forgot that they helped him win his first race, and so it just went on and on.

Q: Now you mentioned in your [2004] interview that one of the problems you encountered as governor was there had been a change in the way the state had been operated and you weren't able to do for your supporters what Docking had been able to do?

A: Well it all came out of Watergate. All the states kind of changed the rules. And it went from Bob Docking's time and prior to that where if you had a buddy, say in Sheridan County, and he called you up and said he had a nephew who needed a job this summer, he'd be working on the highway crew. And it was legal, politically sound, not criticized; it was the way it was operated. When it came to permanent hires in the highway department across the state, you know none of those hires were done without the blessing of the local county party chair. At this point Docking had all of them in his camp. Well, then the rules changed. And what made it more complicated was Bennett followed Docking, so you had four years of a Republican administration and the Democrats out there didn't expect to be able

to call up Bennett and get their nephew a job, and during that four-year period we have all of the Watergate changes.

So I come in in January of 1979 and the rules are totally different. And the political mistake I made was not having had the history of that and therefore a communication strategy to go out and sort of say to those good old Democrats, "The rules have changed." I just started following the law. I can't recall anybody in the transition office leading up to January of 1979 saying that we've got a real problem here.

I always believed that you do things right, this is the way you operate, we're going to put good people in, but it was Hell. I don't think as legislators we were as aware of the politics of patronage. I don't think it was something that got on our radar screen that much. So I think we walked in to the governor's office kind of blind to the possibility of real serious political problems.

Q: Why did Docking retire from elective politics when he did?

A: Docking was always an executive, not a legislative type. He had a very minimal legislative program as governor, it was primarily defensive; very "austere and adequate." And most of the legislative battles were over vetoes and so forth. I think Docking is the only governor in the history of Kansas that vetoed more legislation than I did. The difference is all my vetoes were sustained. He had a number overridden, so I had the record for the number of vetoes upheld. You know, a lot of governors in four years have a handful of vetoes; both Docking and I had over 120 vetoes!

Q: What kind of impression did you get from Bennett? What did he do to make it possible in Kansas for a Republican incumbent to lose to a Democrat?

A: I think it starts with his election, and beating Vern Miller. Vern Miller should have defeated him. Because he was following a very popular Democrat in Bob Docking, he was well known, he was the attorney general, and Bennett was not popular. It wasn't like, "We all want Bob Bennett." Bob Bennett is Johnson County, he's a lawyer, he's an aristocrat, wears a beard, and not your ideal candidate for rural Kansas, and western Kansas in particular. But Vern is, you know, his own worst enemy, jumping out of car trunks, and trying to keep the planes from selling liquor when they were flying over [Kansas] and that sort of thing, and it finally just got to a point where Bennett was able to beat him in a close election. The people were kind of embarrassed by an attorney general that acted like that. But those two or three things aside, Vern was a very popular attorney general.

The question is, how could Bennett lose, what did he do? Well, he didn't come in as a really popular governor. Secondly, he didn't do anything during his four years to improve his popularity. I don't think they sat down and said, "You know, we're kind of lucky, now what do we need to do, what is it we need to do so that in four years we'll be in a position to win reelection?" As an observer, I couldn't see that they were doing anything. He was still kind of that aristocrat down there that was proud of the fact that he was smarter than anybody else – and he was very, very smart. But that isn't the kind of approach you need to take. You know, people were saying he needed to shave his beard, and he kind of put his beard in their face and said, "hmmphh, you're not going to see me doing that." He remained sort of a respected but not really loved politician.

Then in the four years he was governor – and I use this and the Republicans really hate this but it's true - he more or less was comfortable with utilities doing what they wanted to do. During this period of four years, utility rates were going up, the Wolf Creek nuclear plant was being discussed as to whether it should be built, how could rate payers live with what had to be huge rate increases, and his position was we just have to accept it, and if anything needs to be done the Corporation Commission will do it, it's inappropriate for the governor to step into something like this. And this

approach was somewhat true on other things as well. And it was why we as Democrats, with Norman Garr, were able to do some things despite his threat of veto.

For the 1978 election I put together a six-point program for utilities of, if I'm governor, here's what I'm going to do. It was the campaign. There was also lot of talk about growth in government and spending and I made it kind of an issue, and it was a good issue politically following the last Democrat, "austere but adequate." Bennett, probably, in fairness to him, Docking had kind of held things back, there was probably some built in pressure for natural growth without any push for growth. But if you're talking about the race in 1978 then the economy was really not an issue. You can look back and say the economic problems were starting, but it wasn't really graphic until the early 1980's.

Q: So it was a combination of Bennett not really having a good base of support, then not building on that support, and then this issue of utilities striking a chord.

A: Yes

Q: You told us you decided to get in the race at a Chinese restaurant.

A: Yes, it was in north Topeka, a major Chinese restaurant. The China Inn. I was having lunch with Fred Weaver.

Q: You're speaker of the house at this point. What's your notoriety in the state at this point? Are you the public spokesman for the Democratic Party against Bennett?

A: To some degree, yes. But I didn't have near the name recognition that I thought I had. That's one of the things I pass on to folks, particularly people that consult with me. You get the idea that you're pretty well known, but unless you are the governor or a long-time U.S. Senator or whatever, people don't know who the hell you are. And a lot of them don't give a hoot who you are!

So, you know, I thought, "I'm speaker of the house," that I was the top democrat, period. So why wouldn't I be in a good position? But I wasn't. Nobody knew who I was!

Q: Curt Schneider was the attorney general? Tell us about him.

A: Curt Schneider, a lawyer from southeast Kansas, was, if not hand picked, anointed by the Docking Democrats to be the heir apparent to the Docking legacy. So he was hand picked early in Bennett's term to run against Bennett. He was the sitting attorney general, so he was in a better position than I was. Curt had a little trouble crossing the state line with a woman. I mean, it was a news story, it wasn't a rumor or speculation, it was a story that was documented, not just hearsay. It was enough of a story to do him serious damage. It took him down. He ended up not even running.

But early on in my speculation about running he hadn't gotten out. When I was working in the summer of 1975 [1977] I had a lot of people threatening, saying, "You're wasting your time, the Docking team wants Curt." But he didn't leave [the race] because of me, he left because of this story.

But I ended up with two really strong opponents. They were better known than myself and had special interests, traditional Democratic stakeholder groups behind them. One was Senator Bert Chaney from Hutchinson; teachers for sure and some unions supported him. The other one was from St. John and many times a commander of the American Legion, Harry G. Wiles. He was prominent in the Democratic Party, a very well known Democrat. Certainly he had the veteran's organizations that were going to get involved and some of the unions.

But I had my volunteers. I was this upstart. You know, I ticked off the unions when I led the motion to override Docking's veto on farm-labor legislation. They eventually got on board, but it was

after I was elected in 1978. It was during my time in the legislature. It was when Cesar Chavez was coming into western Kansas and trying to organize workers, and I wasn't opposed to them being organized, but I was opposed to their ability to strike during the harvest. I said that's too much. If they can strike during the harvest they rule the roost, and I felt collective bargaining should be balanced. And we passed legislation that was balanced that allowed them to organize. Docking went with the unions and vetoed it. I had unbelievable threats. It was the one time Pete Loux really didn't like what I was doing. The Republicans came to me, they obviously knew that the only way they could override was for the Democrats to help, so they came to me and asked me to help and I felt they were right and I was comfortable doing it. So I literally went to the floor and made the motion to override Docking's veto and we overrid it. It didn't help my relationship with unions and Docking Democrats, for sure, which was one of the issues that made my race in that primary more difficult.

Q: What about the campaign? The primary?

A: I won the primary for two reasons. I outworked and out-organized my opponents. I was organized in every single county. I did it the old fashioned way. Secondly, was that TV ad, the one you haven't seen yet. It was so outrageous that in about three days it had taken "Carlin" outside of our organization to Democrats knowing me and I won the primary. I just know it pushed me over. It was only on the air no more than three days, maybe just two. We ran it in Topeka, SE Kansas, and Wichita, I mean, it was an ad that was a grabber. You see, insiders in my campaign were very upset, but to the general public – I don't know if the message came across – but they caught the tag line, "Carlin for Governor." And so I think I got the uncommitted. None of us candidates had a lot of money, and I don't think the others ran TV ads. What was fascinating to me is that we previewed it with a lot of our people in Wichita one night – I'll never forget that - and people felt good about it, and then we put it up on television and all hell broke loose. Gee Gods, I had relatives calling, saying "Jiminy, this is destroying your image, John! You know, you're a good Lutheran, you're a 4H boy, how could you possibly do this?"

Now, to this day I don't think it was that bad. It was clearly comical. It was clearly outrageous. I wasn't calling Bennett an "egg-sucking dog" or anything terrible, I was just pointing out that he kind of expanded government.

I think the ad worked with the public. That's my opinion. It galvanized the race, it was run right before the primary. To the people voting in the primary who hadn't come to events, who my organization hadn't reached, suddenly saw that ad and said, "I think I'll vote for Carlin." And it sort of goes back to the fact that at least I had asked for their vote. But for my close supporters it didn't represent the image they wanted to communicate. And so we yanked it because the support team was disintegrating, and never used it again.

Q: For the general election you saved your three commercials for the last week?

A: Now this was not by design. We did not sit down and say let's not raise very much money, we'll sneak up on them! We were trying to raise money but just couldn't. We raised just a little bit.

Q: Now at what point or at any point did you commission a poll? Did you commission a poll in the primary or in the general?

A: To the best of my knowledge, we did no polling in the primary and I don't recall any polling in the general. You know the media were doing it. I always remember the one that came out the Sunday before the election and I was down 16 points. But, see, the poll was in the field, like,

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday before the Tuesday election. Well, I had just started on TV! So the repetition really hadn't started to take effect until Saturday, Sunday, Monday; so that poll missed my whole advertising campaign. Bennett had a much better financed campaign. He had a lot of ads, but the key thing was, in the newspaper polling, and it's one of the things I teach, anytime an incumbent can't be consistently over 49 percent, they're in trouble. And the poll that everybody assumed meant Bennett would automatically win, he was ahead 49 percent to 33 percent. So, there are a lot of people who were trying to figure out who in the hell is his opponent and we want to check that out before we vote for the incumbent, and I got almost all those votes.

Q: One thing we talked about before we go into that is we found an ad by Bennett from that election and we can only guess it was near the end of that campaign, but we could be wrong and maybe you remember it, in which he has Olivia Bennett, his wife come on for 30 seconds and just sit there in a park and just say what a wonderful guy he is and gentile and loving. Do you remember that ad?

A: Well yes.

Q: What you said before was they had a need to put that ad on because of his image?

A: I would have to believe that. I mean, you know just in a looks contest, she was very attractive and he wasn't. And you know, she was likable, but she wasn't one who would help too much in the country because she had a foreign accent and she was seen as "country club." Now another part of it could have been was one of our attack ads was about *her* stock in Kansas utilities.

Now you have to understand on that utility deal, this is my assessment: One, it was a real issue. It wasn't one we contrived, you know. I mean the typical Kansan would say, yeah, utility rates are going through the roof, and all the talk about Wolf Creek had just gone on top of that. So I said, if you can get your advertising to parallel what's on the news you got a real winner. If what you're saying in your ads is foreign to what the news folks are covering you're going to need to take a hell of a lot of money to get that point across. But if you're on the short side on money you need to find something.

And then the third element that was so key to this is: Bennett refused to respond. He absolutely refused to respond. He stuck with his position that there wasn't anything the governor could do. And I had my six-point program of leadership action points for myself as governor to address the issue, and they went into law. The Republicans like to say I just took a hokey issue and played with it. You know, we had a door hanger at the end, it looked like a utility bill, particularly in Wichita we used that. They can say what they want but as far as I'm concerned the key was Wolf Creek and that legislation we passed salvaged that whole deal.

You see the old law was that the corporation commission either approved or disapproved; either allowed the utility to fully recover the cost of building a new plant, or you denied it, they had to eat it all. Well, Wolf Creek was so expensive, for the first time something was so big, it would bankrupt the utility, but if you put it all on the rate payer, there would have been no way to do that. So our legislation would have simply changed the law to allow the corporation commission to, as best they could, balance things. So if this things going to be built and it's going to be part of the source of our utilities we're going to try to come up with a compromise that allows them to survive but also protects the rate payer and, you know, the sophistication of that was probably maybe more, certainly more, than we could communicate in the campaign

But I felt very, very comfortable as a candidate being out their championing the general cause because I felt we had a case. We were going to take the sales tax off, and we did, and there were three or four other things that were of less significance. But five of the six went into law while I was governor and the sixth one after I was governor.

Q: So before, the state required them to charge sales tax on their bills?

A: Yes. When I was running in that campaign, if you had a 20 dollar utility bill you paid sales tax on it too, and we said, you know, one thing the state could do - we never pretended it was like a life saver to people - but at least we could take that off.

Q: Quick question, in 1976 they had rejuvenated the presidential debates and ever since we had presidential debates, Kansas has had gubernatorial debates, the last two definitely and maybe even before that. Was there any talk of a debate between you and Bennett? Or did you challenge?

A: Oh, we had the debates.

Q: You had the debates.

A: Absolutely

Q: I didn't know that

A: WIBW for sure I can remember and I think there were at least maybe a couple others but I can guarantee you WIBW.

Q: So you had TV debates

A: Yes. Absolutely, yes. I don't think there were any primary debates.

Q: You remember how many debates for the general?

A: It wouldn't have been a large number.

Q: One or two probably?

A: WIBW. I can visually remember that night, and there might have been one or two more but it might have been the only one but there was definitely that one. WIBW.

Q: Let me ask one more question and then you can go into your talk with the governor about this, cause this goes into the campaign and then one of the big issues it hits you in your, I think, first one or two, couple, years as governor, which is the death penalty.

A: First Term, First Year

Q: The death penalty is passed, you veto it. Talk about what you had said in the campaign and then, from reading the articles that Virgil gave me...and the writers of the articles say there's sort of a big shock, a little bit at the veto, yes, and then, your thinking on that subject.

Okay, first of all, the death penalty, it was an issue when I was in the legislature. I always voted against the death penalty. I never considered it as like one of my key issues. I never went to the well to speak against the death penalty. I just cast my vote. There were prominent Republicans and Democrats who led the attack against it and it really never passed the legislature and it never was really very close.

I mean there were a lot of votes for it, but it wasn't like nail biting down to the last vote. In the house, my guess, my memory would be like 70-some against, 50-some for.

So that's the first key point. It was not a big issue for me. I wasn't on the stump campaigning against it. It wasn't one I always hammered, I never brought it up, you know, it was no big deal. And Bennett was a supporter. In the campaign in 1978 - and I can remember Fred Weaver and I talking about this and basically what we decided, and I was very comfortable, I was very honest about it - that I would never propose it. I would never come out as a proponent. If, you know, the legislature changed, and again, they'd been voting it down, voting it down, voting it down, but if they passed me one that, you know, wasn't blatantly unconstitutional or whatever, that I'd sign it.

I mean, it was out there in the public record but very seldom did it come up. I don't recall it ever being an issue, a real issue in the campaign. I don't recall Bennett trying making it an issue or trying to carve out a real wedge issue kind of thing. And so the fact was that I did make this statement maybe once that, you know, I don't think that I would veto it, assuming it was right, and I was very comfortable with that. It wasn't that big a deal, I mean I voted against it in the legislature but I wasn't going to fight the majority as governor.

When the legislature brought it up again, my folks were a little surprised, there wasn't a lot of thinking about it, but you know, there in my first legislative session as governor, the first session after I was elected and "boom!" they passed it, passed in April, towards the end of the first session, and my staff assumed I would sign it. There was never any discussion or review or any attempt on anyone's part to say, "now governor, let's review this. You always voted against it even though you said in the campaign blah, blah, blah, and we think politically you can survive it." There was nothing. No discussion.

And as I've said many times, the only way I could explain it was to draw the parallel with people being selected to the jury with capital crime being one of the issues and swearing to the prosecuting attorney that they were very supportive of the death penalty and then finding themselves after having decided the guilt of someone not being able to vote for the death penalty. As I said it was just, suddenly, it was the end of the session, there were a lot of bills coming, and I'm sure as you two know the process, it's gotta go through the secretary of state, so it doesn't just walk out of that vote down to the governors office for signature or veto.

It was then that I started thinking about it. And it was like this experience, I said with jurors, it was like, you know, suddenly I started thinking about it. And like I say, I hadn't been a real active participant, so I hadn't really articulated very much in depth in my own view, in my own conscience, the logical reasons for opposing, and I got sort of thinking about the poor representation of a lot of poor people and the potential for error and at some point I said to a member of my staff, I said, "I don't think I can sign this". And that's when somebody drafted me a veto message and, much to the entire shock of my staff, I signed it and sent it back to the legislature.

Q: Now, was there a high profile case or anything pending at the time that this moved through the legislature?

A: No. No certainly not one that impacted me.

Q: So, nothing like the Clutter family or anything like that that was hanging around?

A: If there was one I was oblivious to it.

Q: Now the context was different because there was a high profile case, but George Docking was against the death penalty. And John Anderson, we did an interview with him, he ran on the death penalty. So even though you didn't discuss it with your staff (you know, we've never been governor,

we've never been elected officials), you're sitting there, and does some part of you say, gosh, this could cost me reelection, but I'm going to do it anyway?

A: Oh, I made it very clear to my staff. I said, "I realize this is not the smartest political move," but I said. "I just can't, I can't do it. If I lose reelection, I mean that's just the way things have to be." But I have to say in credit to my staff, although they were shocked, they supported me. I did not have anybody sit down and say, "John, John, John, you can't do this." Philosophically, my staff agreed with me, but they had accepted the direction they assumed I was going to take and did not interfere.

Q: Although it's an aside, how big a staff did you have? How many people who were Carlin loyalists in the Governor's office in that term?

A: 20, 25.

Q: 25, okay and who were your principal people?

A: I had some good ones. Pat Hurley was obviously very key. Now here you're going to get me in trouble trying to remember all I should mention. But Hurley was with me, along with Joe Harkins, and Barbara Sabol. Dan Watkins, out of Lawrence, who interestingly enough is running the Obama campaign in Kansas. I had staff like Charneil Hadl, Nancy Ingle, Bob Wootton, and Mike Swenson. Deb Miller, who is the current secretary of transportation, was on my staff. She may not have been there that first year. But when I think of the big picture, I really had some really, really, really bright people. I mean unbelievable.

I had John Myers, who's an education whiz for a group out of Denver now. He was brought back in on the school finance fight in the last few years. Terri Johnsen, who now is a top staff person for the Federal Reserve in Washington D.C., works directly for the chair. Steve Millstein, he's been an incredibly successful businessman in Texas, unbelievable. Steve Holsteen, likewise, they were two very, very young, very, very bright, both gone on to huge success in the private sector. Huge success. Sister Jeanne McKenna, who wrote the death penalty veto message. Larry Wolgast, Bill Hoch, and many others. Shirley Allen was one of my first loyal volunteers, I remember her walking in when I was in the speaker's office. She was a schoolteacher up north of Topeka, said I want to volunteer. I said well that's great, I'll pay you a little bit but not very much and she left teaching and she was with me the whole way. I would put the team I had up against anybody's team.

Q: One of the things that you commented on in the first interview was that there, for reasons known and unknown, there was not much of a transition plan when you came in. Bennett essentially didn't expect to lose and sort of packed his bags and got out.

A: The first help we got were the keys the day before. (Laughs)

Q: So did you have a group of people that were familiar with executive office functions who volunteered to consult and help you put together a plan? Or was it just strictly, "Okay boys lets whistle and dance and get to work."

A: [The transition] was primarily driven by the colleagues I had in the legislature.

As to whether the Docking people helped him in the campaign and transition:

A: Bob Docking did an ad for me [in the 1978 campaign].

Q: An endorsement ad?

A: An endorsement ad for me that we ran in September a little bit. It was used kind of a little out there to get something going. But the Docking machine did not come on board and campaign. They weren't there. You know, his key people were not rushing to help me campaign. They didn't like me. That's a little too strong, but I mean they were not my supporters.

So the transition was primarily driven by these talented young people that I had, several with legislative experience, legislative staff experience.

Q: Now when you left, or at the end of this process, you also, I think, commented that you actually...that your administration wrote a paper which the national governors association took as a model for the new executive on scene. So you apparently had quite a lesson process.

A: I had a team that were politically interested but they were primarily driven by government public service.

Q: Good that was another question I wanted to ask.

A: You know that's what drove them. And so this was a team that enjoyed the work. They didn't abandon me in big numbers and leave me. They were with me until January 1979. Not all, there was some transition, but I had a solid team right to the end. And consequently we were working until the last day. We were looking for opportunities to do good right to the last. And one of them was this transition plan that future new administrations could use. And we worked hard to pull the records of my administration together. Many of my predecessors destroyed records. But in fairness to them there was no law, there was no automatic response that "this is the way we always do it." But I worked hard to gather the key information from all my executive agencies to go with my governor's records, to move to the State Historical Society. I felt that's where they belong. Some of my predecessors, you know some went to KU, and in some cases, some didn't go anywhere.

Q: Now in the period between November and January, did you craft a policy agenda? You know, what I'm going to accomplish in the first 100 days. I mean did you think about, was there sort of a Robert Redford moment where you woke up and said oh my goodness, now what do we do?

A: Oh no, no, no, there was no advance planning. People would have laughed at the idea that we were going to win in 1978, aside from a few of my inside people who remained, saying "there's still a chance there's still a chance!" But it would have been a joke if there had been a story that leaked that Carlin was planning a transition. That would have been just one big opening for cartoonists to really hurt me. So not only were we smart enough not to do it, we were realistic enough to not do it. So we win and then it's starting from scratch - inaugural activities, what to do, putting it all together. I mean it was chaos.

Q: Now you're responsible for submitting a budget to the legislature in that first month that you're in office.

A: Right. That's right, but there's where we were in good shape, that was our strength, because I'd been on the Ways and Means Committee. I mean, we were taking Bennett's budget and writing the legislative budget, so we knew the process, we knew the key people, we knew how things worked, we had experience with the immediate budget we were inheriting. So in that sense we were in good shape.

We were not outsiders, we were insiders, both in terms of me as well as my key folks, so that was not a problem.

You know, every budget is a challenge. But it wasn't like I was an executive in business out of Wichita with a Wichita kind of chamber staff and we win and say, "Budget? Who's the budget director?" You know, I inherited the budget director, Jim Bibb, who had been there forever, and I had worked with him for six years as a legislator.

Later I made a change. I said it was time for a different approach. I brought in an outsider, outside the state of Kansas, Lynn Muchmore, and we established some very different procedures. And one of the things that I'm very proud of is that for a so-called "tax and spend liberal Democratic governor," when I left office there were no more state employees than when I took office. And we were able to do that because one of the things Muchmore brought to me, he said, its not complicated, he says, when you have a cabinet secretary come in and says, "I got this great idea, I'm going to need six FTEs," all you have to say is "Find 'em." Because if this so great, you've got to cut something not so important.

Q: And had you gotten to a billion dollar budget by the time you were governor?

A: I think so at the end, but you'd have to check on this. The dramatic change to today is dramatically less federal funding. It was 50 percent when I was governor, roughly. And it's way down now.

Q: The death penalty issue comes up and smacks you in the first session. You put your utility reforms in place. What other accomplishments in the first gubernatorial term stand out?

A: In terms of standing out, little or nothing. A lot of basic things were done. I worked well with the Republican legislature.

Q: You had a Democratic majority at no point

A: No point. At no point. I had Republican leadership the whole way.

Q: But you said you had tons of vetoes and yet you worked with the legislature?

A: I did. It was kind of an amazing hat trick or however you want to put it. I was dependant upon Republicans to pass my program and dependant on Democrats to protect my vetoes. That's the honest to God truth - you look at the votes! And particularly towards the end, because the Democrat numbers were not good. And I vetoed measures that passed unanimously and got the Democrats to accept the fact that they made a mistake. I gave them the logical argument - you know, here's a problem, here's your answer. I'm not aware that any of them got in trouble because they stood behind me.

Q: Did you campaign for members of the legislature in the second half of your first term in office?

A: I worked very hard for legislative candidates as governor and I worked very hard for legislative candidates when I left office. I continued to work for them, raised them a lot of money. My biggest fundraiser was always my birthday party and I continued to have that for many years after I left office; all the money going for the legislative candidates.

Q: So there would be a vote for something you were very interested in. It would pass unanimously. You were going to veto it, and...

A: These were measures that did not surface in terms of lots of publicity. In fairness to the legislators, they could say to the administration, "Why in the hell didn't you get word out before the vote?" You try to follow everything, once in a while you could get a bill on your desk and realize they didn't quite have the understanding of it and they could blame us, and rightfully, so that we didn't come testify, and lay it out and so forth.

Q: And so you'd ask them to sustain your veto?

A: Yes. I'd veto it for x-y-z reasons and we would go to the legislature, to the Democrats and say, "You know it was a mistake."

Q: Okay, just as a purely logistic proposition, this piece of legislation comes to your desk. Your staff has looked at it, says governor, this one's a stinker. Did you work your legislative contingent before you wrote the veto message and let them know it was coming? Or did you veto it and then do the work?

A: Generally we vetoed and went to them right away. Then my legislative affairs person would go to the Democratic caucus and simply lay out, here's the deal, we're not trying to play games, but unfortunately there's a flaw here, a serious flaw, and it needs to be corrected. You pass me a bill, a corrected bill, and I'll sign it.

But the Republicans, they always looked for an opportunity to override my budget to embarrass me, or override my veto. So even though they weren't overly ticked off that I vetoed the bill, they made the Democrats line up and be the ones to be on record. They wanted their vote in the record to be consistent. They could say they voted for it originally, they voted to override the governor's veto and it was those damned Democrats who didn't know where they were.

Q: How did you pick your lieutenant governor? Running mate.

A: Paul Dugan, Wichita. We had served together in the legislature. The thinking was, one, we knew each other. We had some what of a similar background- although he was a Wichita lawyer business man - had kind of a small town, rural background. He was not an urbanite. But yet brought Wichita and Sedgwick County into play and Sedgwick County was much more Democratic in their voting pattern then than they are today. And so it was a logical move.

The part of the story that we need to fill in here is with Paul is that - getting back to what we've already discussed - the Docking Democrats were very unhappy with some of my appointments because of what we talked about earlier and the death penalty. Paul, in the first two years - I can't say exactly when - but certainly in the first two years, abandoned me.

He kept the office of the lieutenant governor, but he made it very clear he was no longer a part of the Carlin team and that very likely he would run to oppose me in the primary in 1982.

Q: And it was over the death penalty issue?

A: No, it was a combination of things. The good, loyal Democratic county chairs across the state were very, very unhappy with Carlin.

Q: Because of the patronage issue?

A: Yes, yes absolutely, totally. They didn't follow issues, they followed patronage. They followed what they had run on to become county chair. And, you know, people were asking, what's going on here? And so, for example, Cary out of Wyandotte County, Tilton out of Shawnee County, Moore out of Sedgwick County, were very, very upset. And so that was giving Paul Dugan the idea that, "I want to be with them as soon as possible." The only way to make that clear is to separate myself from Carlin, and so he quit coming in to work. And of course that job was part-time then. It wasn't like it was suddenly a big issue. He was getting a very minimal salary. He had a staff of one, maybe two.

Q: At that time he had a staff of one when you agreed...when he agreed to be your lieutenant governor? Obviously it's a part-time job, but did you say or did he say (of course we know nowadays with the vice president, who can do lots of things; now even the lieutenant governor in the Sebelius administration led all these task forces), did you say, did you want to do something? Or did he say I would like to do something? How did you leave it? Did you say you can do whatever you want? How was the arrangement?

A: Well, there was no job for the lieutenant governor and then the law changed and the lieutenant governor could have a cabinet position in one of the reforms during my time.

Q: So when Dugan came in though...

A: No, no, no. There wasn't a lot of discussion. It was an opportunity for him to be visible and maybe to succeed me down the road, that sort of thing. And suddenly he saw the opportunity to succeed me much earlier. (laughs) Now this was in the first two years. By the time the second two years came along, that possibility drifted away. He never did run, it never did develop it into something real. And, so, I obviously had an opening to pick Tom Docking and did, and driven by a visible decision to merge the Carlins with the Dockings.

Q: Now that's interesting because you said there was no love lost by the Dockings toward your administration.

A: When I say that there was no love lost between the Carlins and the Dockings, keep in mind when I'm talking about that, I'm talking about all those county chairs across the state. I'm not necessarily focusing on the family. You know, Bob Docking cut an ad for me in the 1978 election. Now some would argue that he should have gone further, he should have called all these people and said, "Get behind him." But, he did what he did. It was all those others who weren't happy.

And so in sitting down with Tom Docking, there was no big repair, no pleading or whatever. Tom came on board because he saw an opportunity, and he was loyal, dedicated. He and Jill [Sadowsky Docking] were friends and supporters. So, you have to understand this in the context of the whole picture.

There wasn't this one-on-one duel between me and Bob Docking.

Q: The Docking county chairs/organization people were not happy with the patronage...

A; And post-Watergate. You got to get post-Watergate in there. And the fact that you had four years of Bennett in there that further complicated things. Because they lost their power during Bennett but they didn't understand why. They just assumed it was this Republican governor. So we get a Democrat back and they think: "We're back, we're back." Nobody explained to them and I wasn't

smart enough to see and understand all of this to communicate, “I’m sorry the law’s changed, it’s a different ballgame.”

Q: Now, Docking, today lives in Wichita?

A: Tom Docking, yes.

Q: Yes, Tom. So was he Sedgwick County then too?

A: Oh yes.

Q: So enabled a little bit of a geographical offset?

A: Right. Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Q: And everybody, when you had Tom Docking join you...

A: He was very young.

Q: He was 27, which is very young. Was there any sort of, in the Democratic party, trying to merge the Docking people, was there other people saying, “Hey, I’d like to be lieutenant governor. I’ve been active in politics for 30 years and this guy’s never even run for office and he’s 27. Was there any of that? Or you don’t remember?

A: Well, you see if Dugan had been a good, loyal lieutenant governor I think we would have had a very different picture. But he made it wide open for me, with him not on the list. I mean, nobody would have thought that I would go back to Paul Dugan and say I forgive you for abandoning me. *Whatever*. That would have been stupid.

Q: As a reward for your all your help these past two years...

A: We later connected and we speak now. We’re not close but, I mean, we’re certainly not enemies, you know. I mean, he did what he thought was logical and I fully understood him.

Q: Paul Wunsch was going to run for governor after Anderson, and he didn’t want any budget problems when he ran. And Anderson essentially said, “Sorry Bud,” and that was the end of his aspirations at that point. You know it’s nothing personal, it’s just the way policy breaks.

A: An interesting little side note on that is that Paul Wunsch did me no harm. I won’t say he actively did anything to help me, but there was some carryover. I think it would be fair to say he was not a Bob Bennett fan. To the best of my knowledge he never did anything publicly, but I can clearly remember going to his office in Kingman, his law office, and visiting with him. He was very warm and friendly and asked if I had any problems. And I got along very well with his son who later served in the legislature. And Bob always remembered that I was very polite and respectful of his father.

Q: Let’s deal with the split in the Republican party first and then I’ll ask about the severance tax. Okay, you want to talk about the split?

A: In a significant way, it did not start until after I left office.

Q: I always thought the split as beginning with Roe, the '73 Supreme Court decision which galvanized the pro-life element of the social conservatives.

A: Right, but their presence in a significant way would not have come until the mid 1980's. Because from my general election opponent in 1982, Sam Hardage, a business man out of Wichita - abortion was never an issue, nor in my entire career. Not only was abortion not an issue, but in the 1982 campaign it was my tax increase recommendation versus his that was the issue. You know, if you want evidence of how things have dramatically changed, there it is. He not only did not make a big deal about me vetoing the death penalty, he opposed my severance tax and he wanted to raise the gas tax. Now, I mean that wouldn't happen today.

Q: When did the split, the conservative/moderate split take place?

A: I mean it was after, it was post-Carlin.

Now, against Sam Hardage, these commercials I ran, I would say, "Do you want a severance tax that the oil companies pay or would you like to pay a higher gas tax?" That's the choice you have, Carlin vs. Hardage.

Q: Hardage was the gas tax?

A: Gas tax. I mean, it was like when he did that, we started feeling pretty good.

Q: What prompted the interest in a severance tax? How did you come to that as an issue?

A: Well in the early 1980's, very, very early 1980's, we had an economic problem which led to a serious revenue problem. Serious. And as I looked to the 1980's through the mid 1980's, we needed to have something. And Mike Lennen, who was my secretary of revenue, as much as anyone, said look, we're one of the few rural energy producing states of significance that doesn't have a severance tax. All that coal coming in from Wyoming, that we use to make electricity, Kansas citizens are paying Wyoming severance tax.

And so, in terms of looking at the options, I decided that was the one I would go to the legislature and fight for. Now, the legislature, in the sessions of 1981 and 1982, they turned me down. So the 1982 race was set up. You know, it made no sense to abandon it, I was clearly on record, so why not run on it? So I made it very clear that was going to be the issue I was going to run on for reelection.

Q: Now, did you have the opportunity then to run against big oil...

A: Of course.

Q: ...and very profitable corporations...

A: Of course.

Q: ...so you're sort of hitting the same thing you were hitting with the utilities tax.

A: Well, yeah.

Q: It's kind of a populist...

A: It's kind of populist, yes, absolutely. But again, from my point of view, it wasn't just a wild populist move that didn't connect with reality. It connected to the real issues we had, in that to me this was the fairest and best choice. And Hardage, then, was not going to support the severance tax; that would be counter to all his supporters. But he supported a user gas tax, because it was a combination of education funding and transportation funding that was needed, a combination.

And so it worked beautifully because again, as I told you in 1978 and 1982 there was an acknowledged recognition that we had a funding problem. And there were at least some in the news media that would give me a fair presentation on the severance tax. So, once again, the news, to some degree at least, and my campaign, meshed. So it made for a powerful reelection issue. Far more powerful, because he was willing to promote the gas tax increase. And so that allowed me to say, "Folks, the choice is very simple, do you want to pay a higher gas tax or do you want the rich oil companies and utility users out of state to pay a severance tax?"

Q: And did the energy companies oblige you during this time by expanding production in Kansas as well? This was the time of the over thrust belt exploration out in the Rockies and there was a heavy emphasis on improving domestic production and of course the energy companies came off badly because they profited from OPEC.

A: They were profiting but they were trying to make the side argument that, "Well, that might have been good, Carlin, back when we were producing big volumes, but you're just taking what is now a declining industry and destroying it." That was the argument.

Q: So there was a downward trend in the production curve? You hadn't had an uptick of any sort?

A: And we acknowledged that to a certain extent by having, you know, a *stripper well* treated differently.

Q: Ultimately did you get the severance tax?

A: Oh, yes, ultimately we got the severance tax, oh, yes. When I won, the Republican legislature had no choice if they wanted to continue their position in office.

Q: So that would have come in the '83 session?

A: Yes. That's my memory. And it was clearly with Republican support.

Q: As you just mentioned, amazing in the modern context, both candidates dueling over what tax to have.

A: You know, I tell my classes openly that I could never have been elected in the first place and certainly not reelected in today's climate. Except, except, as I tell my class, and this is true consistently through the history of Kansas, the Democrats have only won when the Republicans screwed up. The early screw ups were not this moderate conservative divide, it was two different factions within the Republican Party, different power families dueling and dueling in the primary and not coming together. That's how we won.

You go back all through history, Democrats occasionally won one term, then Republicans would unite, throw the Democrat out. That is until George Docking. The factions then were so strong that they only finally got together when Docking tried to go for a third two-year term. John Anderson beat him. And a lot of it was because no Republican ever had the audacity to run for a third term, that was not the Kansas way, you're trying to establish an empire or dynasty or whatever, and so there was a combination of things there that allowed Anderson to come back. And then Bob Docking got back in because of Avery and the split over the sales tax.

Republicans never could mount a good candidate when they fight in the primary.

Q: So Democrats, regardless of the current split, when there is some form of split in the Republican Party, that leaves an opening for the Democrats.

A: You look at Sebelius and her two very successful campaigns. Republicans deserve a lot of credit. I mean even her election as insurance commissioner - I mean, Holy cow, the incumbent! How he could have ever expected to win any election is beyond me.

Q: Anything else happen in that second term that stands out?

A: Well, if it's not in there it should be in there: My decision in November of 1982 to publicly say, "I will not run against Bob Dole in 1986," was a strategic decision of significance. I had a lot of people, they didn't like it. Because here I was going to finish two four-year terms as governor of Kansas, you know, gee Gods, why not take Bob Dole on and beat him? But I wanted to accomplish as much as I could in my term and I knew I couldn't do it if I was thought of as a political animal. You know, how could I sit down with Republicans during the day and expect them to help me and at night be running against Bob Dole? It couldn't work, so that was the first thing.

And that, more than anything else, allowed me to partner with Republicans in the legislature to get endless things done. I mean you look at the second term. There were successes in the first term, but at least 80 percent of what I did successfully, was done in the second term by partnering with Republicans. Because, you know, Jack Steineger who was the Democrat leader in the Senate, he was not going to let his Democrats vote for anything that required a revenue measure. So all of the revenue measures - we had sales tax increase, gas tax increase, fee increase, the severance tax - all came in my second term. Because the economy got just continually worse.

You know Ross Doyen was thought of as a hardnosed conservative Republican leader of the Senate, and he was, but we could work together. He was not the kindest to me in the public arena, but, getting the work done, we worked together. Bottom line: Republican legislators in those days wanted to do what was best for the state. And so consequently we got a lot done.

At the end of my second four years, the Constitutional amendments were very, very significant and I was able to get a two-thirds vote to get all those on the ballot. And particularly I'm proud of the fact that I got a two-thirds vote on every one, and Hayden opposed me, I think on every one, certainly the significant ones and he was speaker of the house and I was able to get a two-thirds vote to get all those passed. There was a partnering with some powerful special interest groups that helped and just working it, working it, working it. But the lottery, pari-mutuel betting, internal improvements, the property tax amendment, those four were the major ones and then there were two others.

Q: The property amendment changed the appraising process, the assessment process? And this is the thing, much like your patronage issue with Bennett, this is the thing Hayden got poked in the head with, right?

A: Absolutely, no question about it. Because the implementation took place during his time. And I don't know how he feels about it in terms of whether he has, you know would like to redo it, and handle the PR of it. I will defend that decision as one of the most fair, sound public policy positions the state's ever taken. I mean, what we had up to that time was totally unfair. If you stayed in your house you kept the old appraisal forever. So people moving or building new houses paid the bulk of the property taxes in any community. Well how could you say that was fair?

Q: And how are you ever going to stimulate growth in a situation like that?

A: Yeah. Move to Kansas and carry the burden so that the people who've always been here don't have to pay taxes! That's a slightly extreme statement but not that much. And I said that was wrong. But the old adage absolutely is true, true, true, in politics. And that is, all the people that benefited did not thank Mike Hayden. And all the people that felt like they got screwed, even though they had been benefiting for years, blamed him.

Q: Absolutely. Opposition is always more intense than support. '86, you've done two terms, so you're not running again. But you come back in '90, you try again in '90, and Joan Finney winds up getting the nomination. What do you think it? Is it, "he'd done two terms, a third term is unwarranted" proposition? What was the crux of the problem in 1990?

A: The crux of the problem in 1990 was one, overconfidence, with my staff, myself, my supporters. And secondly, totally underestimating a woman that had gone to every damn bean feed, for 16 or 20 years, that the Democratic Party had ever held in the state of Kansas! And, she was a former Republican, and she retained some of that Republican support. She had been a staff person for Frank Carlson for many, many years.

One of the lessons I took from 1990, and I share it with my students now, is it is very, very difficult to debate someone who doesn't want to have an in-depth discussion of all the issues. I mean Joan Finney, whether by intention or not, she had these two or three points and she stuck with them and there was no discussion of anything complex. And what I teach my students is - I use Adlai Stevenson as an example - you don't want to be the egghead. And if you are, you gotta have a strategy to address it as much as you can.

Q: Yeah, Bob pointed out to me the other day that Adlai Stevenson won the college professor vote. No legs.

A: Oh, yeah, overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly. He had my support. He was one of the first Democrats I got excited about. And to some extent, I think that reasonable people would say that I was the egghead in 1990 but I wasn't against Bob Bennett in 1978. And I point out that that was to my advantage in 1978. I was the one who was connecting with "Joe six-pack." But in 1990 I had come out of sixteen years of government service, I was the former speaker, the former two-term governor, I understood the damn issues and I had a plan that I felt would correct the problems of the Hayden's four years, in depth.

Q: This is a more updated election '90 verses '78. Did you do any primary polling at this point or still no?

A: In the 1990 primary we didn't do polling that much. I mean, why waste money? We were raising money. And also the other factor that we didn't anticipate, Fred Phelps was in the race. I learned something from that, you know. You've got to watch these multiple candidate primaries,

particularly when there's no runoff. And I really believe a lot of people that were very friendly and supportive of me voted for Joan because they didn't want her embarrassed. You know, a woman running for governor, always been good to their bean feeds and supporters. And don't get me wrong here in terms of how I'm describing her, I'm just trying to paint it in a picture of how I saw it. You know, she had paid her dues, Joan Finney had. And she'd been a loyal Democrat, and had put together a grass roots for the 1990 race that eclipsed my 1978 effort, in many respects. Whether it was organized or not, it was there. And it was still close. What it would have been like one on one without Fred Phelps, I don't know.

Q: He actually ran ads, we actually have some ads.

A: And this was before Phelps was certifiably crazy.

Q: Before the big gay stuff.

A: Yeah, see, to put this in context, in 1988 the Phelps family was very, very active, and publicly so, in the Al Gore campaign. It was before going crazy.

Q: So he was Fred Phelps before he was Fred Phelps. Before the now Fred Phelps.

A: "Before the Now Fred Phelps," is the way to put it, because I will take you to one of the primary debates, and we had a bunch of them never televised. But we had endless primary debates. And I mean, that's why I said before, you know, debating Joan Finney and Fred Phelps was like a nightmare. I mean, it was a nightmare.

Q: Oh my gosh. That's Kansas history right there.

A: Yeah, and the classic one with Fred was at a Hutchinson church. And see, what I had failed to acknowledge, both of them were attacking me. Joan Finney attacked me because I was not a populist. I was opposed to initiative and referendum. I was opposed to the people running the state of Kansas. Okay? And this kind of triggered a little bit with some of the old Docketing thinking because Norbert Dreiling always wanted me, when he would privately kind of advise me a little bit, he'd push this issue, the initiative and referendum. I just frankly think that's bad government.

So they were both attacking me. And I failed to take into account that I wasn't responding. I mean, why would I have to respond to Fred Phelps? Why would I have to respond to a very nice lady but one never involved in issues beyond initiative and referendum? Why would I? Even though she's likable, loved by Democrats? Voters understood. Anyway this night at this church, they're both going after me, but Fred Phelps attack is: "John, I love you like a brother but, you know, on liquor by the drink, you're wrong," he didn't get into the gay issue; they were starting that a little bit, but he didn't bring that out in the campaign, but he did the alcohol issue. And so, he said, you know, "Every death on the highways in Kansas, it's your fault, John Carlin, and the people of Kansas need to remember that. He's the one that has brought us all these alcohol problems. We wouldn't have this if he didn't do it."

Q: Oh, so you presided over the reform of liquor by the drink...?

A: Yeah, liquor by the drink. It was one I literally pushed through and debated Reverend Taylor on that in that 1986 campaign. You know I went out to Beloit in one of the Chautauqua kind of revivals in the tent. It was significantly covered. But anyway, Fred Phelps that night at the Hutchinson

church says, “John, I love you like a brother but you’re just as dumb as molasses on this one.” Just ripped, just ripped me, but it was over and over, the standard: “John I love you like a brother, but...” So at the end of the debate, I had the end of my ninety seconds to wrap up and so I turned to Fred and said, “Fred you know we have a lot of these to go, this is maybe June, we have a lot of these to go,” and I said, “If you keep up this ‘You know, I love you like a brother,’ by the time we get to the election, people are going to start to get suspicious about our relationship.” He went white as a sheet and had no response.

That was one of my great moments with Fred Phelps. He’s gone from that position he took then, to what I think is literally hating me.

Q: Hating you now?

A: Well I think so. I assume so. I don’t know if I’d put it in the context of hate or not but it comes out like that when they attack people. One of my experiences with the family in a more contemporary time was at the Reagan funeral in Washington. The service at the Cathedral with a huge, huge crowd, huge, huge security because we got every foreign dignitary whatever and because of the archives and the Reagan Library, it was important that I attend, and I wanted to. So I attend and after it’s over it’s just chaos, in terms of people leaving, you’ve got security trying to get all important people out, etc., etc. And my wife and I are trying to figure out a better route back to the car because we had to walk a long, long, ways and so we’re walking along this street and out of the corner of my eye, I see the Phelps’ and those damn signs and they’re singing. It was my first experience to the vocals, although I’m not surprised, because back when they were in good standing with the Democrats, they were always an important part of the entertainment. I mean the Phelps girls singing at Democratic Washington days was standard in the 80’s. Standard. I mean, they were very, very talented. They are very talented. I mean they were very, very good.

So I see them out of the corner of my eye and they’re singing and I’m not kidding, this sounds unbelievable, they worked “John Carlin” into the lyrics because they saw me coming down the street. I mean this is just beyond what’s realistic. So they must have a system, you know, where they can plug in names. It was just a continuation, and all of a sudden “John Carlin” was in the lyrics and you can only imagine what they were singing.
