Michael Smith: Welcome back to Salina!

Bill Graves: Thank you. It's nice to get back to Kansas. I enjoyed my drive across I-70 late yesterday when I came from Kansas City to Manhattan. I hadn't been in Manhattan in ages. There's been a lot of changes in the downtown of that community looks.

MS: You're right.

BG: Anyway, it was all good. I just took a walk over—I had not even seen the sports complex. I walked over there. It's a nice addition to campus. I'm happy to have had a part in that.

MS: Yes, they love their sports at K-State.

BG: Yes, it's everywhere, it seems like.

MS: I agree.

BG: You've got a new president at Emporia State?

MS: We do, Allison Garrett. I like her. She brought Fred Gray to campus. He was Martin Luther King Jr's lawyer and the lawyer for Rosa Parks and the Tuskegee syphilis study victims and the Gomillion v. Lightfoot voting rights case in the sixties. That's the one where they redrew the city to draw African Americans outside city limits. He's eighty-five years old, and he's still one heck of a speaker.

We have a Constitution Day every year. On Constitution Day or the Friday before if it's a weekend as it was this year, we invite about 500 middle and high school students to come on campus. He was our featured speaker, and she scheduled her inauguration back to back with Constitution Day so that Fred Gray could be the Constitution Day speaker after he spoke at the inauguration. It was really great. So, as far as we're concerned, she's gotten off to a really good start with that.

BG: I know it's been a very challenging time generally speaking, but certainly for education in the state.

MS: It has.

BG: Kansas State loses their president. I can't imagine that Washington and Washington State, I can't imagine that it was a significantly more lucrative or professionally challenging opportunity. Then I know that we have a new president at Fort Hays State not long ago. We have a new president at Emporia State. We just got the announcement of Chancellor Gray leaving KU.

MS: Yes, that was a big one.

BG: It feels to me like from a distance that some of the stresses and strains of running world-class educational institutions with kind of one arm tied behind your back kind of wears people out.

MS: I don't doubt it. I know that when Michael Shonrock was president, he spent a lot of time in Topeka. I think all of them do, especially during those first four months of the year. Maybe we could use that as a segue way into the more formal part of our interview, if that's okay with you.

BG: Sure. What do you want to talk about?

MS: Well, we can just play off of what you were just talking about. Some of us newspaper columnists have made the argument that a lot of the more talented administrators in Kansas have left in the past six years, looking at early retirement options or going to work in the private sector, what have you. Have you heard about that? Do you have an opinion about that?

BG: I haven't really heard about it. I've watched some of the more high-profile leadership transition out of the state. Some of this has gone on from the day the country was founded. So, it's not necessarily new, but there certainly appears to be a strong element in our state legislature that is—well, they have suspicions or concerns about government in all forms and fashions, a belief I think that it's somehow taken on too significant a role in our society, and they tend to have this notion that if we can make government smaller if it just simply has a less significant role, especially the higher-up national state. Everything is better if it filters down to more local control.

I guess it was never a perspective that I shared. I always thought government at all levels had very well defined and important roles, and I'll be the first one to rail against wasteful educational spending, but I'll also be the first one to support quality education opportunities for everyone. I hate bridges to nowhere, but I will propose tax increases to raise the funding for necessary infrastructure improvements. I don't support social service programs that create dependency upon government, but I support social service programs that are necessary for people who are in need of either temporary or in some instances permanent assistance. I just think there's a certain thinking right now that somehow government is an enemy of the people and not a partner and a supporting element of a great quality of life.

MS: You know, the criticism that you get, I'm sure you've heard the term "RINO," which does not mean you're a rhinoceros, but Republican In Name Only. Your critics would say if that's what you believe, what makes you different from a Democrat then?

BG: First of all, I'm not sure what gives those individuals any right or any notion that they define who is or what is or isn't a Republican.

MS: You know, like litmus tests.

BG: Well, I mean, they may be surprised to find out that I'm the Republican, and maybe they're not because the Republican party, in my opinion, always prided itself on being very pro-business. I believe businesses can grow and attract people to work in their companies and grow

 

their companies if there are great educational systems that support the communities they're in, if there are economic development programs and sometimes clear incentives to get them started and growing in a community. I think the availability of health care has always been important to everyone, and it's certainly important to anyone that's trying to build businesses.

I think right now at the national level, we're seeing a very robust debate over what today's Republican party stands for. I certainly am one who is a traditional Republican and proud of it. I think that some of the recent election outcomes maybe are starting to be indicative that those that have taken control of the party apparatus maybe have ventured just a bit far afield, and that there'll be a course correction in my opinion over the next four or five election cycles. Or I think the party will, what's left of it, will be a skeletal remain of what it once was.

MS: When you were governor, I spent some time in the Statehouse doing research, and I know that you were often labeled as a leader along with Speaker Glasscock, Majority Leader Oleen and some others as a leader of what they call "the moderates." There was even a group in the legislature that called themselves "The Mod Squad." Were you comfortable with that label? Did you think that was accurate?

BG: It was very accurate. Again, we viewed ourselves as traditional Republicans whose attention was on budgets and the performance and role of government in supporting people's quality of life. We were not necessarily particularly interested in social issues that we thought 1) had either been decided or at least were more in the purview of the federal government and the court system. I think you probably know then if you did your research I never felt like Kansans needed to carry weapons to be safe and be secure and vetoed a concealed carry bill. As I mentioned already, I proposed and signed a couple of different fuel tax increases for infrastructure investment.

What we saw happening in the mid-nineties which is really now evolved to where I think we are both nationally and in Kansas, the conservative element was emerging and starting to exert themselves to the point that the only way we did business was by building coalitions with Democrat members of the state legislature. I happened to believe it worked quite well. I was never one who thought compromise was—there was anything wrong with compromising. I believe that it often brought us to a point that was closest to what the totality of Kansans were looking for in their state government.

I think the record will speak for itself. Again, we had a tremendous success with our support for our public and higher education, for our infrastructure well beyond roads and bridges and our general aviation and our public transportation. We did a lot of streamlining and subcontracted social service programs, oftentimes not necessarily targeted at saving money, but because we found not-for-profit organizations that were much more passionate, committed, and capable of delivering quality social service programs than we had with a large collection of state employees. So, restructuring of the governance of higher education was part of the eight years that I was in office. Over the objections of many, we expanded some prison capacity because we needed to. We were woefully inadequate. We were trying to be tough on sentencing. I believed that if we were going to be tough on sentencing criminals, we needed to have places to adequately house them. I was pretty proud of the extensive list of accomplishments we had in those eight years.

 

MS: One of those accomplishments you already mentioned is roads. There were some fuel tax increases. There were major roads bills passed. Now, you're the scion of a family that made its money in the trucking industry and today you work in the trucking industry as an advocate. Did you see that as a conflict of interest?

BG: No. In fact, again, I'll proudly say that my passion and support for that investment was the direct result of the appreciation I developed throughout my entire life for mobility, the need in our state and our nation to move—not just freight, but for people. In an agricultural state like Kansas, there's nothing more important than farmers having the connectivity to take whatever it is they're producing to markets. You couple that with the work we did with the railroads as part of that bill. As I said, general aviation, a lot of —Kansas was the general aviation capital of the world, and unfortunately, I don't know that some still think that's true. With what was Beechcraft and Cessna and Lear Jet all based in Wichita, it only made sense to support that industry. As I mentioned, our public transit which was starting to emerge as important modes of transportation for people in the more populated areas of Wichita and Kansas City, Topeka even.

I reached out to the woman who at the time was the head of the Kansas Motor Carriers Association. Her name was Mary Turkington. Mary actually was a co-chairman of the commission that went on an extensive tour of the state, seeking input from anyone who had input to provide on what the state ought to do in terms of infrastructure investment. She knew full well, and she conveyed to those who were active in the trucking industry and the state that roads and bridges aren't free. They're not cheap. To enhance investment would take additional funds and most likely be a fuel tax. After some initial resistance from again the more conservative elements of the legislature, the package passed overwhelmingly. In hindsight, I can safely say it was probably considerably easier than I ever would have thought.

MS: What was some of the inside baseball there that was involved in getting that passed?

BG: It started with the notion of the commission, which I stayed kind of out of. I put together a bipartisan, very diverse group of individuals, and I can't tell you off the top of my head, but I want to say they had twenty-four town hall meetings throughout the state, where Chambers of Commerce and business and industry and whoever it might be was able to share their wish list for what we would like to see done if the state develops a pool of resources to make a substantial investment. They did a fine job gathering lots of data.

Then the Department of Transportation—I had a tremendous secretary of transportation. His name is Dean Carlson. Dean had been the executive director of the Federal Highway Administration before coming to Kansas. He was intimately knowledgeable about all of the federal funding, sort of the ins and outs of how states and feds match up their dollars for maximum benefit. Dean's team took that list of all of the things that were asked for and sort of made a reasonable judgment based on the expertise of the Department of Transportation of where to draw the line. And ultimately it sort of came in at like 13 billion dollars. I think we had 32 billion in requests, and we concluded that we could get the bar up to 13 billion over ten years. Dean's team sort of prioritized if we had that amount of money, here's what we would do. We made a commitment that every county in Kansas would get a minimum threshold of financial

 

support. So, whether they were really high up on the priority list, they'd at least have something that would entice them to be supportive of the program.

Again, we made it multimodal. We didn't irritate the railroads. They were part of the deal. The aviation was part of the deal. It was a big comprehensive package, which was what was called the Comprehensive Transportation, CTP, and then it just took the political willingness to lead with your chin in telling people, "Okay, here's what we need in the way of money, and it involves raising your fuel tax," which for a Republican is not easy to do. I understood that then. I understand it today, but it becomes a question of, "What are you elected to do?" I think too many people run for office with a willingness to do the easy stuff, but when it comes time to do the hard stuff, they come up with all of these excuses for—"You can't do that. That's a rail you can't touch." Well, then you shouldn't have run in the first place.

MS: Speaking of roads, I remember that time. I remember that there was a lot of contrast between Kansas and Missouri about road quality. I wanted to ask you about your relationship, since Kansas shares its largest metro area with another state, how was your relationship with Governors Carnahan and Holden?

BG: I got along with Mel Carnahan quite well. We never had serious disagreements or disputes. I didn't work as closely with Governor Holden because it was the tail end, if you will, of my time in office. I was aware of the comparisons, and I guess I wasn't the governor of Missouri. I was the governor of Kansas. I did what I could do to help my state, and I would be helpful and supportive of anyone else, Republican or Democrat, if they aspired to try to emulate that kind of a program in their states. I mean, our most significant partnership with Missouri was again, something today that would be completely unheard of or impossible was our bi-state tax compact where the Missouri legislature authorized citizens in the counties surrounding the metro Kansas city area to self-determination to whether to cooperate in a multi-county compact of raising taxes for sports and cultural events and facilities, and we did likewise in Kansas with a county option for that. I can't remember how many—not every county approved, but most did, and so we had the bi-state tax authority which essentially pooled tax money from two states, and then made decisions about where to invest for the benefit of greater Kansas City. It made perfect sense then to me, and it makes perfect sense today, but again, I'd doubt that you'd ever see current legislatures think that was an appropriate thing to do.

MS: Got you. I want to shift gears a little bit here. Obviously, when we think about you in public office, we talk a lot about your service as governor, but you were also secretary of state. When you first ran for governor in 1994, your opponent Jim Slattery called the secretary of state, and I'm quoting, "a minor state office." Today, that office is occupied by Kris Kobach who I would not say treats it as a minor state office. In fact, he has a national reputation, particularly on the issue of voting laws. So did you see the secretary of state as a minor state office?

BG: No. I have a great deal of respect for all of our statewide offices, both those that are established through the constitution and those that were statutorily created. I got my start in the secretary of state's office in 1980, and I worked my way up through the first six years before I ran in 1986. What I found to be so beneficial and why I liked the job and the office was it was a microcosm you might say of the larger state government. It was interacting with attorneys

 

throughout the state through the Corporate Records Department. It was interacting with county clerks throughout the state on all of the election-related activities. There was interaction with the legislature in terms of compiling, publishing all of the session laws, the journals, and things that were relevant to the legislative process. It gave me an opportunity to be visible and you might say active throughout the state, probably to some extent as Congressman Slattery pointed out, without maybe the threat of a lot of heavy lifting and significant issues, but I would make an editorial comment that I think the current secretary has overstepped the bounds and I think has, in many ways, identified it and created a perception of problems that don't really exist.

It's just a different time. When I was in office, we were trying to think of every way we possibly could to encourage voter participation. Motor voter was the big buzzword because we wanted everyone to be able to register when they went in and they got a driver's license. Mail elections, mail ballot elections—

MS: Like Colorado and Oregon.

BG: Which at one point were completely unheard of, we had the first mail ballot election was in a small campus community called Protection.

MS: A great name.

BG: So, we referred to it as "The Election in Protection."

MS: Of course.

BG: I believe there were 110 eligible voters in Protection, and all 110 cast their ballots. You had 100 percent participation. It's pretty hard to argue with the outcome of an election in which everyone eligible participates. So, again, I had a different time and a different perspective maybe than Secretary Kobach does about what are the important elements of that job.

MS: What about voter fraud?

BG: I think that there is certainly always the opportunity. As we know unfortunately in our society, anyone who gets up in the morning intent on doing something illegal or inappropriate, it's a free country, and they can at least try. I always felt confident in the registration system that the county clerks who were very dedicated, four of which were appointed by the secretary of state in the four large counties and 101 elected by the voters. I always had great confidence in the quality of the work they did. I never perceived—voter fraud, it just doesn't strike me as—I was always probably perplexed about an election in which hundreds of thousands of people are voting, how someone thought they were going to go about the business of hiding massive fraud, the amount of illegal votes you would necessarily need to cast would be very difficult to orchestrate person by person by person. Are there people who made mistakes in terms of where they showed up to vote or—I'm sure they did. I rest comfortably not believing that there was a single election negatively affected by a random case of a misguided voter or a mistake made by a polling worker.

 

MS: You don't think the system is rigged?

BG: I don't.

MS: I've got it. Thank you. I've got a few more notes here. You had quite a victory in 1998—the biggest margin of any governor in Kansas history and the biggest margin of any governor of any state on the ballot in 1998. You had an opponent that was credible, Representative Tom Sawyer. He was knowledgeable; he was experienced. I met him. He's a nice fellow. Of course, he has a wonderful name. So, it's not like you were unopposed. How did you do that?

BG: I think Tom Sawyer's a fine public official, and I consider him to be a friend. Let's face it, the re-elect in '98 was all about David Miller and about what we're kind of talking about here.

MS: Within the Republican party, not the Democrats.

BG: David Miller, when I was elected the first time in 1994, governors have traditionally been given the right to set up the operation of the state Republican party as they saw fit as the titular head of the party. In 1994, because of conservative efforts to elect precinct committee men and women and to start what I think was maybe the first of a number of steps leading up to more conservative control of the party apparatus, I was informed that that wouldn't be an option that was available to me. The conservatives, the people in power would make that determination, and David Miller became chairman of the state Republican party after what I thought was a pretty successful first term, which I think was validated by the numbers you just described.

David resigned as chairman of the Republican party and announced his intention to run against me in the primary. That's just practically unheard of.

MS: I don't know if it's ever happened before.

BG: And now after the fact I can say it was outrageous. It was an outrageously bold thing to do, to set up a primary race against a reasonably popular incumbent governor. So, it would be fair to say we were very motivated. We were very motivated. I mean, there's a very serious competitive element to politics, and this was probably just what we needed because it got people really fired up. David ran into a buzzsaw in the primary. I think Tom Sawyer had offered himself as the Democratic nominee in large part in the event somehow David might prevail, and he didn't. Tom continued to conduct himself very honorably and capably as an opponent in the general election, but I don't think Tom would tell you he thought there was a big chance that he was going to be successful. It was bittersweet in that I hated to see Tom go to all the trouble he had gone to, and quite frankly in a good faith effort to be of service to the state to take a defeat like that, but it was really all about winning the primary election and the defeat of David Miller.

MS: It sounds like your feelings for your Democratic opponent are a lot warmer than they are towards your Republican primary opponent.

BG: Well, I don't get up in the morning looking to not get along with people. I knew David Miller for a lot of years. He in his own way was a well-intentioned, passionate about what he

 

believed in, and I certainly don't fault him for that, but again there's a lot of hand-to-hand combat in politics. We had just reached that point where only one person was going to prevail, and I was bound and determined that it was going to be me.

MS: There was another factor in that 1998 race. The Reverend Fred Phelps had expressed an interest in seeking the Democratic nomination. I think a lot of Westboro Baptist Church and Fred Phelps's rise to national prominence happened during your governorship and continued. Did that create challenges for you as governor especially as a representative of the state?

BG: Ironically, Fred falls into sort of the same category as David. Fred's mistake goes back to the birth of my daughter, Katie who was born in October of 1995, when I was first elected. For whatever misguided reason, Fred decided that it would be a lot of publicity surrounding his decision to mount a large protest during the baptism of my daughter. I'm a huge believer in and supporter of free speech. I never particularly cared for Fred's brand of that, but I also know that you have the freedom to choose when and where you decide to exercise the free speech. Choosing to do so at my daughter's baptism didn't set well. It was obviously something I haven't and I never will forget. So, Fred was equally welcome to be in the political mix in 1998 because it gave me another chance to send someone to the sidelines.

MS: Got it. That reminded me of something else I wanted to ask you about in a few minutes, the debate about evolution and the state science curriculum. As you met with other governors and traveled to conferences and so forth, you probably got some questions about that.

bG: Yes, you might say that Kansas was the brunt of jokes, which was terribly embarrassing. There were days when the best thing you could do was sort of laugh along at the whole situation. I am always reminded of my wonderful lieutenant governor, Gary Sherrer, a fine Emporia State graduate who was caught in the hallway, or at some point one of the Statehouse reporters tracked Gary down and said, "Gary, what do you have to say about the contention that man didn't evolve, but there was this"—they had a word for it. Was it—

MS: Oh, I know the term. Intelligent design?

RG: Yes, that in fact it was all due to intelligent design, and Gary said, "Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle."

MS: That's where that expression originated.

BG: At least in the use in Kansas, it did. But, again, I think a healthy adult conversation about theories and ideas is perfectly fine. I think a suggestion that it's sort of the law of the land, the rule of the day was just again way overplayed, and I wasn't about to be in any way supportive of that effort.

MS: In fact, you got involved in some of those school board elections.
When the numbers were very close, tipping it just slightly would change the majority on evolution, and that happened.

 

BG: You're telling me things I'm a little fuzzy on. There was, and again to this day continues to be a very committed group of conservative-leaning folks who simply think if they can control the—pull the levers of government that they'll align the world in the manner in which—that they believe or they're more comfortable with, and I'm just here to tell you that the pendulum swings, and it's always going to swing back near the center at some point.

MS: When you were governor, we talked about David Miller. Today, we talk about a Sam Brownback or a Kris Kobach, although their agendas are somewhat different. Burdett Loomis once called them "rebels" within the Republican party. Then, at some point more recently, they've kind of become the dominant faction. What do you think is their endgame? What are we doing? What's the goal?

BG: Well, just so we get it on the record, keep in mind Tim Huelskamp was a member of the State Senate when I was governor.

MS: I remember.

BG: So, I have been dealing with Tim's beliefs for a long, long time. What do I think the endgame is? I think it's a passionate belief that government should be reflective of the views of a majority of citizens, and that they believe the views they hold represent what the majority of citizens think. I simply believe they represent the views of the majority of citizens who are mobilized to get up and go vote on those particular days, and that as we've seen in the most recent primary here in this state, when a more informed, energized electorate starts to pay attention, which let's face it, while we may love to chew on political events of the day, it is not what most people get up and want to worry about. They're trying to live lives.

But I am one who believes, and I think nationally this is true, and I think we're a very diverse country. We are not a hard-right, conservative country, nor do I think we are a hard-left, liberal country. I think we exist with the majority of people somewhere in the middle, but I think conservatives believe that every chance possible, their mission is to rein in the size and scope of government and try to insist on a more precise interpretation of our constitution, and that somehow if that were to happen, their lives would be better, I guess.

MS: As governor, you made deals with people in the legislature. You got bills passed. You sometimes worked with Democrats. You sometimes invited undecided legislators back to the office for a talk. As secretary of state, you won an award from a business group. You worked with the businesses that you were charged with regulating. Now you work in Washington DC with the trucking industry. Aren't you part of the establishment?

BG: Yes. Again, I'm a little unclear of how some negative connotations been attached to that. I'm the son and grandson of hard-working Midwest farmers who became truckers. I then worked hard six years to learn about how to be a good public servant and take care of the business of the secretary of state's office. Then that earned the support of the majority of the voters in the state in '94 and '98 and gave me the honor of being a governor. I think that the re-elect again shines a little bit of light on how they perceived the job that I had done.

 

To then circle back around and have an opportunity to run the trade association that represents the interests of people who move freight for a living was the icing on the cake, to get back to my family roots. Now, after fourteen years, I'm retiring from there. All along the way, my principal objective has always been to do the best job I could to represent the constituents I served, whether they were trucking executives or whether they were citizens of Kansas. I think the record's fairly decent. It's not perfect, but it's not bad.

MS: So, you own being part of the establishment. You don't think there's anything wrong with that.

BG: At this advanced stage of my life, I guess I just don't care. I find the descriptions that are used—RINO we discussed and the establishment—whatever. If that makes somebody, if that helps them in some abbreviated description of myself or others like myself, that's fine. But I know that the state went through a number of years of prosperity, and we did some—we had up until this recent administration the largest tax cut that had been enacted in Kansas history. We didn't have, I hope, the unintended consequences that the recent tax cuts have caused. We were more incremental, and I think a little more thoughtful about how we matched up our revenue side with our expenditure side, and what our priorities and goals for the state were. There's very little in the eight years I was governor that if I had to do it over again, I would probably do much differently. There are a few things.

MS: Such as?

BG: Well, I think one of the worst situations I got into was the resignation by Senator Dole, and what many viewed as a great opportunity to appoint someone to the US Senate. That's a really tough pickle to be in because only one person gets picked. In my case, I selected my then early lieutenant governor, Sheila Frahm. To this day, Sheila was in my mind the right person, the right temperament. She would have been wonderful.

MS: She did serve in the Senate for a few months.

BG: She served briefly, but I think what I needed to be more aware of was working with her very early on to make sure she understood the assault she was going to come under from those others who sought that office, most notably Governor Brownback. So, I take some responsibility for Sheila not being I think as ready to not only serve as a senator representing Kansas, but to be ready for the political blowback that occurred in that.

That was a tough time. I had some personnel issues. You always have people that decide to do sort of dumb things. The buck stops here. So, it involved in some instances people that I had great faith in and confidence who I then had to ask to leave and go find something else to do. You never like to see that, no matter what organization you're running. But many more pluses and fond memories than minuses.

MS: The '96 Senate race. Sam Brownback had not self-identified as a social conservative before that, but, boy, he did then. Did you see that coming?

 

BG: No, not really. Sam had expressed some interest in the governor's race in '94, and then I think when Joan Finney dropped out and renounced her intentions not to seek re-election, and Jim Slattery jumped in, Sam quickly pivoted into that Congressional race. I believe—I'm not the historian. You'll have to fact-check me. I think that was the beginning of sort of the slide to the right. There were a couple of candidates in that primary, one who I remember very clearly named Bob Bennie who was very conservative, especially on the pro-life issue. I think it was the first time that you really saw Sam start to slide right, especially on the pro-life issue. Now, he may have felt that way all along.

MS: But not as publicly.

BG: But he didn't have to give voice to that. I think that really started to happen in that first Congressional race. Then again, I think by then, this organized, more conservative element is emerging, getting a foothold in placing committee men and women in positions in the state party apparatus, and I think running for Senate in '96, it strategically made sense to be more aligned, certainly to be aligned right of wherever Sheila Frahm was viewed as being.

MS: Yes. Soon Brownback will be in the last two years of his governorship. Any advice?

BG: I wish him well. You can't be a governor and ever not hope those that follow you don't take the state to greater heights. You love your state so much, and you know how challenging the job is and how much people depend on the state. So, I hope that there is some positive news. I don't care whether economic recovery is driven by national events or whether it's driven by state developments, but we'll take it any way we can possibly get it.

I just wish Sam well and hope for good things, a bright future for the state. I believe that if the next two years tend to follow along with where we've been the last six years, the biggest challenge will be to find an individual who wants the job of governor, knowing full well there will be a number of very challenging issues they're going to have to weigh in on and lead with their chin on, and that's again, as of late, you haven't seen historically people wanting to run for public office for that reason. I think people like titles that go with it and the recognition that goes with it. They can be very difficult.

MS: That's a good point. I know we need to wrap up.

BG: I'm still good.

MS: Good. Well, I've gotten through all the prepared material. You did mention higher ed funding. Did you want to talk about that a little bit more when you were governor?

BG: Very candidly, I developed a very great relationship with all of the leadership of the higher education institutions, and I found all of them to be—they were all unique. I never tried to pick any winners or losers between Fort Hays and Emporia and Wichita State and K-State and KU and Pittsburg State. They're all wonderful institutions with great histories that serve a constituency of a student population, and I thought the state, just like public, just like K through 12, needed to figure out how to treat them all as equitably, provide as much support as we

 

possibly could. I just am sorry to see that we're at a point where the budget situation is such that there's so much pressure at a time when we need to lessen the pressure on tuition. We seem to be ratcheting up the pressure on tuition.

MS: It's going up.

BG: At a time when we're counting on our alumnae and supporters to financially pitch in, we seem to want to tie the hands of the universities on how they spend what are not even government-provided dollars.

MS: Right. About a third comes from the state.

BG: Yes. It's part of that to-do list that I think a new governor and a legislator are going to have to—you cannot attract the kind of world-class faculty to your universities if they don't believe it's a place for them to showcase their talents and grow themselves professionally. And without having those kinds of great academics leading those institutions, it becomes a harder sell to students to want to come there and train. I just think it becomes that downward spiral.

Again, I'm never one that's been shy about saying, "I understand. Government costs money." As long as we're really obsessed with quality returns for the money we're spending, I don't have problems asking taxpayers to pony up. There just seems to be a mindset that we failed in our efforts to cut budgets. So, since we can't cut budgets, let's just eliminate the revenue stream, and then if there's no money there, we don't have to worry about the budget part.

MS: Drown government in the bathtub.

BG: That's right. "If there's no money to divvy up, then that will be easy." I'm just not one that adheres to that kind of thinking.

MS: When Bob Dole ran for president in '96, smack in the middle when you were in the spotlight, he used to say, "Let's face it. Government does a lot of good things." Do you think a Republican can say that today and win the nomination?

BG: That's hard to say. I have a sneaky suspicion today that they probably could. To me, a Republican, an establishment, moderate, centrist RINOs, if you want to run for office of any kind, but especially if it's president, if it's governor, if it's US senator, you might be surprised if you pulled a page out of our playbook from 1998 and just went right at people with hard truths and proudly wave the flag as opposed to sort of this kind of cleverly trying to be conservative enough that people would accept you as conservative but still not abandon the centrist moderate wing of the party. There might be more people still standing out there in the center willing to back you if you give them a reason to get up and go do it.

MS: Do you think that's what happened in the primaries last month?

BG: Yes, I think that's why a number of people were successful. They ran more direct—I think just the fallout though from everything that's not gone well in the state was really on

 

everybody's mind. Of course, I can't say on the presidential level I can give anybody any advice about anything. This is the wackiest year that we've ever seen in our lifetime.

MS: Definitely.

BG: We probably all hope we don't see another one like it in our lifetime. When I looked at the polls this morning and they talk about Jill Stein, the Green party pulling as much as five percent of the vote and then the Libertarian party—of course, I served with both Gary Johnson and Bill Wells. I know them well. They're talking about by Election Day; it could translate into 15 percent because of just everybody doesn't want to vote for the lesser of the two evils in the major party candidates. All of a sudden, if you peel 20 percent out of the popular vote, you're going to decide the presidency through the electoral college, but at the end of the day with 80 percent of the vote and on a very close election, it means that 41-39 wins the presidency. So, six of ten people who voted didn't vote for the person who won at a moment when the country desperately needs to coalesce around a very strong, unifying kind of leader. It doesn't feel like that's where we're headed, but I hope I'm surprised at the outcome.

MS: One last question, your successor, and I'll just kind of ask you the double-barreled question and let you do what you want with it. What is your opinion of and your relationship with Kathleen Sebelius?

BG: Kathleen was in the legislature when I was the secretary of state. She was the insurance commissioner when I was governor. I think she obviously has an incredible political pedigree with her father's history and then marrying into the Sebelius family. I get along with Kathleen quite well. I thought it was a great honor to see her selected to serve at Health and Human Services. I don't know all the back story. It was unfortunate that the events unfolded the way they did with the health care program. I think she's a fine person. Gary's [Gary Sebelius] a fine person, a good judge. I'm one of those that I am very capable of fully engaging politically when that's required, but otherwise I like to figure out how to get along with people and be supportive of people even if they wear different political stripes.

MS: How do you think she did as governor?

BG: I was so busy with my new job in Washington, I didn't pay that much attention. From everything I know, she did fine. We had the downturn in 2001. I had to do a few things budgetarily that were not necessarily things I was happy to have to do. So, she had a little rebuilding to do herself. I think she left the state with Mark Parkinson finishing up—I think she left the state I pretty good shape.

MS: And finally, are there questions that I should have asked you over the past fifty-seven minutes that I did not, and would you like to address those now?

BG: When you've been in public service twenty-two years, you can talk about this stuff forever. As I've learned from a lot of my colleagues that went on to serve in the Senate, Dirk Kempthorne from Idaho, George Voinovich from Ohio, Tom Carver Delaware, Evan Bayh in Indiana, you talk to anybody that's been a governor that has gone on to be a member of

 

Congress, being a governor of a state is the best job you can really ever have. It's so rewarding to be able to make a noticeable, real difference in people's lives by some of the actions you take.

I'm glad for the term limits because I believe if you really burn bright for eight years, it will be time. I'd like to think, and I hope Kansas felt like we worked hard for them every day for eight years. Again, our daughter was such a bright spot in our lives who joined us early in 1995, and to be part of that whole experience, and that made a big difference in our focus on early childhood education and children's health initiatives. So, it was a special time and I miss it, but I also appreciate that it was my time then, and it's somebody else's time now.

MS: You mentioned you're retiring from the trucking. What's next?

BG: I don't know. Just interviews, I guess.

MS: Interviews and academics.

BG: Yes.

MS: Thank you very much, Governor Graves. I really appreciate you taking the time.

BG: Any follow-up you want, you know where to find me. I'm actually coming back out in November. I don't know why, but I agreed to do a speech for the Kansas Association of Counties in Kansas City, which will be interesting because it will be post-election. There'll be a lot to politically talk about. All the county commissioners—

[End of File]