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Chris Courtwright: Good afternoon. Today is April 1, 2026, and we're in downtown Topeka. I'm Chris Courtwright with the Kansas Oral History Project. I previously served for thirty-four years working as an economist for the Kansas Legislature before retiring in 2020.

We are sitting here today across the street from the Kansas Statehouse in the beautifully newly reconfigured and streamlined three-story Docking Building, which has only recently reopened after a major reconstruction effort. Several months ago, Governor Laura Kelly chose this venue to have her televised press conference alongside Kansas City Chiefs owner Clark Hunt to announce that the state and team had reached an agreement to construct a new stadium in Wyandotte County and new facilities and offices in Johnson County. But that event was only one of the most recent chapters in this building's very long and winding historical journey.

Completed in the mid-1950s as the first public building in Kansas featuring the so-called "Modern Movement" style, the Kansas State Office Building as it was then known opened in 1957 housing over 2,600 state employees and had over 532,000 square feet. The structure dominated the central Topeka landscape for many decades and in 1987 was officially and formally renamed the Robert B. Docking State Office Building after the 38th Governor of Kansas who was elected to four terms; served from 1967-1975; and who also, of course, was the father-in-law of today's special guest.

By the early 2000s, amid findings from the Department of Administration about the need for major maintenance efforts that had been deferred for far too long, the upper floors of the original building were gradually vacated by state agencies. Some fifteen years or so ago, a few of Docking's top floors then actually were utilized for legislative committee meetings and office space during the Statehouse renovation project across the street, making a whole new generation of lawmakers, lobbyists, interns, and reporters familiar during inclement weather with the underground tunnel that connects the two buildings.

Speaking of underground, we should note that because one critically important part of state government infrastructure, namely the Central Utility Plant, was located in the basement of the Docking Building; because that Central Utility Plant was in the basement, the state was never able to fully raze the building as had been temporarily contemplated back in 2014. After a major feasibility study, lawmakers in 2022 approved a partial demolition and subsequent reconstruction option that got us to this very aesthetically pleasing multipurpose building that we're happy to be using today for our oral history interview.

And so today we are privileged to be speaking with Jill Docking, a uniquely prominent figure in Kansas since at least the 1980s who has had a long, distinguished, and extremely diverse career in the private sector as well as in and around the political arena. A proud graduate of the University of Kansas, where she received her undergraduate degree in history in 1978 and later her MBA in 1983, she was somewhat inevitably going to be drawn into politics by having married into Kansas's most prominent political family, the Dockings.

But outside of politics—which we will be getting into shortly—you also have been throughout your life an absolutely tireless advocate for higher education; for financial literacy; health

advocacy; and philanthropy. Just trying to cherry pick a few of the highlights, we see that you were a former member and chair of the Kansas Board of Regents; are currently on the Kansas Health Foundation Board of Directors; were the founder of the Financial Fitness Foundation; served as co-chair of Kansas, Inc; worked with the American Cancer Society; and continue to serve as senior vice president at the Docking Group, a powerful Wichita financial services firm. Did I get most of that right?

Jill Docking: You get an A+. You know my life better than I do. Outstanding.

CC: This interview with Ms. Docking is conducted on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project, a not-for-profit corporation, created for the purpose of interviewing prominent Kansans and significant leaders in our state. I should also add that you and I have known one another for many decades, and in fact served together on KU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean's Advisory Board for a number of years.

The interviews will be accessible to researchers, educators, and the public through the KOHP website, *ksoralhistory.org*, and also the Kansas Historical Society and the State Library. Transcriptions are made possible as a result of the generosity of KOHP donors. Former Kansas House Speaker Pro Tem David Heinemann is our videographer today.

One of the background questions we usually open with in these interviews is to ask whether you are a native Kansan, and maybe when your family moved here. But in your case, the history of how you ended up here is fairly well known. Jill Sadowsky was born and raised in Massachusetts, and when you were 16 years old on a summer school program trip to Durham University in northern England, you were blessed to meet your future husband, Tom. He would later tell the media the very charming story of this summer romance and how smitten he was and everything he did to convince you to come to Kansas, but we should probably hear it from your perspective.

JD: Well, I was equally smitten with Tom Docking. I remember coming home from that trip and saying to my mother—I was sixteen— "I think I love this guy." She goes, "Don't worry, you'll get over that. You'll fall in love a hundred times." But we did end up dating long distance. He worked for my father as a truck driver. My father was an Anheuser Busch distributor. He'd come out in the summer and work on the trucks with my dad. I went to Brown University. He went to KU.

Then he came to Brown for a semester to be with me, and then the plan was I was supposed to go to KU for one year. My father graduated from Brown. My two brothers applied to Brown and never got accepted. He finally gets a kid into Brown, and he said, "I don't really care that his father's governor. You will graduate from Brown."

Tom said, "Why don't you let me handle this?" I go, "Okay." We invited my dad and mom out. My dad went to all of my classes with me at KU. I made the point to him, "I think I'm getting as fine an education at KU as I was at Brown." At KU, even as an undergraduate, I was allowed to take graduate courses in history and English. It was fabulous.

 

Anyway, he came to all my classes. Then it wasn't a full dinner. Tom took my father and Bob Docking and Archie Dykes-- all went to dinner. Archie was at the time chancellor. My father who was a beer distributor and I hardly ever saw him drink ever, came home drunk and said, "Yes, honey, you can stay." What a lobbying group! Oh, my gosh. So, I was allowed to stay and graduate from KU.

Anyway, Tom was just—I was just madly in love with him until he died, forty years of that.

CC: So, the story of your dad drinking with Tom's dad who was the governor of Kansas and the chancellor of the University of Kansas and going to a football game over this weekend, that also helped seal the deal. The venerable Mr. Sadowsky agreed to let you stay on and graduate at KU at that point.

JD: He did, and then we had a rule in our family. You had to graduate from college, and you had to be twenty-one before you were allowed to get married. Bob Docking was determined that Tom and I would get married before I was twenty-one, and then my father did say, "I don't really care that you're governor. She's not getting married until she's twenty-one and graduates from college. So, those were the rules in the house. I thought the rules kind of made sense. Then we did get married and finished out our graduate work at KU.

CC: Okay. I do want to ask you a little more about your family from Massachusetts, and whether any of them ever instilled any kind of public service bug in you before you ended up moving to Kansas and ultimately marrying into the Dockings. I did see a couple of funny tongue-in-cheek quotes your dad gave to his local media back East over the years during a couple of your runs for office about how futile and maddening politics is—but how he nevertheless had high hopes that if anyone on the planet could succeed and do the right thing, it would be you.

JD: He did not like politicians. He, of course, loved Bob and Meredith, but I got a huge underpinning of public service from my parents, but on the private sector side. My mother was very involved in the American Cancer Society and the school system. So, they did all of that public service not in politics.

However, they were early supporters of John Kennedy. When John Kennedy was elected president of the United States, they actually got to go to the inauguration, and my mother said to me, "I was within spitting distance of John Kennedy," who she thought was so handsome. "And I was sitting next to this guy who smelled bad, and everybody said it was a big deal, and it was Robert Frost."

CC: Oh, my goodness!

JD: I said to her, "I think I would have taken that seat myself." They were Democrats, but my father was a conservative Democratic businessman. He was a beer distributor, and I remember when I supported Michael Dukakis, he was kind of mad at me when Mike ran for president because he and Mike had had some scuffle about a bottle bill in Massachusetts. They were not political. They obviously voted and supported Democrats, which made it a little easier for me to transition to the Docking family.

 

CC: I'll bet. Another interesting point that is sometimes lost is that it may have never been necessarily set in stone that you—and perhaps even Tom—were going to end up in electoral politics.

JD: Right.

CC: Let me start by asking about Tom. Even though everyone was certainly assuming he would be running for statewide office someday, given that both his grandfather and his father had been governors, there is some indication that he may have been a little surprised at least about the timing of when it all got started for him. We know that incumbent Governor John Carlin decided he wanted a new running mate in 1982 and approached Tom to be on the ticket with him, even though Tom at that point was only in his late twenties and had already started down the road of a successful law career, if I understand this correctly. Was it a surprise for both of you as a young married couple that the whirlwind of the political machine came calling so quickly in 1982?

JD: It was probably too early for us. We had a two-year-old. You actually are probably too young to remember this, but John Carlin's lieutenant governor was Paul Dugan who was from Wichita. You know that you have to have balance in the state, or they try to have balance, and Paul's a wonderful guy. We really liked Paul, but he and John did not get along. So, I think John was looking for a candidate from Wichita, Kansas who could bring in the old Docking Democrats because there was a split between Docking Democrats and John Carlin. John Carlin actually gives a very compelling speech about how even though there was some animosity between the two camps, it was very easy for him to run because the Dockings had this multigenerational network of contacts across the state of Kansas.

Somehow in today's politics, we have lost this. Bob Docking never lost touch with people across the state of Kansas. He didn't only call you right before the election. He knew your kids. He knew your grandkids. It is that network that bonds people to a candidate, right? Because they trust them. Because they've talked to them, and it's not just about money. In fact, I think money was much less important in those days, raising money.

Anyway, Paul Dugan and John had a falling out. They were looking for a Wichita candidate. Obviously, we were in Wichita. It was terrific. What an opportunity.

CC: So, a very pragmatic decision by Governor Carlin. History tells us that the 1982 gubernatorial campaign is viewed in hindsight at least in part as a referendum on the severance tax.

JD: It was, yes.

CC: Governor Carlin had been pushing for several years to have one enacted, and the issue tended to be defined as much by geographic lines as it did political party lines. In other words, Republican House Speaker Wendell Lady who was from Johnson County and a number of other Republicans in eastern and northeast Kansas also supported, alongside Democratic Governor John Carlin, having a severance tax come along and join in the larger mix of state taxes.

 

Basically, politicians in the eastern part of the state seemed to coalesce around the idea that a lot of income and sales taxes were being mined out of urban and suburban areas and shipped out to western Kansas to pay for schools and highways, and the belief had been growing that oil and gas producers out west needed to start contributing a little more than they had been to the state coffers.

Also, by way of background and context, many of our neighboring states producing oil and gas, including Texas and Oklahoma, had enacted severance taxes many decades earlier. Kansas briefly had one on the books in the late 1950s before the courts threw it out on a technicality. The powerful oil and gas industry had spent the sixties and seventies fighting off any and all efforts to see the severance tax reinstated.

The Republican nominee in 1982, Sam Hardage, after narrowly prevailing in a five-way GOP primary against Speaker Lady and others, went forward that November. doubling down in staunch opposition to Governor Carlin's proposal. But Carlin, now with Tom on his ticket, rolled to re-election that November with a fairly resounding victory over Mr. Hardage, and that set the stage to get the tax across the finish line in 1983.

Do you recall how heavily involved Tom may have been during the campaign in helping Carlin take this severance tax battle to the voters, and what other issues do you remember being front and center in the fall of '82?

JD: It was the severance tax, and, yes, Tom was really involved because the Dockings were in the oil and gas business. Tom had practiced law down there and had lots of oil and gas clients. So, he was a good person to do it, and like you, was a complete geek about taxes. He loved taxes. He loved talking about it. He knew everything about it.

I think also having somebody who's not necessarily an alarmist, talk about a tax, you know. Everybody in Johnson County thought it was great because they weren't paying it. But these were small companies that that might be a problem for. There were lots of issues. So Tom was really good at, I think, mitigating some of the anger. There were some places you couldn't mitigate it, but it was I think the issue, and, by the way, maybe the beginning of Johnson County swinging to Democrats, right?

CC: Yes.

JD: I think there were a lot of moderate Rs that swung to the Democrats in that particular election. But Sam Hardage was our neighbor.

CC: Interesting.

JD: I mean, a couple of houses down. His wife's family were car distributors, and he was kind of a, as I recollect, kind of a California guy. They got him a little bit on that. "You're not really a Kansan."

CC: The carpetbagger kind of thing.

 

JD: Very handsome, very articulate. Anyway, I don't remember what the spread was, but I think it was substantial, wasn't it?

CC: I don't think it was razor thin by any stretch. Do you remember, did Tom do any kind of lieutenant governor forums or debates against Dan Thiessen who was a Republican state senator and Hardage's running mate?

JD: He did. They had a couple of forums. I don't remember anything notable particularly about those. I think usually gubernatorial forums take the limelight.

CC: Center stage, yes. Okay, we are going to talk more about Tom's time as lieutenant governor in a minute, and I hope I'm not messing up our timeline, but sometime in the 1980s after your kids were in school, your own financial services career evidently got started when you were approached by Don Barry, the then senior vice president of investments at AG Edwards. Can you tell us about those dynamics and launching into that line of work while still a very young mom, and while there must have been a lot of additional demands on your time as the Second Lady of Kansas?

JD: I don't remember that much as Second Lady of Kansas. I mean, if John and Karen wanted us to do something, I'd do it, but I had to start carving out areas of "No, can't do it" as opposed to before. And when I went to work at AG Edwards, the manager there, Jack Kowalski, had asked me to work there every year for four or five years. I didn't want to go to work until my youngest was in school full time. Then I said to him, "I'll tell you what. I'll come to work for you, but I'm only working from 9 to 3. I want to drop my kids off and get my kids," and he said, "You know, most people waste a lot of time at work. I think if you actually focus in and do your job, that's enough time," and you know what? It was. Obviously, it was a great career for me, and I left every day at 3:00 and got my kids.

I do remember in our business you have to take the Series 7 exam. You go into the brokerage business; you're paid to study. Then if you flunk, you're out of business. You've got to pass the test.

So, I went in there in the first week. I've been a stay-at-home mom. I got a phone call from my son, and he said, "Mom, you know Dad's been taking care of us while you started this job." I said, "Yep." He said, "Do you know he told me I had seventeen spider bites?" I said, "Brian, what are you talking about?" "I've got seventeen spots all over my body." I go, "You have the chicken pox. You don't have spider bites."

So, I went home to take care of him, and then, of course, my daughter got the chicken pox. I was gone for the first four weeks of my job that I just started because I was at home with the kids. I came back to work, and I said to Jack Kowalski, "I don't think this is going to work. Forget it." He said, "No, I'm just glad you're not Catholic. I'm glad you don't have ten kids. You're back with me now." He was a devout Catholic and did have ten kids—not ten, but a lot.

 

Anyway, it was a great career, particularly for a woman, because there weren't very many women in that business at that time. There are now, but not then.

CC: I think it worthy to mention that you haven't spent so many decades in financial services simply trying to maximize income and wealth for your clients before going home at night. Instead, you've used your expertise and platform to "give back" in a way by launching the Financial Fitness Foundation and have also written and talked extensively about the importance of financial literacy, especially as it relates to women and youth. So could you tell us a little bit more about your efforts over the years along these lines?

JD: I often wondered if I should have gotten a degree in psychology or psychiatry because you know what? Money is not really about money, is it? It never is. It's about security. It's about power. It's about a million other things. It is so important for children to be financially literate because they begin to get into trouble just as they get out of high school. They have access to credit cards.

I worked on a project with a guy named Bob Kerrey, a senator from Nebraska, right after I ran for the US Senate. He was doing seminars in Nebraska that were highly interactive, really fun things for kids to learn kind of the basics of financial literacy. I thought, "That's a great idea. We ought to do that in Kansas." But my goal was to make financial literacy a required course in Kansas high schools.

What was the name of the state treasurer? A very popular Republican woman. I can't remember her name now. Somebody in the audience tell me. But I got Kathleen Sebelius and Jean Schodorf, a Republican, and the woman ran for Congress after being state treasurer. She's from Topeka. Come on, somebody.

CC: Oh, Lynn Jenkins?

JD: Lynn Jenkins. Democrats and Republicans to come together—

CC: Working together.

JD: Women, excuse me, I hate to be that way, but it was easier to get all of these women to say, "Yes, yes, yes." Then the problem was the State School Board. Carol Rupe who was on the State School Board actually ran the foundation that I established to teach financial literacy to high school kids all over Kansas. Our keynote speakers were Henry Bloch of H & R Block. We had really stellar businesspeople in every community giving lectures to these kids.

And, you know, it is part of the curriculum now. We just did it school by school by school, and the hardest school was Wichita because it's the largest school system in the state. But it is a requirement for kids to learn financial literacy. The best teachers are the parents, but if you don't have parents who were particularly into that or sophisticated or knowledgeable, the school has to give them some background.

 

One of the most rewarding things I think I've done in terms of you have a great idea. You think it's good to do. You talk about it, and nobody listens. We actually with the help of those female leaders and everybody else in the state of Kansas got it done. It was awesome.

CC: That's fascinating. That's quite an important legacy. During the time Tom was lieutenant governor and the children were young, you said you were based mainly in Wichita. Were you coming back and forth on I-35 with the children a lot?

JD: No, he was. We really didn't—and on purpose. He protected us. We couldn't do it all. He was mindful of that, and I was kind of the parent on the ground. He was able to go up and down. We didn't travel much. We did ceremonial stuff with the Carlins.

CC: One of the important jobs Tom had as lieutenant governor was the somewhat unenviable task of presiding over a special tax study commission in the mid-1980s that was trying to deal in advance with what everyone knew was going to be a huge political hurricane over property taxes that was going to occur later in the eighties with the onset of reappraisal. You and I have talked offline about this a little bit. This might have been the genesis of the three legs to the stool approach to state and local finance, balancing the sales, income, and property tax legs. Some of those discussions were in their nascent stages during this period here in the mid-eighties.

That group ended up sketching out the rough outlines of what ultimately became the property tax classification amendment to the Kansas Constitution that was designed to be a shock absorber and minimize a lot of the inequities and shifts that were otherwise going to occur. Anything you can recall about his work on this back in around 1985 or so?

JD: This was actually September 1984. First of all, it was not unenviable to Tom Docking. He loved tax. It was such an opportunity to do important public policy work. He was very excited about it. So, they had this big tax conference in Wichita, Kansas. Martin Dickinson, who was his professor at KU, and dean I think of the law school because Tom had the legacy of Bob Docking and George Docking, he had a rolodex a mile long. He could pick the phone up, and people were wonderful and responsive.

So, Martin worked on this tax commission—what a great partner for Tom. They had this big conference down in Wichita, September 28, 1984. Tom said, "Whatever you do, do not have this baby today." I was due September 28th, 1984. You know the rest of the story. I did have the baby during that tax conference. There were no cellphones, but there must have been somebody who had access to a phone. I called from the hospital and said, "Could I speak with Tom Docking?" She said, "Well, Mr. Docking's really busy." I said, "Well, Mr. Docking is about to have a baby. You've got to get him down to Wesley Hospital." And Martin said, "Tom, time for you to leave." So, of course, Martin took over.

But that tax commission was really important work for Tom, and he worked a lot on water issues. Now, when we look at our state government now, they're all, of course, issues we still have, but he had a lot of people, and in those days, Democrats and Republicans worked together. That's the saddest part of what I see now. I mean, they'd go at each other during an election, but they really worked very well together.

 

CC: There's more collegiality when it came time.

JD: Absolutely. I mean, it's our state. They don't see it divided on Democratic and Republican lines.

CC: Well, with 1986 coming up, and Governor Carlin not able to run for re-election, it is little wonder that Democrats enthusiastically embrace the notion of Tom as the gubernatorial nominee and potential successor, seeking for him to follow in both his grandfather's and his father's footsteps. The Republicans, on the other hand, had a huge scrum in their gubernatorial primary, as they often seem to, and the last one left standing on a Tuesday night in early August was House Speaker Mike Hayden. The general election that November was razor close, and Hayden ended up winning by less than 32,000 votes statewide. Can you tell us what some of your recollections were about major issues during the 1986 campaign and how much travel and foot leather must have been involved?

JD: I mean, there was a lot. The issue was the death penalty, and the Dockings had different opinions on the death penalty throughout the three—George Docking lost an election with the Clutter murders. He was governor during that. He was opposed to the death penalty. Robert Docking was in favor of the death penalty, and Tom was opposed to the death penalty, and Mike was in favor of it. I think the razor thin was a function of in the last week, the death penalty became such a dominant issue, it was able to determine the election.

But I do remember we had a consultant, this young guy named James Carville. We had a consultant named Raymond Strother, and Ray used James Carville as a consultant. James Carville, you've seen him on TV, came in with that heavy Louisiana accent, did polling, and said, "Tom, my boy, the hay's in the barn. You've got this."

CC: Oh, really?

JD: I never let Tom forget that! "The hay's never in the barn until the election's over." But I think it was the rural vote that kind of pulled that over the top.

CC: So, this would have been a young James Carville in the pre "It's the economy, stupid" days that he told Bill Clinton.

JD: Way before. I mean, he'd been in politics consulting obviously—that's what he did his whole life.

CC: As a young man.

JD: He's colorful now, but he was more unusual then, really colorful. Anyway, that's the dominant issue I remember people talking the very most about at the very end of the election. I might add, just because it's nice to know, that the Haydens were people we liked and were friends with always, I mean not directly after the election, but I'm saying in those days again, everybody kind of got back together and worked together.

 

CC: Along some of these same lines, do you have any general reflections about the extent to which campaigns and elections in Kansas have changed from that pre-digital era when James Carville was a young man in the 1980s versus the ones we have today? There's so much technology and social media and cellphones, and how different it must have been in the 1980s, running for lieutenant governor and governor versus today?

JD: So, I've thought about that question. The big difference to me is the newspaper industry. I mean, we all know newspapers have died all over the place, but when we were running politics, every teeny, tiny, little town had a newspaper. They were very thoughtful people who were important people in the state of Kansas for determining political thought and looking into what were the results of public policy issues. We're missing that. There are a couple. *The [Kansas] Reflector* does that. There are some pieces in the state of Kansas that do that. But when we were running, it was all over the place. They were—I'm trying to think of—Emerson Lynn and Dave Seaton, all these people were very thoughtful, very well-educated folks who thought a lot about stuff. I miss that part of it.

The ugliness of social media, that happened. It just didn't happen so publicly. I think it makes people less likely to run because it's more painful. It was more of a whisper campaign that would go on. That happened then, too, but not as much for everybody to look at.

CC: In today's social media, yes. I was struck by one newspaper clipping I found from this time. Apparently, three days before the 1986 election, the last weekend, you had been with Tom at a stop someplace in southeast Kansas. These were wild twenty-two-hour days down the home stretch for everyone, and he ended up then flying off someplace for another last-minute appearance, while you opted to go ahead and drive a campaign van back to Wichita.

On the way home apparently, you came upon a horrific accident on the highway and quickly pulled over to help. You ended up comforting an injured ten-year-old girl and her shivering dog by bringing them into the campaign van, even as the paramedics were arriving to try in vain to help her deceased father. This was the Saturday before the election, and you even said that very day how that whole experience helped bring into perspective the importance of the gubernatorial race everyone had been obsessing about versus sort of the reality of this horrific scene you came upon. Anything you want to add about that rather shocking day?

JD: It was shocking. The mother and the father—I can't remember the road that goes from Wichita to like Pittsburg, but it used to be just two lanes. Maybe it still is two lanes, as I think about it. It was a tough road. You would see accidents. Clearly, somebody swerved. He went off the road. He and his wife were both dead when I got into the car and grabbed the dog and the little girl. The glass had killed both of them from bleeding.

But it did realign my head very significantly. I mean, it's interesting you saw the clip. Jim Cross, who was from the Wichita Eagle, happened to be in the van—I was driving— because he needed a lift home from southeast Kansas, and I actually asked him not to cover it, but I guess his editors thought he needed to cover it. But it taught me a really important lesson, which was I'm sorry we

 

lost the election. Tom would have been an extraordinary governor, loves the state, would do the best for the state that he possibly could, but life goes on.

I happened to run into Anita Jones, Larry Jones's wife—Larry had run in a primary, and after we lost the general, she said to me, "That primary loss was the worst thing that ever happened to me." She said, "How about you?" I said, "Nope, not even close." Not even close. So, everybody needs to think about those things.

CC: The perspective, yes. Well, Governor Hayden's administration was characterized by several kinds of turmoil, even from within his own party, as you may recall. There were huge battles over the income tax code, controversy over comments he made about Wichita area legislators, a failed special session in 1987 that was called to fund highways, and, of course, the huge property tax controversy in 1989 and 1990. Given how close the 1986 election was and how Governor Hayden ended up swimming in some of these choppy waters during his one and only term in office, did you and Tom and his inner circle ever have any particularly poignant counterfactual history regrets during the late eighties—the what-might-have-been kind of thing?

JD: Sure. I mean, the fact that Joan Finney then won the next election. But from a personal standpoint, we had a very young family. We then had another baby. We had two kids, a young family, and frankly, he loved being a lawyer, and I think if he'd up and run again and won or lost, he would not have had the profession in the law, and he loved being a lawyer because he loved taxes, and he loved estate planning. So, it all turned out to be a blessing that he decided not to.

CC: Moving ahead to 1990, Carlin opted to try for a third term—something that, interestingly enough, is permitted under our constitution so long as no more than two of them are consecutive. So, he was attempting a political comeback in 1990 and assumed he would be facing off against a relatively unpopular incumbent in Mike Hayden. But you mentioned Joan Finney a minute ago. John was in fact upset in the primary by State Treasurer Joan Finney, while Hayden only narrowly survived a challenge from a Wichita realtor in his primary.

As we discussed, a lot of the angst heading into the 1990 election was over property taxes, with both Carlin and Hayden being blamed while Finney was able to run as more of an outsider. Although you and Tom were not as directly involved in an electoral sense in 1990, do you have any memories of this election? Were you as shocked as many others were when Joan Finney had come in as an outsider and basically knocked off two incumbent governors that year?

JD: Well, I mean, I think everybody was surprised. But she was a very good campaigner. Frankly, she reminded me in some ways of Bob Docking. She never forgot a face, never forgot the kids or the grandkids. So, she was powerful at a time I think when people were kind of ticked off at everybody, right? So, I was not surprised, no.

CC: The anti-establishment election.

JD: It was.

 

CC: And she was an anti-establishment figure.

JD: Yes. It was the first time I saw the abortion issue switched. She was pro-life, and Hayden was pro-choice. So, that again was an interesting shift of roles in Kansas politics. That's what I remember a lot about that campaign, actually.

CC: Well, we will talk more soon about Joan Finney and your own electoral interactions with her, but I think it fair to say, as we've been discussing, she was one of the more interesting political figures in Kansas in the latter half of the 20th century. She was this power-to-the-people populist who supported initiative and referendum; she supported the death penalty; as you mentioned, she was largely pro-life on abortion; and she often clashed with her own party in the Kansas Legislature every bit as much as she did with the Republicans. That said, I think we would be remiss in not pointing out that she and the Democratic majority in the House managed to shepherd through maybe the most single important piece of post-World War II legislation in Kansas, the historic 1992 school finance law.

But then heading into 1994, Governor Finney abruptly decides she is not going to run for reelection, which sets up primaries for both parties. Republicans had another six-way scrum, while the Democrats had prominent House Tax Committee Chair Joan Wagnon who had helped author the 1992 school finance package running against incumbent Second District Congressman Jim Slattery, who had been in Congress at that point for twelve years. I stumbled across one clipping indicating that Congressman Slattery may have asked you to be his running mate that year, but that you declined before he ended up picking former Representative Carol Sader. If this is accurate, can you tell us why you opted not to jump into politics at that particular time? Did you have any kind of indication that 1994 was going to be a bad year for Democrats, or was it just still not the right time yet for you and the family?

JD: Yes, Jim did ask me to be lieutenant governor. I think he needed a female to counteract that powerful Joan Wagnon in the primary, but I declined. You know, part of the problem I always have is Joan Wagnon's a friend of mine, and Jim Slattery's a friend of mine. It's always kind of painful on the siding during a primary. Again, it wasn't the right time for our family.

And then you're going to go into 1996, and I'll tell you the story of that. I mean, a little pressure from national people to do that, but it just, it wasn't going to work for us.

CC: Okay. Before we leave the early nineties, what do you recall about the so-called "Summer of Mercy," the anti-abortion protests in Wichita around 1991 that ended up making national news, of course. How stressful was all of that for the community in general, and do you have any insights as to whether the Wichita business community or Chamber of Commerce people thought there might be any wider implications with all of this going on?

JD: I don't remember that, but I do remember it being stressful, just for all of us—you know, Wichita is a small town. It's the biggest city in [Kansas], but we all know each other, and the Docking family has always been very close to the Catholic community. Remember, Catholics make up the base of the Democratic party in Sedgwick County forever and ever.

 

Tom, when he first went to work in the law business, he went to work for Regan & McGannon, both very prominent Catholics, and it really split our community apart. I don't think it's ever gotten sewn back together again. It's a very divisive issue and painful for everybody on both sides. So, it was a tough summer.

CC: I can imagine. Some accounts suggest you may have originally been angling to run for Bob Dole's US Senate seat in 1998 when everyone figured he would not be running again. But all of a sudden, 1996 turned out to be an incredibly interesting year when both US Senate seats were uncharacteristically on the ballot at the same time because of Dole's abrupt resignation designed to help him focus more on his national campaign against President Clinton. So any timetable that may have been laid out for 1998 was quickly accelerated, and you found yourself vying for Senator Dole's seat in 1996.

We're going to talk about the general election campaign shortly, but you first faced a primary to get the Democratic nomination that year when former Governor Finney apparently decided that she missed the spotlight and wanted to jump back into the political game by entering the same US Senate race. Let's start there.

The final tallies show that you won over 74 percent of the votes that August in the Democratic primary. Do you think Finney assumed that name recognition alone might carry the day and maybe didn't campaign as hard as she had in some of her previous races, or was it more a matter that your campaign messaging and resources were more effective? Did the two of you have any forums or debates before the primary? Tell us about the primary race with former Governor Finney.

JD: I don't remember thinking I was angling for 1998. What happened was, '96, there was one open seat. It was Nancy Kassebaum's because Bob Dole was going to hold his seat throughout the president's election, right? That was the original thought. Senator Bob Kerrey, which is how I sort of got to know him from the DSCC called me and said, "We would like you to consider running for Senator Kassebaum's seat because we think you will draw the same females she did, that you will draw moderate Republican women. You're considered a conservative Democrat. You have a famous name, Docking, and we'd like you to consider running for that seat."

I went out to Washington. I met with Senator Kerrey and a bunch of people, and again Tom and I kind of walked through that decision as a family and decided no. Sally Thompson then ended up running for that seat. Unexpectedly, Bob Dole resigned in June or July of that year, which is impossible. There's no time to run for the US Senate, right?

CC: Plug and play, yes.

JD: And Sheila Frahm was put into the seat once Bob Dole resigned, and then there was a split in the Republican party because Bill Graves had put Sheila Frahm in. Sam [Brownback], sort of the upstart and runs against her in the primary. It was at that point that Bob Kerrey called me again and said, "Won't you reconsider?" And Tom and I sat down together, and he said, "You know, the only time a Democrat could win that seat is if there's a split in the Republican party, and this

 

could be a severe enough split that you could possibly do that." It's the same in gubernatorial races. We know that Democrats are the minority party.

So, both Joan Finney and I had so little time to do anything in that primary. I think it was the second or third week of June, and the primary was the first week in August. I knew I had to raise money, and I'd have to go wherever I could to raise the money. I don't know whether Joan raised a bunch of money. I don't remember that, but Bob Kerrey actually because he was favoring me gave me the opportunity to go to Washington, DC and speak in front of the Democratic Caucus of US Senators after a lunch at the Capitol building.

So, I just decided to do this. I'd never been in politics. I was so nervous I could barely breathe. I'm on the plane going to Washington, DC, and there's Dan Glickman, our former Congressman, now Secretary of Agriculture. Dan comes up to me in the TWA, a crowded aisle, he starts talking to me. I tell him how nervous I am, and he goes, "Jill, don't worry about it" and was trying to comfort me. You may not have known Dan Glickman, but he's always gesticulating, going like this, and he hits the stewardess who spills everything on him, on his nice white shirt. I'm thinking, "This schlub is Secretary of Agriculture. Why am I so nervous speaking in front of these people?"

So, I go into the Democratic Caucus Room. Senator Daschle who's the head introduces Bob Kerrey. Bob Kerrey says, "I really shouldn't take a position in a primary," and he probably shouldn't have, but he said, "I think the profile of Jill Docking, conservative businesswoman, is maybe something we could sell a little easier, and I'm taking a position in this primary." He says, "It's not the first time I've lost my virginity. This is a rare occasion, but I'll do it." Now, this is something—Bob Kerrey was with Debra Winger as his girlfriend. This was kind of the playboy from Nebraska.

I get up there and I said, "I just want all you US senators to know it's not my fault Bob Kerrey lost his virginity." Ted Kennedy was drinking water. He spit the water out of his mouth. Bob Kerrey turned real red like he was in high school. Afterward, I said, "I am so sorry, Bob." He said, "Baby, they are all yours."

Afterward, Ted Kennedy came up to me and said, "What can I do to help?" And I remember thinking, if I was being honest, "Don't show up in Kansas" because that was kind of a red flag in Kansas. At one point during the Senate campaign, Joe Kisner said to me, "Why don't we have a Kennedy? Senator Kennedy is willing to come." I go, "No, Joe. If we have a Kennedy, we're inviting John Kennedy." He said, "Now, Jill, who would come see John Kennedy?" I go, "Really, Joe? Every breathing woman in the state of Kansas will show up to see John, Jr."

But that gave me the opportunity to have those national connections. I needed those, some in the primary. You know, the primary was short and not very expensive. But then in the general, I definitely needed it. If you're going to run that kind of Senate campaign and we'll see that in Kansas, you've got to have national connections.

CC: National money.

 

JD: Dianne Feinstein helped me. John Breaux from Louisiana—I'm trying to think. There were a whole lot of people that just gave access to a national network. Unfortunately, it was expensive way back then. It's just outrageous. But there you go. That's the reality.

CC: I gather you were assuming during this primary campaign against former Governor Finney that if you won, you were going to be squaring off against—

JD: Sheila.

CC: Sheila Frahm, the former Kansas Lieutenant Governor you mentioned a minute ago who was appointed to the seat by Governor Graves after Dole's resignation? How would you characterize your level of surprise when she was knocked out in the GOP primary by first-term Congressman Sam Brownback? It was a whole new ball game then.

JD: It was a surprise, yes. it would have been a very different race against Sheila Frahm who I like a great deal. But Sam was on this sort of cutting edge—the evangelical movement, that was a good grassroots movement marrying into the Koch network. Prior to that, I wouldn't say Koch Industries was all that involved at that particular level. It was probably more Koch Industries supporting what I would have called country club Republicans in the old days, the Johnson County guys.

But this was an unusual marriage. They both made compromises to get what they wanted. We came out of the primary ten points ahead of Sam, but by the end, I don't know if you remember—that was the first of the outside money that was nontraceable. It was called "Triad," and it was the Kochs. We couldn't figure out where it was coming from because if you look at the TV, there were no shows on. It was all ads about how terrible Jill Docking was. I remember saying to my father, "Don't turn on the TV, Dad! It's going to make you mad."

But it was stunning. There was no way to keep up. We outraised Sam Brownback significantly. But that outside money—

CC: That outside money was decisive. As you mentioned, this made for one of the most remembered US Senate races in Kansas since at least 1974. And, of course, 1996 was fascinating because, as we've discussed, we had both US Senate seats on the ballot at the same time. I guess during that campaign were you and State Treasurer Sally Thompson who was the Democratic nominee for the other Senate seat, were you ever on stages together? She was running against Pat Roberts and you against Sam Brownback, or did you more or less both run your own campaigns that year?

JD: We were all at forums together, but I will tell you, we purposely ran separately. We purposely did because Bob Dole was going to be voted by Kansans on the top of the ticket, and in our estimation, Pat Roberts had a more secure race. So, you had to get people to go Bob Dole, Pat Roberts, Jill Docking. So, really an unusual way to try to split a ticket. The argument you have to make is "I'm a Democrat who's very conservative. Even in Washington, DC, when all that pressure comes on me, I'll hold the line because I'm a fiscal conservative." But in the end, people went home. By the end, they voted a straight ticket.

 

CC: Certainly, there's been a lot of history written about the Docking-Brownback '96 Senate campaign, where polls showed the race to be a toss- up heading down the homestretch that year. And that same history will reflect that the campaign—and we discussed a little of this already—turned especially nasty during its closing weeks, when this dark money that was coming in on behalf of your opponent funded a series of what many said were anti-Semitic TV ads against you that heavily emphasized your maiden name while repeatedly suggesting how liberal and soft on crime you were.

And I don't know that it's entirely clear the extent to which these mean-spirited ads played a factor in the final outcome. Some say they may have been decisive. But can you tell us, painful though it may be, what was your reaction to them and what it was like having all that happen during the final hectic days and weeks of that campaign?

JD: First of all, I don't think it was decisive. I think had they not done that, they would not have won by the margin they won by, but it was exceptionally painful, and they actually targeted unusual groups like Black voters that "Did you realize Jill Docking didn't raise her children to be a Christian?" True enough, they were raised to be Jewish, but she didn't raise her kids to be Christian. "She didn't raise them to believe in Jesus Christ."

Well, that's really effective in a strong church community like the African American community. We heard about it because they were reporting it to us, the people that were getting those targeted phone calls. That's the one part of the campaign I found hurtful and hard to swallow of all the parts, and I actually told Sam that. "Sam, you would have won anyway." He said, "We didn't know it was happening." I said, "You did because we told you. We knew it was happening." Everybody knew it was happening.

CC: Did he express any remorse to you?

JD: You know, I'm not kind of a big sour grapes person. We did have a private discussion after the election in my office, but I was clear with him that they could have put a stop to it, and they could have. And we don't need to be doing that in Kansas. I firmly believe he would have won anyway. Eventually, with Bob Dole on the top of the ticket, I thought people were going to come home.

CC: Yes, the mid-nineties. I guess that was my next question: The. mid-nineties was when you started to see less and less ticket splitting and more straight party-line kind of stuff. You had Dole on top of the ticket.

JD: Remember, that was the beginning of the Newt Gingrich sort of change in the Republican party, and that's some of what made me run. I just could see what has happened today happening then. I could see that this is what was happening that the people like Dick Bond that I could always work with or Bob Bennett I could always work with, this was a different kind of divisiveness.

 

And, by the way, the Democrats do it, too, right? They're very divisive on some issues also. I'm not just doing a partisan blame, but in this case, at that point, that was the beginning of that Republican really kind of ugly divisive politics.

CC: Well, now US Senator Sam Brownback, of course, did have to defend the seat again just two years later in 1998. Among the people apparently urging you to take another shot at that Senate seat, in addition to the connections you'd made on Capitol Hill with former Senator Kerrey and former Senator Kennedy and all the other Democrats, the powers-that-be in and around Washington, there were a number of people promising you resources and full-throated support including President Bill Clinton. But you said elsewhere that you were still a little upset about the nastiness of the '96 race and with your children not yet out of the nest, you just didn't want to put your family through all of that again. Is that a fair characterization of your thought process back in 1998 when Bill Clinton and others are urging you to take another run at Sam Brownback?

JD: Yes, right. And I would have had to start right away. I had too little time the first time, and I think I thought I got close enough, try it again. I worked at AG Edwards, and I had decided I wasn't going to do politics anymore. We had a receptionist at AG Edwards who was clearly there because she was somebody's niece or spouse. She was the worst receptionist. She'd answer the phone. She'd go, "What?" I'm thinking, "That's not how we answer the phone. 'Hello, may I help you?'"

Anyway, I'm down in my office with a client, and I get a phone call from our receptionist, Nancy. She goes, "Jill, there's a call for you." I said, "Well, Nancy, I have a client in my office. Could you just take a message." She goes, "It's the president." I said, "The president of what?" She said, "Of the United States." I said, "Okay, okay, wait a minute. I'll take the call."

So, I get on the phone. He's obviously eating while he's talking to me. I said, "Mr. President, are you eating while you're talking to me." He goes, "Yeah, what's it to you?" So, he does the whole schtick of Bill Clinton, blah, blah. I go, "There's nothing you're going to say to me to make me change my mind." He said, "Really? Why? I'm interested." I said, "Because I watched what happened to my daughter, who was twelve or thirteen at the time." I said, "Mr. President, it wasn't good, even in the short amount of time I did it. I just think the most important legacy we have are our children. I'd have to shoot myself if I didn't do a good job at that."

And it was really quiet on the other side of the phone. And he said, "You know what, Jill? I never went to any teacher conferences. I didn't go to plays. I missed most of my daughter's upbringing. I hear you loud and clear." And that was the end of the conversation.

CC: Oh, my goodness. Wow. That's fascinating. Okay. Well, before we move on from this period, do you have any other impressions about running a statewide race in the mid-nineties when the conservative wing of the Republican Party, as you've mentioned, suddenly seemed to be in the ascendancy at both the state and national levels? Brownback, of course, rode the initial red 1994 wave into Congress before defeating his more moderate GOP opponent, Sheila Frahm, in the '96 primary, as we mentioned. Longtime Democratic incumbent Congressman Dan Glickman from Wichita was also defeated in that same 1994 election year—

 

JD: Yes.

CC: By a GOP conservative, and we saw Democrats losing seats at the Statehouse in Topeka after they had enjoyed a lot of success earlier in the nineties. Political scientists have pointed to these years as giving birth to the hyper-partisanship era and the use of social wedge issues that we see and hear so much more about today. Are they correct? You mentioned some of this yourself. Is that sort of how you date the start of some of this?

JD: Yes, because when you think about it, I was thinking back to Bob Docking's election. I don't remember—by then, Roe v. Wade was done, you know? Abortion wasn't an issue then. I don't remember it being an issue in John Carlin's election.

So, the "Summer of Mercy" that you designate becomes an issue. When I was running for the US Senate, I had many friends at the Sisters of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ at Newman College. I sat on their board. One particularly good friend said, "All the Sisters here are going to support you for the Senate. We're going to do so vocally." And I said, "Charlotte, you know what? How you vote is your business, but, please, I don't think you should do anything publicly" because of that tension. She goes, "You know what, Jill? If you're elected US Senator, we will not quit badgering you about the issue of abortion, but Jesus was not a single-issue voter. Jesus cared that you cared about kids, about education, about poverty, about all the other things we care about, and we're not single-issue voters either." It made me cry. I thought it was one of the more touching—

Actually, another story. Some woman, bless her heart, was a devout Catholic, trying to decide whether to vote for Joan Finney or Jill Docking. So, she calls me on the phone. She goes, "Mrs. Docking, I haven't decided who I'm going to vote for in the primary. Can I ask you a couple of questions?" I said, "Of course." She said, "So, where are you on the abortion issue?" I explained my stance on the abortion issue. She said, "I'm a very devout Catholic, and I'm very pro-life." I said, "Of course, I understand." She said, "Where are you on the death penalty?" I said, "Well, under certain circumstances, I actually believe in the death penalty." She said, "I'm a very devout Catholic. I'm really opposed to the death penalty." She said, "Mrs. Docking, I really want to vote for you. Can you give me something?" I love America, the American flag, apple pie, but a thoughtful voter, right?

CC: Absolutely.

JD: We should all be thoughtful on both sides.

CC: Before we jump back into a general timeline, I want to divert the questions for just a minute and ask you as someone who has interacted with so many famous people about funny stories or anecdotes you might care to share. You've already told us a few. Oral histories can often be a little dry, but we can imagine fifty years from now people pulling this off the shelf and at least getting a chuckle over some of the more fascinating characters you've gotten to know. Let's start I suppose with Governor Carlin, whom we have already discussed in the more formal political context. Keeping in mind that he has both of our phone numbers, are there any funny or

 

interesting stories or memories you can share that wouldn't irritate him too badly at this juncture?

JD: So, I love John Carlin, starting off. He's the cheapest person I know. In all of the time we were campaigning, he would make me take the soap out of the hotel room and the crummy shampoo. He'd say, "Jill, don't forget the soap and the shampoo." So, I'd be hauling it out to John Carlin. So, Christmas time every now and then, I will package up a bunch of soaps and shampoos I've gotten in hotels.

I don't really have any other than that. He's got a better sense of humor than people know because when he was governor, he was kind of serious all the time. But that's one of my favorite John Carlin stories. He did campaign in the Davis-Docking campaign with us, and he was remarkable. He worked that parade route. Some of those routes are two or three miles, and it's ninety-two degrees out, and he did great. I still say he could do one more parade. He says no. But you know when I offer him a soap or two, he's fine.

CC: He's going to take it. Old War Horse. Anything on Joan Finney, who was certainly one of our more enigmatic politicians, beyond what we've already discussed in the '96 election? Did you have many chances over the years to interact with her one-on-one?

JD: She actually appointed me to be the commanding general of the Kansas Calvary. Do you know what the Kansas Calvary is?

CC: It was the economic development base, yes.

JD: I also, by the way, was appointed by Bill Clinton to be on the Defense Advisory Council on Women in the United States Military. Secretary Perry was the head of that. One time, I was going to Fort Riley, and the guy calls me up. So, you had to do visitations to these places to see if women were being treated fairly and honorably. He goes, "Mrs. Docking, I understand you're the commanding general of the Kansas Calvary. We have the calvary horses here. Would you like to—" I'm going, "No, no, no, no. I'm not a horse person. I don't want to be on any horses."

But Joan did give me a great opportunity, which was almost a once in a lifetime for a businessperson. When Bill Clinton was first elected, there was a summit in Little Rock, Arkansas because remember, Hillary and Bill started off with health care. They kicked it off, and they had this big summit with all of the very prominent people in business going to that summit, and she sent me as a representative of the business thing on behalf of Kansas. I was in my twenties or early thirties, I don't know, but it was a super opportunity for me. I met Augie Busch. I met the head of Apple. I met the head of the railroads. I mean, around this table, it was remarkable.

And this will give you a funny story about politics and how the money game works. I met the CEO of Loral, which was the defense industry, and the most charming man. I thought he was incredibly old. He was probably seventy, my age, but to me in my twenties, and I befriended him, and he was fascinating. He said, "If you're ever in New York to do a Kansas Calvary thing, you call me." I said, "Awesome."

 

So, I go to New York to bring in I think a coffee company to Kansas. I call him on the phone, and he said, "Okay, this is fabulous. I want to take you to dinner. I'll have my private car come pick you up." So, we go to dinner, and after about fifteen minutes, I have now figured out what he's thinking is going to happen after dinner, and I got very nervous, like sweating. I kept saying, "I'm so happily married. I fell in love with my husband when I was sixteen" and went on and on and on. He gets it. I go back to the hotel, hoping I never see this person ever again in my whole life. I call Tom, kind of upset by it all, and Tom said, "It's okay. You're safe."

Now, I'm running for the US Senate. I have to raise money quickly against Joan Finney and then Sam Brownback. Bob Kerrey calls me and he says, "The #1 Democratic contributor in the United States of America is"—I'm not going to use his name— "Is So and So. You've got to call him." I said, "Nope, I'm not doing it." He says, "Yes, you are." "No, I'm not." He says, "Yes, you are." "No, I'm not." He finally says to me, "You have to call him."

I call up, hoping he forgot who I was. So, I call up his office, ask for him. I get him immediately, and I say, "Mr. So and So, I know you don't remember who I am. My name's Jill Docking. I'm running for the US Senate, and Bob Kerrey suggested I call you," and I do this fast, nervous spiel again, and there's a pause, and he goes, "Actually, I do remember you. You are very happily married."

CC: Did he give you a check?

JD: He did, and he raised money for me. That is a tough *Mad Men* environment. That has changed a lot since those days, but I used to say to people, "I think some of these guys try 100 women. If one works, yay!" Right? But you'd better be tougher than that if you're going to be female and go into that business because it is a tough business.

CC: Absolutely. Let's talk about another tough female, former Governor and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

JD: Yes.

CC: Also from a powerful political family. We are going to talk soon about her appointing you to the Board of Regents and your tenure on that body, but can you tell us how long you have known each other and describe your working relationship more generally over the years?

JD: So, her dad was governor of Ohio at the same time Bob Docking was governor of Kansas. Her mother and my mother-in-law were very close friends. They played bridge together. When Kathleen married Gary Sebelius and came to Kansas, my mother-in-law who was First Lady of the state of Kansas called Kathleen on the phone and said, "I love your mom, Katie. I just want you to know I'm here for you." So, we've known Kathleen for many generations.

She and other candidates when they were running for stuff used to stay at our house, and I'd say to Kathleen and Jim Slattery and whoever else was coming through town, "I don't have time to hostess everybody. I'm going to give you a key. The sheets will be clean. Make yourself at

 

home." And at one point, Kathleen was in the bedroom, and there's a knock on the door, and it's Jim Slattery who'd been double booked.

I knew Slattery for many, many years because Bob Docking supported Jim when he was a young—he must have run for the House before he ran—he must have been a House member from Topeka. These are forty- and fifty-year relationships. You know what? That's really wonderful.

There was a dedication in Ark City for the Docking Museum. Both Kathleen Sebelius and Laura Kelly came down. It was a big day in Ark City. That was really wonderful. And Kathleen actually told the story of knowing the Dockings since she was a kid.

CC: I know that health care and access to it has always been one of your passions.

JD: Right.

CC: Do you think that Secretary Sebelius got a fair shake in the national media—

JD: I do not.

CC: You do not. When the ACA was being implemented because the damn federal website kept crashing or whatever it was, or do you think a lot of the more shrill and partisan voices who had opposed the legislation were suddenly simply looking for a scapegoat and for anything to go wrong?

JD: Yes, of course. Look, it was going to be really complicated to get this done. If I had to create a health care system from scratch, I would not create what we have in the United States of America. There are clearly big advantages to our health care system. If you have money, you can have access to meet the best doctors in the world, the best research in the world. In your perfect corporation you've got lots of benefits, but everyday working Kansans who are definitely going to be screwed soon on having access to health care. I think Kathleen has been a lioness nationally on these issues and continues to go on and is so articulate. I'm so proud of her. It was a bumpy start, but once this is unwound, I think we will see what a good idea it was because it's getting unwound, and it's dangerous. So, yes, obviously I'm defensive of Kathleen Sebelius.

[End of File 1]

CC: Well, before she leaves for her HHS gig in Washington, Governor Sebelius in 2009 appoints you to the Kansas Board of Regents. This allowed you to oversee another one of your lifelong passions, namely the effort to ensure that Kansans have access to affordable and high-quality higher educational opportunities. Before we get into some of the funding challenges and more normal business that you recall that the Board was handling, I want to ask you a little bit about college athletic conference realignment. During your final year on the Board when you were its chair, everything was beginning to get crazy, as I'm sure you may recall. This was an era where Nebraska and Colorado were leaving the Big 12 Conference, followed soon thereafter by Texas A&M and Missouri. TCU and West Virginia were coming in to sort of backfill, but as early as

 

2010, Oklahoma and Texas were also starting to talk about greener pastures. And the prospect at that time of losing Oklahoma and Texas would have meant almost a certain break-up and disaster for the remaining Big 12 schools.

So everyone was up in arms and worried about KU and K-State and what the future held. We talked to both Ed McKechnie and Kenny Wilk about what unprecedented levels of stress this put on the Board of Regents back during this time. Ed told us in his interview that he talked with you and others a lot about how he thought the older model of the Board being hands off on college sports and leaving all of that to the athletic corporations and chancellors—that just wasn't realistic and wasn't going to work anymore. The Board was getting drawn into this, whether you all liked it or not. That was sort of the way Ed had put it to us. And he told us wild stories about his phone ringing off the hook day and night, and dozens of people approaching him and Christine Downey out of the blue in restaurants to talk about the implications of the Big 12 breakup, potentially the Big 12 breakup. Is that how you remember a lot of that, and how would you describe some of your formal and informal discussions about all of this during your final year or so on the Board?

JD: So, I am perhaps in all of Kansas the worst person to talk sports with, the worst. But I had to kind of get into it because it was part of what was going on. And it was unfortunate because I didn't intend to serve on the Board of Regents to talk about sports, to be honest with you. I spent the majority of my time as vice chair and chair. Certainly, sports has even changed faster with the NIL and all of that kind of going on, and I watch what's happening at KU because I'm on KU Endowment. I don't think all of this money coming into sports is good for these young people or for college sports.

What was interesting about the time I served, there was not so much the sports issue, it was the economy. In 2007, I got on the Board. In 2008 and '9, the national economy went into the tank. Remember, the East and West Coast kind of got it before we did, and then it really set in in 2010 when I was still on the board, and Duane Goossen would come and talk about just the sucking out of money out of the economy, and there was virtually no money for higher education. It was as instructive a time to serve on the Kansas Board of Regents and painful.

But some important stuff came out of this, and it really has nothing to do with sports, but people ought to hear this story because it's important for Wichita. During that period of time, KU Med School from Wichita came to the Board of Regents and said, "We want KU Med in Wichita to be a four-year institution." At the time, it was only two years. So, the kids would spend two years in Kansas City and their last two years in Wichita, some of them to do their clinicals.

The reason it's so important we have a four-year program in Wichita is we get retention of doctors. They end up doing their residency there. KU Med Wichita holds 60 percent of the students in the state of Kansas as doctors. KU Med from the Kansas City area holds more like 40 percent because they're going to Missouri. They're going to lots of other places.

I was chair of the Board of Regents, and I remember saying to all of my friends in Wichita, "You know there's no money. There is no money." And their first response was, "We'll raise enough money to sort of start privately, and then when money starts coming to the coffers"—there were

 

moderate Rs all over the place promising they would support this because everybody was in favor of it. Well, then Sam became governor, and we followed a huge economic downturn with the pulling back of tax revenue. Talk about sucking everything dry.

So, Wichita at that point said, "We're going to have to do this on our own. What we did was we started doing coordinated education with WSU and Kansas Newman College. It was sort of the best thing possible because we started that partnership, which all of those institutions of higher education for years and years and years had been parochial. I used to say, "You guys are fighting over peanuts. What's the matter with you? The competition is national and international. Quit it!" But this forced us to work together.

So, we had this wonderful cooperative spirit in trying to make our med school a four-year med school. Work, work, work together. We needed a new med school in Wichita because Kansas City had a beautiful new med school. It's also hard to compete for students down in Wichita.

Then COVID hit. When COVID hit, there were federal dollars to be had, and we had this cooperation already with two Regents institutions working together. As a former member of the Board of Regents, I would say to them, "If you don't work together, the legislature will never listen to you because it's wasted money. You're repeating things. If you cooperate, that would be great."

We have a new biomedical center about to be finished in the city of Wichita for 220 million dollars in the center of Wichita. It is a remarkable gift to us for three reasons—they're educating our next corps of medical professionals in the city. It's not only our doctors, but it's pharmacists, nurses, med techs. They're all going to be in the same building—never, almost unheard of for WSU and KU to cooperate. We would never have gotten that without the kind of alliance we already had with WSU and KU. Ty Masterson worked hard on getting the Republicans to support it for Wichita, and my job was to work hard for Democrats to support it for Wichita, and I did.

And I had many people say to me, "I can't believe you're working with Ty Masterson." Clearly Ty and I couldn't be further apart on public policy issues. My response? "For 220 million dollars in the middle of Wichita, I'll shine his shoes. What's the matter with you?" It's been terrific.

It's a good example of Democrats and Republicans coming together for the betterment of Kansas. This split is not good for our state. We're a small state anyway. We compete with all of our neighbors. We compete nationally. We need to kind of quit it. I don't think we are going to quit it, but that's a pretty good example of the power of that. The power in our city is about 200 million dollars of economic development in the city. Heartspring is moving their neurological pediatric wing down there. We've got 3,000 students who will be attending in the center of the city. That's what we need to do in Kansas.

CC: Yes. Well, you mentioned the stress that the Great Recession put on the state budget in general and higher ed in particular back in 2008 and 2009 during the Great Recession. Today, one of the issues that people are pointing out as putting a lot of stress on higher ed is the

 

demographic issue apparently because of the Great Recession. Now, eighteen years later, there is a baby bust.

JD: That's correct.

CC: This was a ripple effect that has now hit the higher education sector and its affordability twice if you will, the severity of what you all were experiencing, and then here eighteen years ago.

JD: So, #1, the party's over. There's not going to be federal dollars coming in here, and I think the reality of the state budget is going to kind of come back to everybody's purview. But you're going to get demographic downturn. President Trump has made it very, very difficult for international students here to study here. International students, of course, pay full fare at KU and WSU. I sit on the board of Southwestern College, a little Methodist school in Winfield, Kansas. We kind of kept our kids there last summer. We were afraid to let them go home. We didn't think they could come back again. It's bad, obviously, for the schools because we're looking for enrollment every place we can get it, but also bad for the kids. It's so good for the kids to have international students and learn about other cultures.

So, higher ed is on the front line. Higher ed is on the front line because of a lot of what's been going on nationally with the Trump administration going after Ivy Leagues for a variety of things, but I am such a fundamentally optimistic person. I think this will settle down. I really do. I think all of those who worry, worry, worry need to keep our heads together and say, "Let's get through this and figure out where we're going next."

CC: Before we get into the 2014 election, let's touch briefly on 2010. Were you at all surprised when Governor Parkinson opted to not run for reelection, and did you have any advance notice of his decision?

JD: I didn't have advance notice. I was surprised because he was in my opinion an extraordinary governor. He was really smart and was a visionary. I remember when he came to speak to the Board of Regents, and I was actually chair of the Regents, he said, "I know you all want a Final Four at KU, but why aren't you worried about how KU's ranked nationally on academics? Why isn't K-State worried about this?" He really was good.

I don't think—Mark was playing tennis from the middle of the court. He'd been a Republican, became a Democrat. You're really not steeped in—you're a traitor on one side and not particularly trusted on the other. I'm guessing that's why he didn't run. Plus I think he's by nature kind of quiet. He'd come down to Wichita and want to sit and talk to Tom and to me, and I'd go, "Mark, get up and go work the crowd!" He was by nature kind of solitary, but a really good guy and an extraordinary public servant for the time he was there and really good on strategic planning.

CC: Lieutenant Governor Findley also opted to not run, and State Senator Tom Holland ended up being the Democratic nominee running against Sam Brownback, who had decided to come back to Kansas and run for governor after sixteen years serving in Congress in DC. As an important

 

part of the Democratic Party establishment, were you and Tom at all involved with discussions about what the party was going to do for its gubernatorial prospects in 2010 after Governor Parkinson had bowed out?

JD: You're leading up into the Davis-Docking campaign. Yes, Paul Davis and I sat down as did Tom. Everybody was worried about—more about what was happening to Kansas to be honest with you than who would win or lose. Paul Davis said to me, "One of us has to run for governor, and the other has to run on the ticket." He goes, "You run for governor. I'll be lieutenant governor." "No, no, no. I'm not doing it. If you run for governor, I will help you" because I knew I could help him raise money, and I knew that we could—whether we could win or not, and I frankly thought we would significantly lose, even when we started, a bad way to go into a campaign.

There are many ways I think to participate in politics, and if you think the message is important enough, that you run, and you know you probably won't win, but you get the message out, it's worth it. By golly, I thought we got the message out about what was happening in government. I hope that helped Laura Kelly win on that next election.

I remember saying to Paul, "Paul, I don't think we can win this." By the end, I thought we might. We had a lot of traction by the end, but I said, "It's more important for Kansas that we get the message out because we're going to go bankrupt."

CC: Well, the background and the context of that 2014 race that you're describing, just to set the table here, Brownback is elected in 2010, and after settling in for a year, he decides in 2012 to do a self-described "experiment" on the state's tax system. He convinced Republicans to rush it to his desk after flying supply-side economist Arthur Laffer into the state as a special consultant. But I think it is fair to say that the experiment did not turn out anywhere nearly as well as Brownback, Laffer and some of its other proponents had hoped. The reality is that the fiscal crisis it caused quickly became ongoing and institutionalized, and lawmakers had to annually consider back-filling tax increases; smoke and mirrors budget gimmicks; and painful budget cuts. Kansas made national news; had our bond-rating downgraded repeatedly; and even became a punchline for late-night TV comedians. Tax-cutting Republicans in other states were publicly asserting that while they wanted new tax cuts, they most certainly did not want to emulate what Kansas had done in any way, shape, and form.

So, that set the table for this 2014 election year you described. Paul Davis who was then the House Minority Leader, and you and he decide you are going to run. Yes, you're on the ticket as a lieutenant governor running mate, but it's interesting from a historical standpoint that you're squaring off once more against your nemesis from 1996, Sam Brownback, here a couple of decades later.

JD: Although he hardly mentioned my name in that race. I mean, he squared off against Paul.

CC: Any other memories you have about the hard-fought election campaign that year at all? Did you do any kind of debates or forums between you and Jeff Colyer? What else do you recall about that campaign?

 

JD: You know, I don't remember any debates. We could have had them, but I just don't remember that. It's usually again between the gubernatorial. Here's what I remember about it. It was the most unconditional love I had for my state because I didn't think we were going to win, and I thought somebody had to do something to get the messaging out, and that eventually people would figure out what we were saying was true. I think we were almost two weeks too late. I think stuff started to fall apart after the election, and it became evident what was going on.

But thank goodness, we got Laura in. I don't remember who ran in that primary. Who ran against Laura in that first primary?

CC: It was Josh Svaty and Wichita Mayor Carl Brewer, if memory serves.

JD: Also good people, really terrific public servants. I gave Laura her first fundraiser in Wichita, and she hasn't let me forget this. I introduced her. First of all, people didn't know Laura. She'd been a state senator here. I said, "The worst criticism I've ever heard of Laura Kelly is she has no charisma. And you know what? They're right. But there's nobody in the room smarter than she is or will work harder than she does to get the job done." You want charisma? Go somewhere else. Donald Trump has charisma. There are a lot of people in politics that are very charismatic, but Laura was really the steadying hand we needed. She's been terrific as governor. I couldn't be more pleased.

CC: Another race that was thought to be a toss-up heading down the home stretch was this 2014 result that we just mentioned with you and Paul running against Brownback. As you mentioned, it turned out to be a lot closer than you may have thought—

JD: I anticipated, yes.

CC: But in the wake of the *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court, there's now the ability for even more dark money to become pouring in, and some of this dark money began going after Paul hammer and tongs with TV ads vaguely implying he was in the wrong when he happened to be present at a strip club nearly two decades earlier when police raided the building in search of drugs. So just like back in 1996, there's yet another race going down to the wire involving Mr. Brownback, where he and/or his supporters had turned to shadowy, negative and some might say, wildly misleading attack ads suddenly flooding the airwaves in the days leading up to the election. And maybe like in '96, we're never going to know the exact impact that these negative ads had, but we do know that there was only a slightly over 30,000 vote margin. I guess hindsight being 20/20, do you think those attack ads were decisive, or do you just don't think it was a winnable race in any case in 2014?

JD: By the end, I felt we were going to win. I thought it was a winnable race. Yes, the attack ads are effective. You know, they can—I remember saying to Tom when I ran for the Senate, "I'm such a dork. What are they going to say? And I've never been in public office. How are you going to paint me as anything? I've never voted on anything." They'll create stuff. They make stuff up.

 

The American voter, you want to hang on to democracy, you'd better be a little more discerning. It's just as simple as that. You've got to figure out who's doing the ad, where's the money coming from. I remember that ad with the blue and red lights. It was terrible. I was sorry for Paul and his family to go through all that, but that is politics today. Again, if you're not willing to endure that, you're probably in the wrong game, which is why I'm out of it.

CC: Setting the table for the election of Governor Kelly, you mentioned 2018, in the intervening years between 2014 and 2018, the fiscal crisis we mentioned had dragged on for several more years, and the 2017 Kansas Legislature rather famously repealed the controversial non-wage business income exemption and also restored our individual income tax system to three brackets after it had been reduced to two brackets. Governor Brownback was not enthused, as you might imagine, with this action and vetoed the bill. But the legislature by this time had simply had enough and rather remarkably rounded up two-thirds majorities, which of course included both Republicans and Democrats in both chambers, and overrode his veto. Even though you were watching more from afar by 2017, did you and Paul at all feel vindicated when the failed tax experiment was finally abandoned?

JD: Yes. I was asked on TV once by Victor Hogstrom who's KPTS down at Wichita and does a personal thing, "Name a Republican you really admire." At the time, I said, "[Representative] Mark Hutton," and he said, "Why?" I said, "Because he said, 'I was wrong.'" The Huttons are really good businessmen. I think they actually built this building. They got the contract for this building to do the Docking Building. To buy into it is one thing, but then to keep going, knowing something's wrong is a moral failing, and I see it happening nationally. There are plenty of people nationally who know a lot of what's going on in this country is really wrong, and they are cowards. I thought [Representative] Hutton said, "I was wrong. That was a bad decision, and it's bad for our state."

I think that's all I ask from our public servants, whether you're Democrat or Republican, if you're wrong, please shift gears.

CC: Be able to admit a mistake. Well, in 2018, Republicans had a wild ride with then-incumbent Governor Jeff Colyer losing narrowly to then Secretary of State Kris Kobach, and votes ended up being recounted and tabulated several weeks after the primary in fact. When Governor Kelly advanced out of the Democratic primary we just mentioned to run against Secretary of State Kobach, we can assume you were an enthusiastic supporter of Governor Kelly at that point. But that election also featured a well-funded independent candidate, Greg Orman. I guess, similar to our questions about other prominent Kansas politicians, can you tell us a little bit more about your relationship over the years with Governor Kelly? Did you first meet her when she was a state senator?

JD: State senator. I've been a supporter of Laura's for a long time. I really liked what she did as a state senator. So, I was on her bandwagon all the way around. Greg Orman was an interesting candidate, very, very bright. I'm sure he screwed up the tabulation at the end of it all, but the three-way split probably helped Laura get into that office at that point.

 

Anyway, I've said this before, I think Laura has been an outstanding governor. I can think of a couple of things I didn't agree with her about. You're going to ask me what they are, and I'm not going to tell you. But other than that, I think she's done a great job.

CC: Governor Kelly of course. has long been a long, tireless and enthusiastic advocate for Medicaid expansion.

JD: Yes.

CC: I assume with all of your health care advocacy work, you continue to support that initiative as well?

JD: I do. Yes, but I wonder—I think about this a lot because I'm on the Kansas Health Foundation. We have really slipped in the national rankings on our health rankings. I wonder if we hadn't been fighting about this for so long if we could have strategically done something to help Kansans. That's what I'm thinking about. I mean, some of our numbers are so terrible, it would appall you. We ranked 51 out of 50 states in access to mental health care. So, I raised my hand and said, "How is that possible?" Puerto Rico's ahead of us.

Now, we have made huge strides on access to mental health in the last five years or so. The state's building a facility in Wichita. In Wichita, we, a bunch of us, raised money to transform an orthopedic surgeon doctor's office into a crisis child's psychiatric hospital. We were shipping seven hundred children to Kansas City and Oklahoma City who had tried to kill themselves. Imagine, working at Boeing, having to drive to Kansas City and leave your child there who's tried to kill themselves. We now can accommodate those people. We raised the money privately in Wichita.

So, I went to the head of that hospital and said, "Say, how's it going?" He said, "We don't have enough child psychiatrists." I said, "Whose problem is that?" He said, "KU." I said, "I know the guy at KU."

So, I went to Dr. Girod and said, "Doug, we want a fellowship in child psychiatry in Wichita" because again we know if they do their residency, and they go to Kansas City in child psychiatry, they're not coming back because they're at the age when their kids will be in school. He said, "Okay, but you guys have to raise the money privately." I said, "How is that? Surely, residencies are funded by states and the federal government." He said the hospitals aren't interested because there's not much money. If it's surgery, they're interested. And I am so proud of the people on KU Med Wichita. We raised about six million dollars in the last three or four years. The Patterson Foundation helped us. I went to the county and the city saying, "These are our kids. We've got to have a psychiatrist." We now have almost tripled the number of child psychiatrists we have in Wichita, Kansas because those fellows are staying. They've got families. Their kids are in school. They're staying.

So, tons of strides being made, all very exciting stuff. I am the most positive about Wichita, Kansas I have ever been in my life, about all the things going on there. So, I don't want people to get kind of negative.

 

CC: That's fantastic. Some of the powers that be with the Kansas Oral History Project wanted me to ask you some big picture from 20,000 feet kind of questions, and I think that's an excellent idea. Some of this turf we've already covered, but given how diversified your remarkable life experience portfolio is—from working with nonprofits; in higher ed; as a health care advocate; philanthropist; a champion for financial literacy; a prominent political figure; and as someone who has moved relatively seamlessly back and forth between the public and private sectors—you may well be uniquely qualified to talk about some of the ongoing challenges you think Kansas faces moving forward. You just mentioned things in Wichita where the glass is way more than half full, but what are some of the issues you are most concerned about statewide when we think about the immediate and long-term future? Feel free to talk about anything from age-related demographics to water issues to health care or higher education access.

JD: So, I'm going to stick with health care for a minute. We do not have enough research being done on statistics in the state of Kansas to show outcomes of women having breast cancer and seeking treatment, the mortality of African American women during childbirth. We have many health care issues that we need a great deal of research on because the disparity between urban and rural outcomes is pretty stark. Right now, I'm working with WSU and KU in partnership, again yay, on data banking statistics to find these things out and to help raise the care we have and access to care and largely education, educate people about where you can get the care and what you need to do.

So, I'm seventy. If I'm not on the back nine, I'm on the back, I don't know, three. I was in the Denver airport the other day, and everybody called me Sweetie, and I thought, "Oh, my god. I think I'm a little old lady." But I got from the front door to the train in seven minutes. "Here, Sweetie, let me take you." "Okay."

I think all Kansans ought to be looking at the next ten years instead of the next year. I do believe we'll get out of this dark period of our history nationally, and all those things that make a difference to me as a mom and a grandmother ought to be making differences to people in Kansas. We want to educate our kids. You have to have kids prepared for this world of AI and high technology.

So, I'm generally optimistic about the way things are going. I can't be a pessimist. I think the energy is great, and I think we ought to just still keep working together. I'm not saying anything people on the other side wouldn't say. The divisiveness is a cancer in this country. There's no other word for it.

CC: That was actually my next question. What concerns you the most relative to our politics at this very interesting moment in our history? It's the divisiveness. And we've talked already a little about the increased political polarization, the ascendancy of social wedge issues, fewer competitive races than there used to be, and then the accelerating influence of powerful special interest groups and whatnot. I guess maintaining an optimistic outlook and working together is an important part of the way to fix this, but anything else you can think of that needs to happen in your estimation for the state to right the Kansas political ship and make the public sector more responsive to our electors and maybe more "small d" democratic?

 

JD: So, there are tons of people running for public office right now. We all know this because we've been in politics a long time. There are always swings. The anti-what's going on in the United States is swinging the action towards the Democratic primaries. I think there are eight or nine people running for the US Senate against Senator Marshall. Down in Wichita, Kansas, which we hardly ever get, a slew of people running for Congress. They're all very qualified people, all of them, in the Senate race, too. I find that enthusiastic because I was at the "No Kings" protest that just recently happened and was a little depressed about how old everybody was. I was. I'm thinking, "Where are the young people?" But there are a lot of young people running for public office. So, I took a couple of those candidates by the scruff of their neck at that "No Kings" protest and said, "Work the crowd. This is Katie. Katie's running for the US Congress."

I don't know. You know, I'm a stockbroker, and people jump in and out of the markets saying, "This is the worst time ever. Everything's going to hell in a handbasket." It's not. We're going to be okay. Maybe age gives you that wisdom to say, "It's going to be okay." People will start working together. We are the greatest nation, I believe and will always believe in the world. I think it's a blip in time, and when I get depressed, I think about my father fighting in World War II in the darkest of all times, and that's just my dad. It's not five generations ago. We'll be okay.

CC: Anything else you want to add about what the future holds for you? I'm assuming you're still staying engaged in at least an informal advisory role here and there in the electoral process, as we've discussed. I seem to recall being at an event with you fairly recently where you gave a glowing endorsement of the presumptive Democratic Attorney General nominee Chris Mann. Are you going to be helping out any other candidates in particular and monitoring the results up and down the ballot this fall?

JD: I've scheduled at my home six fundraisers over the next eight weeks. So, I am still fully engaged. I'm more in the philanthropy side of things. I just joined the board of Heartspring, which deals with pediatric neurological problems for children not only in Kansas, but the United States. They are building a 25-million-dollar facility right near the Bioscience Center. That's kind of where I'm putting my energy right now, just to help them raise some money to do that. You know, Chris, I'm not dead yet. I've got a lot more to do by the time I've finished my life. I look at a guy like Warren Buffett. What's he? Ninety-five? He's done a lot in all those years.

So, I'm still working, and I'm not retiring. My son said I tried retirement for a week, which is true, I did. It wasn't my thing. And I have a wonderful son who's my business partner and a daughter with these beautiful grandchildren. I feel very blessed. I miss my Tom like crazy, but I'm going to keep trudging on because that's what he would expect of me.

CC: Absolutely. Thank you for your time with us today.

JD: Thank you, Chris.

[End of File 2]

 