

JOE HOAGLAND ON BOB ALDERSON

Joe Hoagland: My name is Joe Hoagland. Bob Alderson was my brother-in-law. He was the best brother-in-law on my side of the family. In fact, he was the only brother-in-law on my side of the family. I met Bob when he was in the Revisor of Statutes Office in Topeka, and I was a member of the state legislature. He had started dating my sister, who was a tour guide at the Capitol Building.

I got to be friends with Bob, and I used him to draft all the legislation that I wanted to introduce. I remember walking into his office with an ice cream bar, eating an ice cream bar at about 4:00 in the afternoon, and I said, "I want to introduce a bill that will abolish contributory negligence and replace it with a system of comparative negligence." It's a technical area of the law but an important one. As I was gesturing, the ice cream had melted a bit on the stick. It came off and landed on a pile of papers on his desk. I didn't say anything. Bob never looked up. He just said, "I'll have it ready for you in the morning."

The next day, the bill was on my desk. I introduced it to the legislature. It passed both houses, signed by the governor. It's on the books today.

But the bill was so well drafted, it became a model. It was known as the Kansas Model of Comparative Negligence. It was adopted verbatim by seventeen other states. It has allowed millions of people to receive compensation for injuries when they were otherwise barred. It was major tort reform legislation. I took the credit for it, but it was really Bob who figured out how to do it.

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