

Jim McLean: Hello, I'm Jim McLean, a member of the Kansas Oral History Project Board and a former reporter for Kansas newspapers and public radio stations. Today is August 13th, 2025. We're at the Kansas Capitol to interview Martin Hawver, the dean of the Statehouse press corps when he retired in 2023 after forty-seven legislative sessions. Martin started his reporting career as a newspaper carrier, then copy boy at the *Topeka Daily Capital*. There he worked his way up the editorial ranks until he was assigned to cover the Statehouse for what had become the *Topeka Capital-Journal*. In the spring of 1993, Martin left the newspaper. We'll talk about that later. He and his wife Vickie took a bold step of starting their own publication, the groundbreaking *Hawver's Capitol Report*. It covered the legislature like it had never been covered before. It was packed with insider stuff from analysis of the big stories to the minutiae of Kansas politics.

As always, today our volunteer videographer is former Kansas Representative Dave Heinemann. This interview is part of the Kansas Oral History Project's series exploring contributions of reporters, editors, and press secretaries, and others who inform the public about state policymaking. The Kansas Oral History Project is a nonprofit corporation that collects and preserves oral histories of Kansans. The project is supported by donations from generous individuals and occasional grants. With that, Martin, welcome. Thanks for being here. I appreciate it.

Martin Hawver: Sure.

JM: Let's start by talking about your ascension from newspaper carrier to copy boy to editor to Statehouse reporter. How did that happen?

MH: The guy that threw the *Journals* on our route told me he was going to quit, and I said, "I'll get that job." I went down and asked, and they said, "You live on that route; sure, go ahead." It worked out pretty good. I did that. Then part time, I sold cemetery plots, and that was kind of fun.

JM: Was it really?

MH: It was because I talked to cemetery plot salesmen who would spend like three hours talking to people about why they should get a plot. And I came up with the line where early in the conversation, I would say, "And if there's any chance you'll be dead longer than three days, you really ought to get a plot." About a third of them just threw me out of the house, and another two-thirds just kind of grumbled and wrote a check.

JM: That's pretty good odds.

MH: It worked out pretty good. It saved me a lot of time. That's not a bad kind of generation, way to generate questions for people.

JM: It's interesting you should mention that. Initially, I thought, "What an odd combination," but anything you're doing door to door where you're greeting people cold like that, no pun intended with the "cold," but that really is good training to be a reporter to do that over and over again all the time. You have to start conversations with people who really don't want to talk to you.

MH: Yes, and you can end the ones you don't want real quick.

JM: That's right, yes. Then you became a copy boy, right?

MH: Yes.

JM: You were roughly seventeen, eighteen years old when that happened?

MH: Yes. The advantage there was that there's a liquor store that I could deal with at age eighteen. There were other people in the newsroom that every now and again needed a little shooter or maybe a half pint, and I could go get it for them. I was the only copy boy that could do that.

JM: So those were the days when reporters and editors literally kept a bottle in the desk drawer.

MH: Pretty much.

JM: Pretty much. So, you've got your foot in the door.

MH: Yes.

JM: You progress through some editorial positions becoming the copy editor, the editor to the Sunday paper. Was that a long period of time?

MH: Maybe four or five years. The people tended to like me there. They just kind of taught me little things that journalists ought to know. I had gone to Washburn. I didn't graduate from there, but I went to Washburn. After a while, that got kind of dull, and I couldn't get any dates. So, I just quit and went full time.

JM: That's interesting. That really is old school. That's the way people who became reporters used to work their way up through the system. You didn't go to some journalistic school at Northwestern, KU, whatever. You just literally—it was a craft that you learned from mentors who did it.

MH: Yes. It's kind of been fun because my wife and I, she was a copy editor also.

JM: Right.

MH: Copy editing has kind of gone downhill.

JM: No kidding.

MH: It's just not nicely, concisely done. We spent about half our time reading the paper, telling each other, "Can you believe they let that go to ink?"

JM: Do you guys sit there with red pens?

MH: No, we don't. We just do it out loud. The industry's changed quite a little bit.

JM: So, you made it to the Statehouse.

MH: Yes.

JM: Roughly speaking in the late seventies, right?

MH: Yes.

JM: Roger Myers is already there.

MH: Yes.

JM: So, the two of you were the *Topeka Capital-Journal* Statehouse Bureau when I got there in the early eighties. You were there for a long period of time, the two of you covering the Statehouse.

MH: Yes, he took the House and gave me the Senate.

JM: You split it up that way.

MH: We split it up like that. It was kind of fun having someone else there. We could check each other to see if one of us knew something that would be important to the story. He taught me a lot about what goes on in this building and formal technical things that I didn't have much knowledge about.

JM: You need to know those things to cover the Statehouse effectively. There is a lot to know in terms of the process.

MH: Yes.

JM: But talk to me a little bit about Roger. The late Roger Myers, he's gone now. We can't do an interview with him, which is a shame because he had a lot of institutional knowledge. But I shared that office with Roger briefly, too, but you were there many, many years before I was. What's your recollection of him?

MH: He could type faster than I could, but I didn't look at my hands.

JM: Wow.

MH: He knew the people that other people didn't know.

JM: Really?

MH: That was a time when reporters didn't spend a lot of time, kind of, getting to know people, being able to chat about, "Is the wife okay? Did the car start?" just things that are kind of conversational and social. That's the problem we're having now is that there's not a lot of social interaction. I don't mean going out for drinks, although we used to do that.

JM: That's part of it, but just conversationally.

MH: Just conversationally.

JM: Roger was an interesting guy. I think he was in the Army Reserve and commanded an artillery unit or something like that. He was truly an institution here. He was here for a long time.

MH: He did a lot of military stuff.

JM: He did.

MH: He was the first guy that got, I think, pissed off when I said, "The only lottery I ever won was the draft lottery." He said, "Oh?" I said, "Yeah, I got to stay here," and he was like, "That's not winning." He thought going into the service was winning, which was kind of not how I was brought up.

JM: Did you guys get along pretty well?

MH: Yes.

JM: You seemed like a good team.

MH: Yes, there were things we would talk about and things that we wouldn't talk about. Every now and again, he'd be doing a story, and I'd know someone in my Chamber that he's ought to talk to. We could kind of blend things together. It was kind of fun. It was indoor work.

JM: Indoor work.

MH: We didn't get indoor parking until I think the eighties. We all had to cross the street, but, boy, once we got indoor parking, I pretty much had it made.

JM: And you shared an office on the first floor of the Capitol with the Harris News Service was in with you guys, you and Roger and the Harris News Service.

MH: Yes.

JM: Who was there then? Was it Leroy [Towns]? Cindy Schwartz? Do you remember?

MH: I remember Leroy. He's mostly the one I think I remember. There were attractive young women they brought in, but they didn't stay long in the Statehouse.

JM: For Harris.

MH: They'd go to another job with the company or to another company. At that time, this was not a very good place for women to work.

JM: Yes. Leroy Towns we're talking about who was the Harris News correspondent, and then he became Governor Bennett's press secretary. I think Cindy Schwartz came in after that, and she ended up marrying Mike Johnston who was a senator from Parsons.

MH: Yes.

JM: So, your time at the *Capital-Journal*, those were some pretty interesting times here at the Statehouse. Anything you particularly remember from your time at the *Capital-Journal*? Is that when you started covering—did you cover national political conventions there? Did that not happen until you got later?

MH: I don't think it happened until we started our own firm. Myers—Roger went to national conventions, but then he was the big dog. [During the review of the transcript after the interview, Hawver added the following: "Martin covered 16 national political conventions, four apparently not memorable while working for the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 12 for *Hawver's Capitol Report*."] ]

JM: He had covered the short-lived Washington Bureau for the *Capital-Journal*, too.

MH: Yes.

JM: Then he came back to the Statehouse.

MH: Yes, he let me cover state conventions and Congressional district conventions, but the nationals, it was him.

JM: It's so funny. I remember when I first got to the Statehouse in the early eighties. You were already a bit of an institution here. I can still recall, the Statehouse Press Corps in those days was larger than it is today, and we would cram into small rooms for press conferences and so forth. Often at a press conference, you would ask the first question, and you had a reputation for kind of asking off-the-wall questions. Nobody quite knew what to expect from you at those news conferences. Was that something that was just whatever came into your head or did you plan it that way? Were you living up to your reputation after a while?

MH: It was a little of both. There are some folks that you just were afraid that the right question wouldn't get asked. So, you'd get it in first. Sometimes it was a little question. Sometimes it was a big one. Sometimes it was funny. Sometimes it wasn't. It kept the people that heard about those press conferences—it used to draw legislators who'd come to see what we did to folks.

JM: Were you aware that you had that reputation?

MH: Well, not really. I just was who I was and what I did. If people thought that was amusing or entertaining or something, then cool.

JM: I think you probably were the most entertaining member of the press corps. I remember—I think I've talked to you about this before. I don't think you remember this particular instance, but it sticks in my memory. Do you remember Ross Doyen?

MH: Yes.

JM: Ross Doyen was president of the Kansas Senate from Concordia, I think it was.

MH: Yes.

JM: And he, like many people who had risen to that level, was thinking about a run for governor. So, he held a news conference in his small office there in the Senate behind the Senate Chambers to say, "I'm thinking about running for governor." And he finished his opening remarks, and you were the first person to ask a question. Ross was a farmer, and his little finger stuck straight out.

MH: Yes.

JM: And you asked him whether he was going to get that finger fixed cosmetically before he made the run for governor. Do you remember that?

MH: Yes, I do. No one remembers how tall he was, but they remember the finger. I don't know if you fix it. I don't know how you make an ad out of it. It was just a distraction. He could be talking about anything, about fence law, and people would be looking at his finger.

JM: Yes.

MH: It was just one of those things you kind of have to work out.

JM: Nobody else would have asked that question but you. It kind of set the stage for the news conference. He kind of looked at you. I think he actually took it seriously and answered the question.

MH: Yes. I had a little advantage with him. I don't know how to say this, but one evening, I met him at a strip joint. I went and sat down. He was at a little table there. I said, "Here's the deal. You weren't here, and I wasn't here," and he said, "Done."

JM: Deal.

MH: I don't think he got a lap dance that night, but it was like one of those little kind of weird social things that could have turned out to be just bad for both of us that you just kind of twist it a little bit, and it turns out to be good for us.

JM: It's interesting because that's what you were talking about earlier. In that moment, he was no longer a legislator. You were no longer a reporter. You're just two guys.

MH: Yes.

JM: That does form the basis of a relationship.

MH: Yes, pretty much.

JM: What other characters do you remember from your time in those early days at the Statehouse? Anything stick out?

MH: Let's see.

JM: That's always a tough question.

MH: I'm not sure. I got along with pretty much everyone. They were just people who could make news and people who couldn't make news.

JM: When did you start the "On the Rail" column? Was that when you were at the *Cap-J* [*Topeka Capital-Journal*]? Was it later? I think you did have a column.

MH: I did have one. I forget what we called it, but in *Hawver's Capitol Report* it was "At the Rail." I started it because there's lots of little things that go on, lots of little social interactions that can turn out to be important politically, and no one was really reporting on those. Mine was kind of an insiderish thing.

JM: Exactly.

MH: I think most years I had the majority of quorum in both Houses as subscribers, but lots of lobbyists and state agencies because there are lots of things that just—especially nowadays just don't get reported and can have people who have an interest in what happens here, it will give them a little something to chat with someone about.

JM: I mentioned, the name of the column as it evolved after you started your own publication was "At the Rail" I think or something like that.

MH: Yes.

JM: But the rail refers to the circular railing in the Rotunda of the Capitol.

MH: On the third floor, outside between the Senate and the House.

JM: Where people would lean on the rail to have conversations, lobbyists, legislators, reporters, etc.

MH: Yes. That was kind of—I can't remember. I don't know if people could smoke in there at the rail. I can't remember.

JM: I don't think you could, not by the time I got there.

MH: By that time, I'd quit smoking. Then people went outside to smoke and to chat about things going on in committees and which lobbyist did good and which one didn't, and which was cute so it didn't matter. I kind of got in secondhand smoke there, standing around talking. You learned more about the culture. If you know the culture, you could deal with people better and learn more. If you don't, you'll hear things, you won't understand what people mean when they say things.

JM: You got to know the culture, and you got to know the people at a level. Therefore, that's crucial for a reporter because you want people to want to talk to you. You were very gifted in that way. It's funny—this kind of leads us into the next evolutionary milestone in your career because in the 1990s, you left the newspaper to start your own publication, you and Vickie, your wife, a former copy editor, kind of the business manager of the enterprise.

MH: Yes.

JM: But you were telling me before we started rolling the cameras about why you left the paper. I think that's interesting. Do you recall? It was a relatively minor event, but you kind of put your foot down.

MH: Yes. The editor and his wife thought that Governor Finney wore skirts that were too short. She had good legs. They wanted me to make fun of her for that. I said, "I won't do it." They kept saying, "You really need to do this." I told them, "If I make fun of her legs, what are people going to think about my judgment on everything else? I'm not going to wreck my judgment on things by doing something silly like this." They said, "You really have to," and I just said, "I quit."

JM: Was that just an impulse decision on your part? Did it play out over a couple of days?

MH: No, it was pretty much an impulse. At some point, everyone has something they won't do, whether it's—

JM: Well, not everyone, but people who have standards.

MH: Yes, I guess. People will not write something. They won't buy a yellow car. It's just things you wouldn't do. Making fun of her legs was something I wasn't prepared to do.

JM: So, you got home and you told Vickie, "Hey, guess what?"

MH: Yes. She still worked there. No, she had quit by then, and she had started her own publication.

JM: Yes, for about a year, she was doing some private work for clients.

MH: And publishing *Capitol Health* because she had been a health reporter, a health editor for the *Capital-Journal* and knew all the people and knew that there was information that people weren't getting. So, she started that, and it was doing good. When I went home and said, "I'm out of work," she said, "Let's try this." And we tried it, and she assembled it and did all the business stuff, and that's one of the reasons I always tell people, "I couldn't have married better, but there's talk she could have done a little better."

She took care of that. We got it started, and it took off pretty well because it was for a specific community of people who needed to know things that they'd never learn by subscribing to a newspaper.

JM: In my introduction, I called it "groundbreaking" because there are lots of publications like that now.

MH: Yes.

JM: But when you started *Hawver's Capitol Report*, it was a subscription-only publication.

MH: Yes.

JM: That really was pretty groundbreaking. I remember very well when you started it. Did you know initially or was Vickie confident? Were you confident that there was really a market for that? Were you pretty much banking on success? Did you think it would really take off?

MH: I thought it would work. It seemed to me like it had a good chance. It had a good audience of people who needed to know more than they were learning from their regular newspapers by someone who knew what they were doing. Now there's all kinds of things popping up, and lots are done by very smart people, but it just—there's different approaches you have. We all went to high school with girls who we thought were cool, but we'd never ask them for a date.

JM: Because they were too cool?

MH: Either too cool or not cool enough, but there were lots of people you think, "Hmm," but you just wouldn't. So, we aimed for a market of people who wanted to know what was happening at the Statehouse. They wanted more, kind of, background information delivered briefly. They wanted to know where things were leaning. They also wanted to know enough about insiderish stuff that they could come here to lobby or just hang out and be able to communicate with things.

I used to get quoted a lot. People would use stuff that I had put out to start conversations with other people. Sometimes that's all you need is just a reason to start a conversation, and if it's like you tell them something that's kind of funny or something, you can kind of start that conversation.

JM: It really was must reading. As you pointed out, I've often referred to the Statehouse as kind of its own little town. It has all the components of a small community.

MH: Yes.

JM: It has a variety of different kinds of people. Everybody shares—it's kind of like a company town. Everybody shares an interest in what's going on here, whether you're a lobbyist, a legislator, an observer, just somebody who wants to influence public policy in showing people like the League of Women Voters, etc., etc. So, you had a ready-made audience, and you knew it was sizable enough that if you charged a certain amount of money for subscriptions, you could make a go of it.

MH: Yes. I think Vickie also didn't want me hanging out at the house all day. I—you used a lot of adjectives there. I always just think once you come into this building, it's just a different culture. It's just people act like they're in the Statehouse. It's just a different culture.

JM: Yes.

MH: No one goes into a Chinese restaurant and says, "I need a steak and potatoes." You go there for the culture.

JM: For what they have on offer.

MH: It's kind of like that. It's a whole different country almost.

JM: And you knew that culture. You made an important point a minute ago, I think. Anybody can start a publication, but what gives it real value is somebody like you who knew enough about that culture and knew enough about the process that you could sift—even if you were reporting stuff that was not the biggest story of the day, you knew what tidbit to put in there that could become a big issue or was somehow important to a bigger issue.

MH: Yes.

JM: You knew enough about how the place worked that you could put the right stuff in there that people were truly interested in.

MH: Yes. And like I said before, it was indoor work.

JM: It freed you up, too. When you worked at the newspaper, you were writing wire service style, he said this, she said that.

MH: Yes.

JM: The *Hawver's Report* was analytical.

MH: Pretty much, yes. Maybe because I can't remember how many press conferences I sat through where there was absolutely no news made. I would not report if there was no news made. Someone did one about some little issue that no one cared anything about, and at the end, they said, "Will you do a couple of paragraphs about this?" I said, "I prepared to, but nobody fell off their chair."

JM: That would have been news.

MH: That would have been news. It's just kind of weird how things are, but you just get kind of sort things out because we don't all have all the time we want. You might as well spend the time that you're working or interacting with the Statehouse actually, kind of, knowing what's going on there.

JM: In the *Hawver's Capitol Report*, you could have gone to the same press conference, written a little blurb, "So and So called a news conference today, and absolutely no news was made. That's commentary, but it's also—

MH: I did that a few times. You never know. You could go to a press conference over something just really not important, to Americans' way of life or Kansans' ways of life. Someone could get bit by a dog.

JM: Man bites dog. That's the news, right?

MH: Or dog bites it depends on which man.

JM: But you had lots of stuff in there. You had legislative birthdays. You did lobbyist expense reports. Again, things you're not going to find for the most part in your daily newspaper, but things that mattered to the people who are in this building every day.

MH: Yes. That was kind of what I decided would make it worthwhile for people to subscribe to. You could tell—we had a centerfold every year. Every legislator, every committee they were on, what time, what room, all of that. I forget what we called it, but people kept those. They laminated them sometimes. It was just something you used every day, and we had the name across the top of it.

JM: Exactly. I still remember keeping—you would print phone numbers for legislators and so forth. That kind of information is valuable. Just like the weekly newspaper in a small town, it sits in the doctor's office for a week and gets read over and over again, some of the stuff you put in the *Hawver's Report*, again, as you say, people kept. It was really handy to have that information. Nobody else was putting it out.

MH: Part of that might have been the old marketing from my cemetery plot sales days. It seemed like a good thing to do so that people who were interested in issues in the Statehouse could actually find someone and what room they were in, their assistants' names. It's just kind of like a souped-up phonebook.

JM: And Vickie was crucial to the operation, wasn't she?

MH: Yes, she was. She would say, "We need"—on issues, she'd say, "No one's making much of a deal out of it, but this would be important to some people, and here's the people it would be important to." So, I would go do a story about it. She had a good feel, partly from growing up at the newspaper, and from dealing with a specific group of people with health issues and health concerns and health industry concerns, she managed to transfuse that into me to get for legislative stuff. What people think is interesting, what they ought to know, what they wish they know, what they hope other people don't know, and they don't. It's just kind of taking care of people.

You specialize—am I the only people that gets emails from Ukrainian women? Maybe not, but I get them. I don't know any Ukrainian women. You just market to people.

JM: You were certainly the face of *Hawver's Capitol Report*. I don't think I ever really had any appreciation for how much teamwork—I know she handled the editing of it and the business end of it. There was daily collaboration about what should be covered and what didn't need to be covered, etc. She was kind of a managing editor in some respects.

MH: Yes. There was not quite daily—there was like morning and after lunch, she made sure that we were on track for our audience. She talked to people around the Statehouse sometimes or she'd be calling folks to just ask them, "What's up? What's hot?" Then she'd tell me and basically because I didn't want to have to go to sleep with a catcher's mask on, I'd do it.

JM: That's what I meant, the way you phrase things, the catcher's mask. I'm not going to ask you to get into numbers or anything here, but you guys, I remember being intrigued by this when I was just watching it all happen. You guys made a pretty good living out of this.

MH: We did. We made a nice living. She was in charge of all the money stuff, but I always had all the money I needed. She's the one that—remember Brownback's tax plan, the tax break that everyone still makes fun of?

JM: Yes, I remember it.

MH: She told me that that idiot plan that she didn't care for made us seven grand a year. I mentioned that to some folks, and they'd say—the funny thing, folks I knew, I'd say, "I understand that this is a bad way to do things, but we're making seven grand a year off this."

JM: Literally, you were making \$7,000 a year because of [changes in] the tax structure.

MH: Yes. And people would say, "Don't tell anyone that."

JM: Which you didn't.

MH: They weren't going to do anything to me. But they'd say, "We need to fight that. Don't say anything good about it." I never wrote it down, never typed it, except maybe now. It was just one of those things that people would hear and not understand exactly who could make money out of it, even though we didn't need the money.

JM: Because the way your business was structured, you benefited from those tax breaks.

MH: Yes.

JM: Governor Brownback, interesting that you should mention him, you were here through—probably Governor Bennett was governor when you got here. Governor Bennett, Carlin, Hayden, you mentioned Finney, Bill Graves. You were here through many, many Kansas governors.

MH: Yes.

JM: Who was your favorite to cover? Did you have one? They're all so different.

MH: Yes. Go through the list again.

JM: All right. Bennett, smart, erudite.

MH: Yes. You could work with him, chat with him.

JM: Then Carlin came in, the first governor to serve two consecutive four-year terms.

MH: He was a little cautious about everything he said, which I'd rather people just kind of talk loose because they make better quotes. It's like he said it inside before he'd say it outside. I liked Finney. Most of the governors we get here at least understood how government works, which is a little different than how it is now nationally, but knew how—how do you say this? They didn't mess with things that weren't broken. If some agency is working okay, they might have a little policy rumble here or there, but they didn't tend to gut agencies. That gave them more time to concentrate on things that they believed in many cases voters liked.

JM: It's funny, Carlin, you mentioned the fact that you thought he was cautious. He had a very good staff. They had regular staff meetings, and they would play out these things. I think you're right. I think by the time he was ready to make a public pronouncement, it was well rehearsed.

MH: Yes.

JM: It wasn't very spontaneous. But remember those days, Martin? He had a weekly news conference.

MH: Yes.

JM: And Graves similarly and Hayden. For a while there, I thought that's just the way things were done. Governors came through, and they made themselves readily available to the media on a regular basis.

MH: Bennett wasn't quite so available.

JM: Anyway, that's certainly changed now. I can remember those news conferences. I discussed in earlier interviews where as long as people had questions, the governor would sit there and answer them. And then later on, things changed, and the press secretary would step in and say, "One more question" and cut everything off, and things have evolved I think in the wrong direction ever since. What changes did you see?

MH: I remember when that started happening, when they'd say, "One more question." Two, three, four years ago, I was at a press conference not just with governors, but with other people who two or three questions, what they wanted to announce in two or three questions took care of it. People would just wind up asking questions that didn't yield any news. It's kind of the tenor of the press has changed quite a bit over the last ten, fifteen years. Lots of this, people hold their phones up to people's faces and that kind of stuff that doesn't really yield much in the way of news. You can't just report for clicks. You need to tell people something they wouldn't know any place else. Then you sell them to clicks.

JM: That's interesting. You can't just report for clicks. You talk about digital media and particularly headlines. There are many, many headlines that I read that are compelling that I'll click on, and the body of the story doesn't support the headline at all, but they've gotten you to click. So, therefore, they've gotten the metric that they wanted.

MH: That's like the *Capital-Journal*. Sometimes they'll have big headlines on a story that really doesn't amount to much, and you don't know if it's because an ad fell through, and they needed more space or what. But sometimes the judgment on what to report and what people need to know is kind of weird. Sometimes it sounds like someone in India is making the decisions on what goes on the front page of lots of newspapers.

JM: Which again is antithetical to your business model of the *Capitol Report*. You knew the place. You had a sense of what people needed and wanted to know, and that's what you gave them.

MH: Yes.

JM: The press corps—this place used to be, maybe still is, when I first broke in here, and you I assume, the place was a lot of fun. The press corps was big. There was always something going on. There was a

lot of collegiality. The press corps played softball against the governor's office, the secretary of state's office, the attorney general's office. It was really fun to be around this place.

MH: The culture's changed.

JM: It has, hasn't it?

MH: The news culture has changed, and so has the culture of much of the government. Lots of people—there are members of the House and Senate who do something essentially just so they can get their picture someplace or get a quote made. It doesn't really amount to anything.

JM: I hope you don't take offense to this term, but I always thought you were idiosyncratic in the sense that you stood out. You had the press corps, and there's some people who kind of play the role and didn't stand out so much, but you were always, as we talked about earlier, you were entertaining at news conferences. You wrote in an entertaining style.

I'll just give a case in point. I'm not wearing any socks today for the interview because that was part of your reputation. You didn't wear socks. Is there a particular reason? Even when you're dressed up in a suit and tie sometimes.

MH: I just don't think they're necessary. I have one pair in case I die, and they want to put me on display for a minute. They can put socks on me. I just don't see any need in it. Lots of people notice that.

JM: Yes. You stood out. You were different.

MH: Well, maybe that's it. Maybe that's what got me Vickie. Who knows?

JM: Vickie or that's what made the *Hawver's Capitol Report* so entertaining. Nobody quite knew—you actually turned that reputation—you also got a lot of speaking engagements around the state.

MH: Yes.

JM: That really picked up, didn't it, when you started the publication?

MH: Yes, it did. It did expand that. There's one I'll always remember. Sedgwick County Republicans.

JM: Pachyderm?

MH: The Pachyderm Club had me go down there once. Someone brought up a question about health care for the poor and expanding Medicaid and all that. They were all pretty much all against it. I said, "Well, is there a reason to be against it? Do you want your children or grandchildren—because they were older folks. There were several walkers at tables. "Do you want your children or grandchildren going to school with kids who have not been vaccinated?" You could kind of watch people going, "Is that—is that?" You get to take some kind of different viewpoints to folks that—it was just kind of funny looking out at the crowd and see people say, "Can that be right?" I don't know. It was not a bad lunch, too, as I recall.

JM: That turned into a cottage industry for you. I remember you got asked to speak at a lot of places.

MH: Yes. I usually didn't get paid. I usually got nice meals and drinks.

JM: You didn't get paid for some of those?

MH: Not really. I don't believe I really did.

JM: But it helped you market your publication certainly.

MH: Yes. Maybe it turned out to be one of those deals for Vickie to get me out of the house for a while.

JM: Speaking of getting out of the house, I read in the bio material that you covered sixteen national conventions, Republican, Democratic conventions.

MH: Yes.

JM: I never covered one of those. What was it like to be there, covering something like that?

MH: It was pretty good. The drinks were always strongest at the Democratic Conventions. Republicans used jiggers, and Democrats just poured, which I thought was handy. They were kind of fun. You got to meet your folks. It's weird when you go to cover the convention, you're really just covering your delegation pretty much unless they create news somehow. But it's kind of fun to see how people get along. It was fun to do. It made nice trips. Like I said, the Democrats' drinks were stronger.

JM: And the people in those delegations, both Republican and Democrat, were people who you wouldn't see in the Capitol every day but nevertheless were influential politically, or they wouldn't be there.

MH: Pretty much.

JM: You got to know people that you otherwise might not get to know.

MH: Yes. You could ask them, "How's your representative going to do? Will he or she get re-elected?" Every now and again you hear, "I don't know." You could kind of use that to ask around about things. I kept waiting for somebody to tell me, "We don't know if Joe can get re-elected because he backed over a cat" or something. But they tell you, "He or she is just not quite sociable enough."

JM: You can gather intelligence about the goings-on of politics across the state.

MH: Yes, it's not big stuff, but it gives you an idea how they might perform, and if they're willing to do what they really probably ought to do to get re-elected, and if they're really willing to not do what doesn't make any sense, not do what many people would consider wrong.

JM: As you look back over your years both with the *Capital-Journal* and with your own publication, what stands out to you if anything from an issue standpoint? We talked about how politics have changed. You

mentioned the Brownback tax proposal and just various things that you had covered. The last twenty or thirty years have been pretty eventful in Kansas from a political standpoint.

MH: Yes. We got liquor by the drink.

JM: Liquor by the drink, right.

MH: There are other things, too, of course. What's been kind of intriguing to me is what's happening with schools, K-12 especially, because how do you say this? I'm an old guy now. It would be nice if all the kids in high school or in college learned skills so they could get good jobs and support Social Security. You want to make sure that every generation that comes after you is smarter than you are. And lots of people really don't think about it that way. They think about property taxes going up another few bucks or something. But the whole thing is, if it turns out that people are smarter, have more job skills, can do more things right and take care of themselves and their families, it's good for us grown-ups, too.

JM: That right there is interesting because that's the kind of insight or analysis you would bring to an issue in the *Capitol Report* that you're not going to see any place else. Your take on something, "Hey, maybe when it comes to the school finance issue and supporting schools, maybe you haven't thought about it this way, but how about"—and that's the kind of thing that I remember seeing in your column, that kind of analysis.

MH: Yes.

JM: You always had a slightly different take on things. You could count on it almost.

MH: There are people that will never hear—they'll hear one phrase and just live by that phrase instead of kind of dissecting it. Obviously, I've had time to dissect things. There are still people who, oddly, vote for candidates who aren't going to do them any good. And maybe it's because they don't know enough about the candidates, but you see people voting for candidates who it's just not the right vote. They've done something kind of crazy there that makes you wonder for some people, if before they get a ballot, they ought to pee into a cup and have it tested to see if they're really aware of what they're doing. That's the end of that.

JM: You're raising the issue that's been much discussed in recent years about people voting "against their economic interests" or their interests generally.

MH: Or their social interests.

JM: The social stuff has pretty much taken over I think in terms of the mindset of voters. Those social issues have become very important, and if you forgive the turn of phrase, they trump other things. You and I both have seen that evolution, both in national politics and Kansas politics. Kansas politics has become in my view—I'm curious about what you think about this—much more nationalized than it used to be. All these big issues that are controlling the political ecosystem nationally have been injected into Kansas politics and have become paramount here, too.

MH: Yes, or they can be sold as being paramount.

JM: There you go, yes. That's a good distinction.

MH: And described that way so that you can sell them. It's like the three days for the cemetery plots. You can shape a policy to sell it to whoever's out there.

JM: Maybe this has always been true. It seems to me that it's come to the fore in recent years. You have legislation that is crafted in some place in some sort of thinktank or with some sort of group, and that legislation, variations of it go out to every state.

MH: Yes. That's a little weird, but it's starting to happen. Maybe people just—I don't think people are learning enough about how their government runs, what the government's obligations to its citizens are. They're just picking up little catch phrases. What was it? People from some country were eating people's pets. That kind of nonsense. If you can distract them, that works. That's why every medium-skilled magician has the hottest assistant that you've ever seen. She'll look so great, you won't notice.

JM: She's the distraction.

MH: She's the distraction, and you'll never notice that he can't do magic tricks.

JM: See, once again, a classic Hawveresque insight in the way things are going. Hey, what made you decide after forty-seven years it was time to retire?

MH: I've gotten a little older. I've had a few kind of heart issues and decided that maybe it would be good just to ease down. We kind of eased down. We sold the business [publication]. Now we're starting a new business [publication].

JM: I wanted to ask you about that. It's interesting. You started this publication, the *Hawver's Capitol Report*, which we've discussed was unique for its time. You did it for years, and you turned it into something that was valuable enough. You could sell it to somebody else.

MH: Yes. Can you believe that? Practically, you're selling a subscriber list that if whoever buys it does everything right will continue to grow. I don't know. We don't own it anymore. I don't know what's happening. But that's kind of what you do. It's a list of names, depending on what names they are, have a fair amount of value. I'm sure my name really doesn't have anything—my name alone would not be sales worthy to the Ukrainian women that keep emailing me. But if you have the right group of people, that group of names would be valuable.

JM: That's something though to have started something *de novo* like that and build it up to gain enough value that it was worth something for somebody to come in and buy and to keep—that's a heck of an accomplishment, really, I think. I remember once asking you when you first started it how you started it and how you projected the audience and everything else. It sounds like you and Vickie collaborated on that. You really created something of value there.

MH: Apparently. It sold.

JM: So, you decided to retire. It was a weekly publication for the most part, but covering the legislature full time. So that was in 2023. So, you've had a couple of years of retirement. In the bio material you

supplied us, I think you said something to the effect of “Retirement hasn’t quite panned out.” You’re coming out of retirement to do something else, right?

MH: Yes. I didn’t quite know what to do. Now I go check the geese at Lake Shawnee. I haven’t named them all yet. But almost every morning, I go by and count them and see how they’re doing. I need something else to do, and Vickie says there are times that it would be good if I had something else to do.

JM: You’ve returned to that over and over, Vickie wanting you out of the house.

MH: That happens. I imagine most guys that retire and aren’t doing something else, maybe Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, or if they’re really good, maybe just Tuesdays and Thursdays, that the wife likes the man out of the house for a while.

JM: And you don’t play golf. So, you’re going to go back to work.

MH: No, I caddied a little bit. I caddied at a local country club. I was a young caddy. The country club management said I will caddy for women. That was just their idea that young guys, they learn by caddying for women. I caddied like four times. Every time the woman I was caddying for heard the irons clink together, she’d go, “They’re clinking together.” I had to put the little socks on them again. I just didn’t do it often. I forgot where that started.

JM: So, you weren’t going to be a caddy.

MH: No, I’m not going to be a caddy anymore. But it seems kind of interesting. There are things that this group of people really aren’t being let in on. The general news they get, but really how it affects them.

JM: So, you’re talking about the publication that you’re going to start now, which is specifically geared towards people of our age, right?

MH: Yes, pre-retirement, into early retirement, and it’s the baby boomers, and as we like to say, and other grown-ups. People who are older. It’s quite a lifestyle change to not have something where you need to be there every day. If you don’t do it right, you get to know all the ducks and geese.

I think it will be helpful. And as it turns out, lots of local, lots of newspapers don’t really, at least locally, do much in the way of local news or are just maybe too filled up with feature stories that don’t matter.

JM: This publication is going to be aimed at baby boomers and people roughly speaking of our age but specific to this area. You’re going to tell them about everything that’s going on and helping them understand things that they can plug into to fill their days.

MH: Yes, and maybe what the City Commission or County Commission or our legislature—

JM: Is doing that affects you.

MH: Is doing that, presented broadly, doesn’t sound like much but focused on that generation could make a change in their lives or what they do or what they can’t do.

JM: So, you and Vickie are going to do this, right?

MH: Yes.

JM: Well, Martin, it's been a lot of fun talking to you and reminiscing about your days here and your future plans. I really appreciate you agreeing to participate in this series. Thank you very much.

MH: Sure. Thank you.

[End of File]