

Transcript of Video Clip of Jack Alexander

ML: Let me ask about the responsibilities of being Water Commissioner once you were elected. What were the daily things you did? How did the City make decisions with different Commissioners?

JA: I particularly liked working for the Commission. I particularly liked being Water Commissioner. The one thing that I particularly liked about being Water Commissioner during that period of time after I was there was I learned that the Water Department was run totally on revenues. It was not dependent upon tax dollars. But as one-fifth of the City Commission, you had to run on different taxing things that went on. We would be able to do our projects. We were able to borrow money. We were able to do certain deals within the department so that we could at least keep some money as well as the development of the infrastructure that had to take place.

I certainly wasn't the engineer or the planner, but I had the last say on whatever we'd done. Let me say this. In all the jobs that I have ever had, I have had such wonderful people to work with. I say that holistically because things that I don't know or didn't know, they felt comfortable in coming in and saying, "Commissioner, thus and so, thus and so." I had the belief that they were giving me the straight skinny.

The political side of the job, I could deal with that. That was the other four commissioners, which was a treat within itself. Politics is nothing but a numbers game. We're about who's got the odd number. I didn't have any number of going and calling one of them guys down to my office and tell them how the hog ate the cabbage. I couldn't do it up in public because some of the things I said shouldn't be said in public, but I had a good relationship with them.

I was on the Commission twelve years. I was President of the Commission ten of those twelve years. The two years that I was not President, there was a gentleman that had been on the Commission all that period of time by the name of Charles Campbell. He was running for his last time. He wasn't going to run anymore. I talked the other commissioners into supporting him to be Chair of the Commission on his last term.

Now that was then. Let me go back to the first term. A cute story for you. After the election, we had to vote. I won the vote 4 to 1. There was a gentleman by the name of Terry Watson that was just visibly upset. "Find out which one of those SOBs voted against you." He kept talking to me and talking to me, "I'm going to find out. I'm going to find out." I finally had to tell him which one it was. Do you know who voted against me?

ML: I'm guessing it was the Water Commissioner Alexander.

JA: It was the Water Commissioner Alexander. It was the last time I have not voted for myself.

ML: While you were Water Commissioner, you were elected president at the League of Kansas Municipalities in 1982. How did that come about? That's a statewide organization.

JA: Again, I had represented the City of Topeka on that board, on the Municipalities Board, and just like everything else, I was there. So I'd get right into the middle of everything, I guess during that period of time of raising hell on the board, people thought maybe I could be the Chair of the board. It was a great experience. It's all kinds of activities and cities that blend in because of that Kansas League of Municipalities.

ML: Did you discern any differences in urban and rural approaches to issues?

JA: There were issues. Even the rural activities and the rural individuals that we dealt with during that period of time were so open to communications. I talk a lot, but I'm also a good listener. We were able to do things that assisted the smaller communities, even if it was getting some of the expertise out of some of the bigger places that could go out and lend them a hand in helping them plan this or do that. There was always a great working relationship there.

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