



Governor William Preston Graves in the governor's office in the 1990s.

“Doing What Needed to Get Done, When It Needed to Get Done”: A Conversation with Former Governor Bill Graves

edited by Bob Beatty and Virgil W. Dean

William Preston “Bill” Graves, born in Salina, Kansas, on January 9, 1953, served as the state’s forty-third chief executive from January 9, 1995, to January 13, 2003. Graves enjoyed impressive electoral success, winning all four of his statewide elections, and he can make a strong claim as Kansas’s most popular governor, as he won reelection in 1998 with a staggering 73 percent of the vote, the highest percentage in state history.¹ Graves started his path to the governorship in 1980 from an unusual place, the office of the Kansas secretary of state, working for then secretary Jack Brier. When Brier left the job in 1986 to run for governor, Graves ran and won the race to be the state’s chief election officer, defeating State Representative Judith C. “Judy” Runnels, a Topeka Democrat, 53.5 to 46.5 percent. He ran for reelection in 1990 and easily defeated Democratic challenger Ronald J. Dickens.² In 1994 Graves prevailed in a crowded Republican gubernatorial primary, garnering 41 percent of the vote versus 28 percent for businessman Gene Bicknell and 23 percent for State Senator Fred Kerr, his two strongest opponents. In the general election contest that year Graves defeated Democratic Congressman Jim Slattery, 64 to 36 percent, and became the first secretary of state in

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Virgil W. Dean, who received his PhD in U.S. history from the University of Kansas, was for more than two decades the editor of *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* and is currently the journal’s consulting editor. His publications include *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (2006) and “Seeking ‘Realism and a Little Rationality’ in Government: The Observations of Former Governor Robert F. Bennett,” which was published in the spring of 2008 as part of a special issue of *Kansas History*, “Governing Kansas, 1966–1986” (kshs.org/publicat/history/2008summer_dean.pdf).

1. Lew Ferguson, “Popular Kansas governor becomes first Republican since John Anderson in 1962 to win a second term,” *Hutchinson (Kans.) News*, November 4, 1998.

2. Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1986, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [1987]), 27, 77; and Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1990, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [1991]), 47, 115. Graves defeated Runnels, 427,460 to 371,479 in 1986, and won over Dickens four years later, 447,491 to 285,107.

Kansas history to move into the governor's chair. In 1998 Graves was challenged in the GOP primary by the chairman of the Kansas Republican Party, conservative David Miller. Graves took Miller's intraparty dissent head-on, engaging in televised debates and frequent campaign appearances, and easily won the nomination. The 1998 general election was tame by comparison, with Graves prevailing over Democratic state representative Tom Sawyer 73 to 23 percent.³

Graves's eight years as governor were largely ones of economic prosperity, which enabled him and the Kansas legislature to implement extensive tax cuts. Governor Graves signed into law bills that added up to a cumulative \$2.7 billion reduction in taxes. In 2001 an economic downturn hit the state, prompting the governor to make hundreds of millions of dollars in difficult budget cuts and to sign into law an increase in the state sales tax, as well as hikes in cigarette and inheritance taxes, in order to balance the state budget. "I don't want the next governor to be handed an even more difficult budgetary situation because we took the easy way out," said Governor Graves at the time.⁴

A hallmark of Graves's administration was the comprehensive \$13 billion, ten-year transportation bill that passed the legislature in 1999, resulting in an extensive program of building, maintenance, and repair of the state's roads, bridges, railroad tracks, and airports. Other initiatives pushed through during Graves governorship included the privatization of foster care and adoptive services, the replacement of state hospitals for the mentally ill and developmentally disabled with community programs, and the reorganization of the state higher education governing structure.⁵

3. Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1994, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [1995]), 35–44, 105–7; and Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1998, Primary and General Elections, 1999 General Election Constitutional Question* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [1999]), 36–40, 102–4. In the August 2, 1994, primary election, Slattery defeated four other Democratic candidates with 84,389 votes; second place was Joan Wagnon, 42,115. In the general election, November 8, Graves/Frahm defeated Slattery/Sader, 526,113 to 294,733. In the November 3, 1998, general, Graves/Sherrer won with 544,882 votes to the Democratic ticket's 168,243; two minor party candidates carried nearly 30,000 votes between them.

4. "Graves focused on budget mess," *Topeka (Kans.) Capital-Journal*, January 13, 2002; for an accounting of Graves's 2002–2003 budget cuts, see "Graves' plan to trim deficit," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 4, 2003.

5. "Highway chief discusses future needs, present work," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 13, 1998; "Graves signs highway bill on road trip," *Lawrence (Kans.) Journal-World*, May 11, 1999; "Graves urges funds for kids," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 12, 1998; "Higher ed governance to get another look," *Lawrence Journal-World*, January 15, 1998; "Education funding plan due in House bill," *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 25, 1999; Lew Ferguson, "House committee endorses

Graves's gubernatorial style was non-confrontational—he was described by Topeka Capital-Journal writer Jim McLean in 2003 as "Bill Graves, the nice guy governor"—which Graves believed allowed him to get a lot done by working with a wide variety of lawmakers. McLean wrote, "As he saw it, proposals should rise and fall on their merits, not on the governor's powers of persuasion."⁶ Throughout Graves's eight years in office many political battles did occur, but they usually came not from members of the opposite party, but from conservatives in Graves's own Republican Party. Graves, a moderate, fought conservatives on economic issues such as the depth of proposed tax cuts and increased funding for education, as well as on social issues such as gun control and abortion. The ideological battle played out dramatically in 1998 when conservatives tried to thwart Graves's goal of a second term by backing David Miller as a candidate in the GOP primary. This open rebellion from members of his own party disappointed Graves and fueled his determination to soundly defeat Miller at the polls.⁷ In 2002 Graves declined to endorse conservative Republican Phill Kline in the Kansas attorney general's race, while reluctantly endorsing the conservative GOP gubernatorial candidate, Tim Shallenburger, who went on to lose to Democrat Kathleen Sebelius. Graves believed that this moderate/conservative split prevented him from accomplishing more, saying in his 2002 State of the State address, "The people of Kansas sent us here to validate their trust, not to sow seeds of distrust. The people of Kansas sent us here to enact good public policy, not to engage in petty politics."⁸

higher ed bill," *Hays Daily News*, March 31, 1999; William Preston Graves, Governor, "State of the State Address, 1997," January 13, 1997, Kansas State Library, Topeka, kslib.info/government-information/kansas-information/kansas-governors/william-preston-graves.html; and "SRS to pump \$25 million into foster child-care," *Hutchinson News*, September 5, 1998.

6. "I tried to be steady': Outgoing governor's style helped him reach both parties," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 1, 2003.

7. For press coverage of this internecine contest, see for example, Jim McLean, "GOP leader urged to resign," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 27, 1998; McLean, "Republican chief Miller to run against Graves," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 3, 1998; and McLean, "Miller to stress abortion, morals," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 6, 1998. For primary election results, see *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1998*, 36–40; the Graves/Sherrer ticket defeated Miller/Henkle, 225,782 votes to 84,368.

8. William Preston Graves, Governor, "State of the State Address, 2002," January 14, 2002, Kansas State Library, Topeka, kslib.info/government-information/kansas-information/kansas-governors/william-preston-graves.html; Shallenburger, who directed Bicknell's campaign during the Republican primary race in 1994, lost to Sebelius by a vote of 441,858 to 376,830. Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 2002, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [2003]), 94–96; and Jim Cross, "Bicknell's spending shows up in polls," *Wichita (Kans.) Eagle*, June 24, 1994.

As governor, Graves strived to make changes that he hoped would have a lasting positive impact on the lives of Kansans, a philosophy best reflected in his commitment and work on what he said was one of his proudest legislative accomplishments, the highway and transportation bill. This philosophy was also reflected in that 2002 State of the State address, where he said, "Our decisions . . . are not about today. They are about what will shape tomorrow. We must rise above the challenge of what is, and set the course for what this state can and should be."⁹

This article is excerpted from two interviews conducted with Bill Graves in February 2004 and July 2011. Interviewer questions have been omitted, and footnotes have been added to provide further explication of topics and relevant source citations. Video footage and a complete transcript of the 2004 interview, which was part of a series of conversations with Kansas's then six surviving governors, are available at kansasmemory.org/item/303751. An audio recording and a complete transcript of the 2011 interview is available at kansasmemory.org/item/304916. The overall project that gave rise to the interviews was an initiative by Bob Beatty and Mark Peterson, both of the Political Science Department at Washburn University, designed to capture on video the histories of Kansas governors John Anderson, William Avery, John Carlin, Mike Hayden, Bill Graves, and Kathleen Sebelius.¹⁰ "Doing What Needed to Get Done, When It Needed to Get Done": A Conversation with Former Governor Bill Graves" is the fifth in a series of articles based on those interviews.¹¹

9. Graves, "State of the State Address, 2002."

10. The Kansas governors project is ongoing and now includes an interview with former lieutenant governor and governor Mark Parkinson, who finished out Governor Sebelius's second term, from 2009 to 2011. Former governor William H. "Bill" Avery died on November 4, 2009. "Former Kansas governor William Avery dies at 98," *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 5, 2009.

11. For this published version of the interviews with Governor Graves, the 2004 and 2011 interviews have been merged and passages have been omitted and reordered in some instances for clarity and narrative effect. The words are the governor's, however, and the editors have not altered the meaning or original intent in any way. See kansasmemory.org/item/303751 and kansasmemory.org/item/304916. See also Bob Beatty, ed., "For the Benefit of the



Governor Graves's grandfather and namesake launched the family business, Graves Truck Line, in 1935 soon after the repossession of his Saline County farm. When W. P. Graves died in 1939 his sons took over the business and made it one of the top twenty motor carriers of general freight in the nation. After graduation from Kansas Wesleyan, Bill Graves expected to enter the business full time, and for two years he "worked in the front offices, loaded and unloaded trailers, worked midnight shifts on the docks." But times changed and in 1978, while the future governor was away at graduate school in Lawrence, the company was sold to American Natural Resources of Detroit. Photograph of Lowell "Jim" Graves, the youngest of W. P.'s sons, beside his rig outside the Beverly Sale Barn in Salina, Kansas, in the 1930s or 1940s courtesy of Judy Magnuson Lilly.

EARLY INFLUENCES

I was born January 9, 1953, in Salina, Kansas, and that's where I grew up, went to high school, went to college [Kansas Wesleyan University], and where my parents resided all of their lives. I think I had a fairly normal childhood. My father, who was involved from the time I was born in the trucking industry, was gone quite a bit; he traveled. I grew up in Salina right across the street from the school that I attended, Whittier Elementary. I thought that was just terrific because it always gave me access to the school yard and to friends and fun things to do.

People': A Conversation with Former Governor John Anderson, Jr.," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 30 (Winter 2007–2008): 252–69, also available at kshs.org/publicat/history/2007winter.htm; Bob Beatty, ed., "You Have to Like People': A Conversation with Former Governor William H. Avery," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Spring 2008): 48–67, also available at kshs.org/publicat/history/2008spring.htm; Bob Beatty, ed., "Be Willing to Take Some Risks to Make Things Happen': A Conversation with Former Governor John Carlin," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Summer 2008): 114–40, also available at kshs.org/publicat/history/2008summer.htm; and Bob Beatty, ed., "Being Close to the People': A Conversation with Former Governor Mike Hayden," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 32 (Spring 2009): 46–74, also available at kshs.org/publicat/history/2009spring_beatty.pdf.

I still believe to this day that a lot of my success in politics and public service was directly attributable to not just my dad but the whole Graves family. I mean, this was a family that didn't always have it so good; a Depression-era farm family with ten kids. They managed to scrape out a living hauling farm-to-market in the trucking business. Graves Trucking was pretty successful because they were focused and understood how to provide great quality service.¹²

When I went to work for Jack Brier in the early 1980s in the secretary of state's office that's what government—at least to me—should be about. It's a public service, and I really enjoyed it. So I think my dad's commitment in that regard had a lasting impact on me.

Dad clearly struggled with the questions about government regulation, and he grew up in this regulated industry, so in spite of their success they were constantly frustrated by the way government kind of intruded in your business practices. But he overcame that and I know he understood and appreciated the role that government should play and needed to play in people's lives. He would be a supporter of limited government, but of good government where we needed to have government. That was probably how I ended up as a more centrist kind of Republican. I was always in favor of trying to be as efficient as we could be, as financially responsible as we could be. But I was also in favor of making sure we had a state government that took care of the issues that it needed to to benefit people in our state.

The year that I entered high school it was [still considered] junior high, so I went to seventh, eighth, and ninth grade at Roosevelt-Lincoln Junior High School. I started as a sophomore but by the time I graduated they had built another high school so there were two four-year high schools, Salina Central and Salina South. I was in the first graduating class of Salina Central High School in 1971. I am embarrassed to admit how poor my study habits were. I had the ability to make

12. Graves Truck Line was started in 1935 by Graves's grandfather and namesake, William Preston Graves, soon after his Saline County farm was repossessed. When W. P. Graves died in 1939 his four sons took over the business, and by the 1970s it was one of the top twenty motor carriers of general freight in the nation and employed more than fifteen hundred people. In 1978 the Graves family sold the company to American Natural Resources of Detroit. For a comprehensive, illustrated history of the company, see Judy Magnuson Lilly, *The Graves Truck Line Story* (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Press, 2012); also see "End of the Road," *Salina (Kans.) Journal*, February 17, 2013.

good grades but I just didn't try very hard. So I was just an average student. I will confess—because of the success that Dad had—we were considered fortunate, we were an affluent family in Salina. But I don't think that influenced me a whole lot. I had a real wide cadre of friends that came from every side of town and I had a lot of fun in high school. It was a wonderful experience.

I loved sports and participated in everything that I could. I played football every year in high school. I did run track. I think I ran a 2:00, 2:02 half mile, which was pretty good but not great in those days. One of the reasons Kansas Wesleyan was so attractive to me is because of the opportunity to participate in lots of activities, especially sports. When I became a senior [in high school] I grew a little and matured in terms of my sports, so I decided I was going to play football at Wesleyan. One of my friends, Mike Lindsey, was recruited to play at Wesleyan by Coach Gene Bissell, and I told Coach Bissell that I was going to come to Wesleyan and walk on and play football. I couldn't tell that he was happy about it; it wasn't like I was a star recruit or something, but things worked out.

Timing was everything—maybe a lot like politics—and I started as a freshman. I was a very small defensive end, probably played right at two hundred pounds, and in the early 1970s that was about what you would expect at that position. I started every game for four years at Wesleyan, and my freshman year at one point we were the third or fourth ranked NAIA small college in the nation. I went from my freshman year, where we lost one game, to a senior year or junior year to where I think we won one game, but I look back and realize that I had as much fun in the years that we won as I had in the years where we lost.¹³

I mixed in some baseball with that. Unfortunately, baseball was what really caused most of my injuries. It wasn't football! I tore my knee up on a couple of occasions playing baseball. And so baseball wasn't nearly as illustrious a career as my football time at Wesleyan. I still stay very involved with Kansas Wesleyan. It's a great, great small college that means a lot to me.

13. Graves was inducted into the Kansas Wesleyan Sports Hall of Fame in 1986. For an account of his freshman year success see, for example, "Salinan Bill Graves to attend Wesleyan," *Salina Journal*, August 1, 1971; "KW seeks No. 5 against McPherson," *Salina Journal*, October 15, 1971.

DEBATE, THEATRE, AND BEING HAL CARTER

I loved speech and debate. Gary Sherrer had been a very distinguished debater at Emporia State University and was then teaching speech and debate at Salina High School.¹⁴ My sister, Martha, became enamored with the debate program and it also appealed to me, getting a subject and developing either an affirmative position or developing the expertise to argue a negative position on a subject.

So I got real active in speech and debate in my sophomore, junior, and senior years. We'd go off to these Friday and Saturday debate tournaments at various high schools. I wasn't great at it, but I was pretty good, and brought home a few trophies. Salina High was pretty good about coming home with a team trophy just about every weekend.

I think speech and debate was a starting point [for politics]. It was certainly one of the key early moments in my life; unbeknownst to me, I was getting ready. The next step was that I then took that speech and debate and took it on stage, and I did some theatre stuff at Kansas Wesleyan. One day the theatre instructor, a guy named Jimmy Crank, approached me on campus and said, "You know, I'm short male actors in a show we're doing and I'd love to have you consider trying out." It was one of those moments where you wonder, what was I thinking? But I said, "Okay."

Kansas Wesleyan was great for me because it was a small enough university that I got the attention I needed academically. I got the opportunity to play sports that I wanted to and I got involved in a lot more extracurricular kinds of things like theatre that I otherwise wouldn't have at a larger university. That sort of stair-stepped me into community theatre and I did a number of shows at the Salina Community Theatre. So at that point you

14. This was the beginning of a long personal and later political friendship between Sherrer and Graves. Sherrer served as Graves's secretary of commerce from 1995 until 2003 and was Kansas lieutenant governor from 1996 to 2003. He was appointed to the latter position after then lieutenant governor Sheila Frahm was picked to take Bob Dole's U.S. Senate seat, following Dole's resignation to run for president. Sherrer also was appointed by governor Kathleen Sebelius to the Kansas Board of Regents in 2007 and served until 2011. Sherrer considered running for governor in 2002 but ultimately decided against it. "Sherrer named to replace Frahm as lieutenant governor," *Salina Journal*, July 19, 1996; for more on Sherrer's 2002 decision see "Sherrer says he will not run for governor," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 6, 2001; and "Why the Next Governor of Kansas will be a Democrat," *Ingrams: Kansas City's Business Magazine* 28 (January 2002); see also "Chairman Gary Sherrer announces sudden and immediate resignation from Kansas Board of Regents," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 18, 2011.

really develop a confidence and comfort level that you can stand up in front of a crowd of people and say what needs to be said or to perform. And that's a lot of what running for public office is, the confidence to perform. You also always need to have that energy level, and you always need to be ready, and I was.

I was involved in all aspects of theatre, both performing on stage and a lot of backstage supporting stuff. At Kansas Wesleyan the first show I did was a Greek comedy, *The Birds*, an outrageously funny show.¹⁵ I then did a very dramatic Ibsen play called *Hedda Gabler*.

[I performed in] lots of community theatre musicals. *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* was one of my favorites. I did a show called *Picnic*, which was a famous Kansas piece because it thematically had to do with Independence, Kansas, and the Neewollah Festival. There was a movie done in the 1950s with Kim Novak and William Holden, and probably in a horrible miscast situation I had the William Holden role in *Picnic*.¹⁶

Once I got into political office, the guys there at the Topeka Community Theatre found out I had some ties to theatre so I actually did a couple of shows when I was governor. I performed in the *Odd Couple*, as one of the poker players, and I did the voice-over for *How to*

15. Graves received good notices for his performance, with the *Salina Journal* writing, "Bill Graves is excellent as a profit-taking priest." "'The Birds' Flies high with KW cast," *Salina Journal*, November 17, 1972.

16. The author of *Picnic*, William Inge, was born and educated in Independence, Kansas, and graduated in 1935 from the University of Kansas. He was an acclaimed playwright, novelist, and screenwriter who based many of his characters, scenarios, and settings on the Kansas he knew growing up. Some of his notable works include *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1949), *Bus Stop* (1955), and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). He received a Pulitzer Prize for the 1953 play *Picnic*, which was made into the Academy Award-winning 1955 film that Graves talks about. In the film and play Inge uses the structural device of a large-scale annual picnic in a small, midwestern town to explore themes that include the repressive nature of cultural and social expectations. Inge based the picnic on the annual Neewollah Festival (Halloween spelled backwards), which began in 1919 and is today one of the largest celebrations in Kansas. The role of the drifter, Hal Carter, who the main character, Madge Owens, falls for, is a challenging one, and was played by Paul Newman on Broadway and William Holden in the film. Interestingly, Inge was not pleased with the happy ending in the play and film, with Madge escaping small-town life by running off with Hal, and wrote *Summer Brave* shortly before his death in 1973, which is a darker, less optimistic piece. In *Summer Brave*, as the *Wichita Eagle* noted, Madge "chickens out at the last minute and poignantly resigns herself to a safe, if stultifying, future." See "'Picnic' presentation blends in Inge's rewrite," *Wichita Eagle*, April 18, 2010. For more on William Inge see Ralph F. Voss, *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

Succeed in Business without Really Trying, which was easy because I didn't have to be there in person. It was great because it allowed the community theatre in Topeka to promote my involvement and raise some money and sort of generate some energy for the theatre.

CHANGE OF DIRECTION

After I graduated from Kansas Wesleyan my whole goal was to go back and do whatever it took to position myself to move into the management roles at Graves Truck Line, so for two years I worked in virtually all aspects of the company. I was travelling out to Great Bend and Manhattan, and I went to a little town called Tonkawa, Oklahoma, that we used as a point to serve Blackwell and Enid, Oklahoma. I worked in the front offices, loaded and unloaded trailers, worked midnight shifts on the docks. So I was ready to assume my rightful place, at least what I thought it was, and my dad called me in one day and said, "Times are changing. Used to be that all you had to do was to work hard and you could succeed, but this is the day and age where you've got to work smarter." So he encouraged me to look at graduate school, which was surprising because my dad didn't finish high school. That's when I went to the University of Kansas and enrolled in the masters of business administration program.

While I was away he had an offer from a large company to buy out our family business. He felt like given the offer that was on the table he shouldn't pass up that opportunity to, you might say, cash in the chips. I remember very distinctly being at my apartment at KU and the phone ringing and my father saying, "I have news for you, we're selling the family business," which was really a devastating blow because it's what I thought I would do; it was sort of my safety net. So my whole life sort of crumbled, because what I had aspired to do was no longer available to me.¹⁷ I made a bad decision at that point. I concluded that my reason for being in graduate school was to position me to be in my family business, and so after I had forty-three graduate hours completed in a sixty-hour program, I walked away. I just made the kind of mistake young people do. It really took me a while to recalibrate and redefine what I thought might be of interest to me.

17. "Graves plans merger with Michigan firm," *Salina Journal*, January 30, 1978.

ENTERING THE POLITICAL SCENE

Gary [Sherrer] called me and said, "Hey, there's a guy running for president, George [H. W.] Bush. He's not getting a lot of traction in Kansas because most everybody's aligned with Bob Dole," who my dad and our family had supported for years given the close geographical proximity of [Dole's hometown of] Russell and Salina. It never dawned on me that Senator Dole might take exception to me signing on with one of his competitors! I clearly was naïve. I had no appreciation at all for the competition between candidates. Bush was sounding more interesting and Senator Dole had all the help he needed in Kansas. George Bush was a new face on the national political scene and someone who I thought had qualities and abilities that would be well served in the nation. So I signed on as a very underpaid staff person on the "George Bush for President" campaign in 1980. That lasted four months during the primary season, January into April.

The attraction to me of the 1980 Bush campaign was there was a lot going on! Ronald Reagan [was running], Dole was running, [Illinois congressman] John Anderson was running. It was the first time I had really spent much time in Topeka. We had a little cubbyhole of an office a block and a half away from the state capitol, just a beautifully impressive building, and so it was great to walk in the shadow of the capitol every day to meet these young people that were all involved politically on the Bush campaign. I certainly was smitten and bitten by the political bug.

One of my jobs was to try to generate some interest in the Bush campaign by culling through voter registration records and getting people to come out to some of our events. This is what introduced me to Jack Brier, the secretary of state, who was the chief election official for the state and was also friends with Gary Sherrer. Jack contacted me and said "Hey, I have an opening in my office and I think you'd be a good choice. Why don't you come talk to me?" So August of 1980 I started working for Jack.¹⁸

I think that both Gary Sherrer and Jack Brier saw in me some of the values my dad instilled in me. I was a

18. Jack Brier, a Republican from Overland Park, became secretary of state on May 10, 1978, when he succeeded Elwill M. Shanahan, who had resigned from the office she had held since the death of her husband Paul R. Shanahan in 1966. Brier received his party's nomination for the office in August and won the general election contest; he was reelected in 1982 and served until January 12, 1987. "Brier takes oath of state office," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Thursday, May 11, 1978.

hard worker. It may sound a little bit simplistic, but I was a good kid, respectful. I was willing to do whatever I had to do. I didn't expect to be elevated prematurely. I wasn't looking for a quick ride to the top. Starting at the secretary of state's office on any given day I might have been pushing a two-wheeler through the halls of the capitol delivering a case of law books to a legislator's office or I would have been downstairs running a postage machine making sure that corporate annual reports were getting mailed out. I wasn't in a hurry. I wasn't looking to leapfrog forward. I was prepared to do whatever was expected of me and that hard work paid off. The great thing about the job was it was in the capitol. So I like to tell the story that my first day on the job I worked at the state capitol and my last day on the job, twenty-two years later, I was still at the state capitol. I was there as the deputy assistant secretary of state for about three years and then promoted to assistant secretary of state for roughly two years. Jack Brier decided to run for governor in 1986, so I then ran for secretary of state.¹⁹

KANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE

I discovered after a couple of years in the secretary of state's office that I really did enjoy public service and politics. But I hadn't thought about running for political office. In 1986 I surprised myself that I ended up running for secretary of state. Jack [Brier] convinced me that I could do it and it was then that I really discovered the power of this great family business. Graves Truck Line had little freight terminals in thirty-six cities in Kansas, and so for thirty years local businessmen had seen a Graves truck pull up at the back door delivering their freight. People had become conditioned, seeing Graves's trucks running up and down the road. So I harnessed that and made it my campaign logo. It was kind of like getting a head start on a statewide network that other people would spend months trying to build.

19. Brier finished third in the 1986 GOP gubernatorial primary, garnering 13.55 percent of the vote, while winner Mike Hayden received 36.1 percent and Larry Jones came in second with 31.1 percent. In a 1993 interview, Graves attributed part of Brier's poor showing to treating the race for governor as similar to a secretary of state campaign, taking far too long to announce his candidacy and get his campaign organization up and running. Said Graves, "This is single-A or double-A ball, and the governor's race is major league hardball." See "Secretary of State ready to enter political big league," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 18, 1993; and Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1986 Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1987]), 24–25.

I had an old Chevrolet and jumped in and started driving the wheels off it, going to every civic club I could. I had a couple of very good opponents that year. My Democratic opponent was Judy Runnels, who was a state legislator from Topeka, a fine lady and a good candidate.²⁰ But it wasn't like I was just handed the job, because, with Jack leaving, a lot of people said "Hey, this is my chance to get a statewide office." But I won the primary and won the general and the next thing I knew I was holding a statewide office at the age of thirty-three.²¹

One of the hardest questions on the campaign trail was to explain to people what the secretary of state did. I mean, why should it matter? How did you generate some energy? It was hard. When I was there we literally hand-filed a whole array of legal documents that were nothing spectacular or sexy but were critically important to articles of incorporation for people in business in the state. We compiled and sold statute books, session laws, journals of the Kansas legislature. Principally the job was known for being the chief election officer of the state. Although the 105 county clerks or election commissioners didn't work [for] and report to the secretary of state, they looked to the secretary of state for guidance on the administration of all the elections.

What I think worked [in the campaign] was to simply say, I've got six years of experience doing this whole array of business-related services and election-related services. None of these other people do. It's not broken, let's not try to fix it; let's just stay the course. You've got this known sort of Kansas quantity, Graves, ready to move into this trusted position. And it worked remarkably well.

20. Judith C. Runnels was born May 11, 1935, in Lawrence, Kansas, and received a nursing degree from the University of Kansas in 1958. She was a lobbyist to the Kansas Legislature for the Kansas State Nursing Association from 1973 to 1979, worked for Governor John Carlin from 1979 to 1981, and represented a Topeka district in the Kansas House of Representatives from 1983 to 1987. Runnels died at age sixty-eight on November 20, 2003. *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 25, 2003.

21. In the August 5, 1986, GOP primary, Graves easily defeated Gordon Schultz and Janice L. Hardenburger. Graves captured 132,337 votes; Hardenburger received 62,306 and Schultz 44,887. As mentioned above, in the general election contest Graves defeated Runnels, 427,460 to 371,479. *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1986*, 27, 77; "Graves plans to do his share of running in campaign," *Salina Journal*, June 4, 1986; and "Graves, Runnels vie for Brier's job," *Salina Journal*, August 6, 1986.



Secretary of State Graves decided to run for governor in 1994, a good year nationally for Republicans, as it turned out. Pictured are Bill and Linda Graves at a campaign event, with popular Third District Congresswoman Jan Meyers (1985–1997), Senator Bob Dole (1969–1996), and former President George H. W. Bush (1989–1993), who had lost his bid for a second term in 1992 to Bill Clinton. Curiously, Graves first entered the world of partisan politics “as a very underpaid staff person on the ‘George Bush for President’ campaign in 1980,” opting for Bush instead of Dole, who also sought the Republican nomination that year. Of course, neither Bush nor Dole captured the nomination; the 1980s was Ronald Reagan’s decade. Bush accepted the vice presidency and after bidding his time for eight years in that position, got his chance for the top job. Photo courtesy of former governor Bill Graves.

DECIDING TO RUN FOR GOVERNOR

I can remember the moment when I knew I would run for governor in 1994. It was general election night in 1990. I was running for reelection as secretary of state and I won handily, but the Republicans didn’t do very well statewide. When the night was over Governor Hayden had been defeated by Governor Finney and the attorney general [Bob Stephan] had been reelected, but just barely, and [he] had some challenges that made it look unlikely that he would seek the governor’s office. So that night I had a few close friends approach me suggesting that the die had been cast and that in four years I’d be running for governor.²² I remember at the

22. It was indeed a shaky night for Republicans on November 6, 1990. While Graves won the secretary of state race over Democrat R. J. Dickens by a wide margin, Democrat Sally Thompson defeated Republican Eric Rucker for state treasurer and Joan Finney defeated Republican incumbent governor Mike Hayden. Incumbent Republican insurance commissioner Ron Todd barely escaped an upset, winning by only five thousand votes over Democrat Paul Feliciano, while incumbent Republican attorney general Bob Stephan squeaked out a razor-thin victory over Democratic challenger Bert Cantwell. Robert “Bob” Stephan was elected as Kansas attorney general in 1978, had won reelection in 1982 and 1986, and would have been considered the

time being a little bit overcome with the notion that I’m looking at a four-year path, where at the end of those four years I’m going to be running for governor. Now, I expected that I would be running as a challenger to an incumbent Democratic governor. That’s the one twist that really changed the lay of the political land four years later when Governor Finney decided not to seek reelection.²³

I didn’t come out of a legislative background. Sometimes I think the legislative background can be very helpful because you have a better sense of the intricacies of the policy issues, but it also means you’ve got recorded votes on issues that can be used against you to a great extent. No secretary of state had ever been elected to higher office in the history of Kansas—to Congress or to any higher statewide office.²⁴ There were many people who said when I ran in 1994 that the secretary of state is just not a substantive enough post, that you don’t grapple with the significant policy

issues, and there is some truth to that. On the other hand, I thought it was a perfect springboard because it’s a

Republican front-runner for governor in 1994 if not for legal troubles stemming from a 1982 sexual harassment lawsuit that dogged him for years afterward. Stephan was indicted for perjury in 1992 but acquitted in 1995. For details on the long, complicated case, see “Jury finds Stephan innocent,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 22, 1995. For details on the background to the Hayden loss to Finney, see Beatty, “Being Close To People,” 46–74; see also *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1990*, 41–47, 110–15; and Lew Ferguson, “Finney’s stunning win confounds pollsters again,” *Hutchinson News*, November 8, 1990.

23. Joan Finney was Kansas’s oldest governor (at age sixty-five upon taking office) and Kansas’s first female governor. She was born on February 12, 1925, in Topeka and worked for Republican U.S. Senator Frank Carlson from 1953 to 1969. In 1972 she ran for a U.S. House seat and lost. She then switched her party affiliation to Democratic and won the state treasurer’s job in 1974, serving until 1991. Her 1990 defeat of Governor Mike Hayden was a surprise, but the incumbent governor had become unpopular because of the perception by many voters that he had raised their property taxes. As Graves notes, Finney surprised the Kansas political pundits again by opting not to run for reelection. Instead she ran for U.S. Senate in 1992 but lost in the Democratic primary to Jill Docketing, 74 percent to 26 percent. Finney died on July 28, 2001, at age seventy-six. For more on Finney’s gubernatorial years see Warren Armstrong, ed., *Populism Revisited: The Selected Papers of Governor Joan Finney* (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita State University, 1998).

24. One of the reasons for this may be the inauspicious beginnings of the office of secretary of state in Kansas. The first secretary,

small microcosm of state government. You have people to manage, you have budgets to prepare and present and to live by. You do have some policy issues that you have to work through the legislative process. You have a responsibility to represent a statewide constituency. So you learn how to move politically around the state, and I found it to be an excellent springboard for me.

The campaign in 1994 was kind of like diving into deep water and not being sure exactly what you're going to find. You just have to go all in and you have to be willing to lose. But I'd been in the secretary of state's office for fourteen years, and it was just time to sink or swim.

CHOOSING A RUNNING MATE

The process for deciding on a running mate in 1994 was interesting. We had a number of candidates, but at the end of the day everybody concluded that the significant weakness I had was a lack of legislative experience. At the same time one of the key emerging issues in Kansas was the funding of education and the quality and support of education. So we went after Sheila Frahm, who was the senate majority leader and had been senate chair of the Education Committee, a very well-respected, great lady from Colby, Kansas. Sheila at first was a little reluctant. In fact I believe she might have said no the first time around, but she finally agreed and being from Colby, really anchored the western Kansas vote, the agricultural community vote, and had strong supporters in education. She sort of put a stake through the heart of the lack of legislative experience piece, and just became a very good match as a running mate. She was a big part of our success.

THE 1994 REPUBLICAN PRIMARY CAMPAIGN

I ran against Fred Kerr, who had been majority leader of the state senate and had a tremendous following from western Kansas, and Gene Bicknell, who was a very successful businessman from Pittsburg, Kansas. He was the largest franchiser of Pizza Huts in the world.

Republican John Winter Robinson, was implicated in a bond scandal and subsequently impeached by the Kansas House of Representatives, convicted, and removed from office by the Kansas Senate in 1862, giving Kansas the dubious honor of being the first state to have an executive branch officer removed from office in U.S. history. See Cortez A. M. Ewing, "Early Kansas Impeachments," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (August 1932): 310-21; and Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), 71-77.



Born at Colby, Kansas, on March 2, 1945, Sheila Frahm served on the Kansas State Board of Education (1985-1989) and in the state senate (1989-1995) before entering the gubernatorial race in 1994 as Graves's running mate. "When I served as lieutenant governor with Governor Graves, his challenge was to be patient with the legislature. I knew, . . . because I had served in the legislature," reflected Frahm in a 2004 interview, that "the legislature moved very, very slowly." Graves and Frahm are pictured on a 1994 campaign pamphlet.

Gene had great business sense and a great desire to be governor, but he stepped into that world of politics that, until you understand it, a newcomer has a hard time really adjusting to. It probably benefitted me that there were a number of other individuals in the race because the more you get in there, it takes a lot smaller slice of the pie to win. I had eight years of experience in

state government as an executive branch official to run on. No one else had that.²⁵

My media consultant was Paul Wilson, who worked with my family and my friends and tried to get, as quick as he could, a sense of who I was and what was going on in the race.²⁶ We went back to basics. Graves Truck Line is like a subliminal piece of advertising that people had seen every day on every highway in every city street for years and years and years. I believe there was a certain amount of good will tied to that name that helped people develop some level of comfort with me that a lot of politicians have to spend a lot of time and money otherwise trying to develop.

I'm not sure we ever figured out [to] whom to attribute the most successful part of the campaign, the tag line that we adopted, but it tied back to my father in the trucking business. At the time I ran there was a real sense in Kansas that we needed to be very business-like and we needed to be very responsible in our fiscal approach to government. In the trucking business the way you would refer to being efficient was you would load "high and tight." In other words, you would make sure you maximized all the space within the trailer that you were pulling. It would be loaded to the ceiling and compacted as tight as it could be. Paul Wilson came up with a fairly straightforward thirty-second commercial of me dressed in jeans and a work shirt on a freight dock and the back end of the trailer talking about [how] my father taught me that you had to load "high and tight," and what I intended to do as a governor was to insist upon efficiency and effectiveness.

It was almost embarrassing how the phrase caught on and took off. As I traveled through the state I would go to a parade and people along the parade route would yell, "Hey, Bill, high and tight, load 'em high and tight!"

25. Fred A. Kerr represented Pratt in the Kansas State Senate from 1977 to 1993. In 1999 Graves appointed Kerr to the Kansas Board of Regents, where he served until 2003. In 2012 Kerr and several other former moderate Republican legislators made headlines when they formed a group, "Traditional Republicans for Common Sense." For more on Kerr see "Kerr joins Republican race," *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 2, 1993; and "Kerr joins former lawmakers opposing Brownback policies," *Pratt Tribune*, May 4, 2012. For more on Gene Bicknell's background, see Beatty, "Being Close To People," 46-74. See also, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1994*, 35-44. In the August 2 primary election, Congressman Jim Slattery defeated four other Democratic candidates with 84,389 votes; second place was Joan Wagon of Topeka, 42,115. Graves won the Republican nomination with 115,608 votes in a six candidate field; second place went to Bicknell with 79,816 votes, and third to Kerr, 63,495.

26. Wilson is the Chairman and CEO of *Wilson Grand Communications*, based in Arlington, Virginia, and produces many television ads for Kansas Republican candidates.

"Load 'em High and Tight"



A still from the "Load 'em high and tight" television commercial courtesy of Jeffrey Hight.

In 1994 Wilson Grand Communications was hired to do the strategy and television for Secretary of State Bill Graves to try and become Governor. He was not well known despite having served two terms as secretary of state, and to mock him, Democrats hung an empty suit on the podium at their party convention to symbolize that Graves didn't have much substance.

To plunge into a campaign my partner Steve Grand and I had a technique of interviewing everyone of political significance to map the strategy and determine how to introduce and position a candidate. We talked to many people and I remember we ended one day in the kitchen of Graves's Johnson County home with his wife Linda. We were interviewing Linda Graves. She was delightful and Steve and I were suitably charmed. Bill was coming home from some event but before he arrived Linda popped the cork on a bottle of wine and we stood in the kitchen talking about Bill.

Linda was filling in, as best she could, the details of Bill's earlier life. Partly in mock humor she told us how Bill had worked for his father's trucking company in Salina, Kansas, during his summers at college. She rolled her eyes, as if to say, "I married a trucker."

Maybe Bill came home at this time. Maybe it was a few minutes later. Who can remember? We were so entranced by Linda and she so captivated us that

the story now comes from her lips in our collective memory. She said, "The Graves family had a saying, that Bill told me. It was something like: 'Load 'em high and tight.' You see, in the trucking business in Salina you loaded every truck from the front to the back and from the floor to the ceiling to maximize the revenue of each mile driven across Kansas." She repeated for emphasis, "You load 'em high and tight."

My partner and I both looked at each other. We loved the anecdote.

Steve and I had just started experimenting with the power of metaphor. The notion that a metaphor allowed the instant communication of complex information in seconds and that the use of a metaphor was nearly impossible to reject by the TV viewer. Just the stuff for political advertising. The classical metaphor for explanatory purposes comes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare writes: Juliet is the sun. In this metaphor you instantly associate, and indelibly pair, with Juliet the qualities of the sun: bright, glowing, golden, warm, and the center of your universe. Without ever having met Juliet you understand why Romeo loves her.

So in the phrase "Load 'em high and tight" we found a spectacular metaphor even though no one had ever heard the phrase. Because if we could visualize the metaphor by showing Bill Graves loading a truck to the brim we could use the phrase to explain what kind of Governor he would be: namely, a frugal, efficient manager.

It was perfect. Except for one problem. It had to be crammed in to thirty seconds. At the time, Steve and I were also working in Guam on the governor's race there and I had a seventeen-hour flight the next week. Some electronic miracle happened on that flight. My computer allowed me to work eight solid hours on that one script shaping it to thirty seconds. The commercial wrote itself instantly but it was forty to forty-five seconds long. It took half the flight to Guam to shape, mold, and whittle the concept of "Load 'em high and tight" into a thirty-second ad. But it fit. Perfectly.

After the return from Guam we had a meeting with all the Graves kitchen cabinet of advisors.

Chairing the meeting was a tough-as-nails party stalwart and former Bob Dole campaign manager, Pat Ransom. She had a stack of nine scripts in front of her that we had written. Each of the advisors had the same stack. On top of the pile was "High and Tight," as we named it. The room was quiet. She read it silently to herself and took the page from the top of the pile, moved it aside and turned it over. Only one sentence was uttered by anyone. "Now that's a good spot," she pronounced and we moved into production.

The spot was instantly a lightning bolt to the body politic of Kansas. They got it. They understood what kind of governor Graves would be. And they liked it. Graves was being outspent by millionaire Gene Bicknell who helped start Pizza Hut. Bicknell had been on the air for weeks ahead of Graves and had pulled ahead in the polls. After one week of "Load 'em high and tight," Bill Graves jetted to the front of a four-person field and nothing and no one could dislodge him.

It was the summer of '94 in Kansas; a hot July and Bill Graves was doing the obligatory parades when he called me. "Pauuuul," he slow-talked to me with Linda on the extension phone of their home. "Something strange is happening. People are shouting at me during the parade: Load 'em high and tight, Bill!" "It's incredible," Linda said with her stabbing sarcasm, "You could be governor based on your summer job!"

Bill Graves won the primary; the general; the next primary; and his reelection. It did indeed work. And the irony of that spot is not lost on the Graveses because it has shaped their lives. Bill Graves has served for a decade as CEO of the American Trucking Associations in Washington, D.C.

Paul Wilson, CEO
Wilson-Grand Communications



When Graves decided to run for governor in 1994, he assumed he would be challenging the Democratic incumbent, Joan Finney. "Governor Finney was beloved by many, many people," said Graves. "She was one of the finest retail politicians you'd ever want to meet. If you went to an event somewhere out in the state and you were there to see Governor Finney press the flesh and meet and greet, wow, she was just really good. And what she perhaps lacked in policy skills, I mean, as governor she made up for that because she went out and found good people to put in her cabinet and to run state agencies. . . . Her [1990] victory was a surprise, no doubt about it. But she sort of tapped into a populist vein in that election against Governor Hayden and I think just snuck up on the governor to some extent and won. It was always to me tragic that she was only able to serve one term. . . . She was ground-breaking in the role she played in politics for women in Kansas."

I mean, it resonated, and you'd sort of laugh and say well, that's kind of silly, but the campaign having that kind of identity connected to you means an awful lot. In fact, the day I knew we had really struck a chord was [when the Slattery campaign] tried to sort of attack the theme. There was a very brief effort at a rebuttal, their polling was telling them that this is really resonating and we've got to do something. But "low and loose" didn't work very well. So the campaign theme was "load 'em high and tight," and that stayed with me

through my eight years as governor. To this day I'll meet people who will still mention that to me.²⁷

GOING NEGATIVE

The campaign as it developed relative to Gene Bicknell probably to this day is one of the more troublesome moments for me. It's just so hard to know when you've got things trending your way, and those polls can be awfully misleading sometimes. You think you're doing well, but you're not sure. Generally the rule of thumb in politics is, don't leave anything to chance. Gene had been involved in a film that was probably—knowing him as well as I do today and what a great guy he is—not his pride and joy.²⁸ So there was a decision made that we ought to run with this, we ought to make clear to people that his judgment is such that this was the kind of thing he would be involved in. A campaign TV spot was developed and it was run. In hindsight—because we won fairly easily—we didn't need to run it. But we didn't know that at the time. It probably introduced me to the tougher side of politics. I still don't care for it. I do understand that it's what happens and I ended up taking my share of blows along the way as well. But that was one that even to this day [I] wish there was a way to have a do-over, because I came to know Gene as a really fine guy, and so you regret that kind of thing.

1994 GENERAL CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION

Regarding the 1994 general election, I was nervous about where that campaign was headed because we had predicated the whole thing on the idea that we'd be running against Joan Finney, the incumbent. All of a sudden she steps aside and you get Jim Slattery, a six-term Democratic congressman who was very bright, a very good public speaker, and had broad support throughout the state.²⁹ In the early debates I was essentially going to school on Jim's knowledge of a lot of public issues that I

27. For campaign references to the "high and tight" slogan, see "Better days ahead," *Hutchinson News*, August 4, 1994; "Ads pit 'Torchmark' vs. 'bounced checks,'" *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 26, 1994; "Graves posters at school upset Democratic chairman," *Salina Journal*, October 6, 1994; and "Blue-ribbon debate," *Hutchinson News*, September 11, 1994.

28. When Gene Bicknell first ran for governor in 1986, Bud Burke, the lieutenant governor candidate for Larry Jones, one of Bicknell's opponents, introduced the matter of Bicknell's involvement as a financial backer and actor in the 1984 R-rated film, *They're Playing with Fire*, which featured the sultry Sybil Danning. Kansas Governor Mike Hayden, who won that primary contest over Jones and Bicknell, says that the film revelations mortally wounded Bicknell's campaign. See Beatty, "Being Close To People," 58–59.

29. Jim Slattery was born in Good Intent, Atchison County, Kansas, in 1948 and received his law degree from Washburn University in 1974. He won a seat to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1972 at age twenty-four, while still a law student. He served in the Kansas

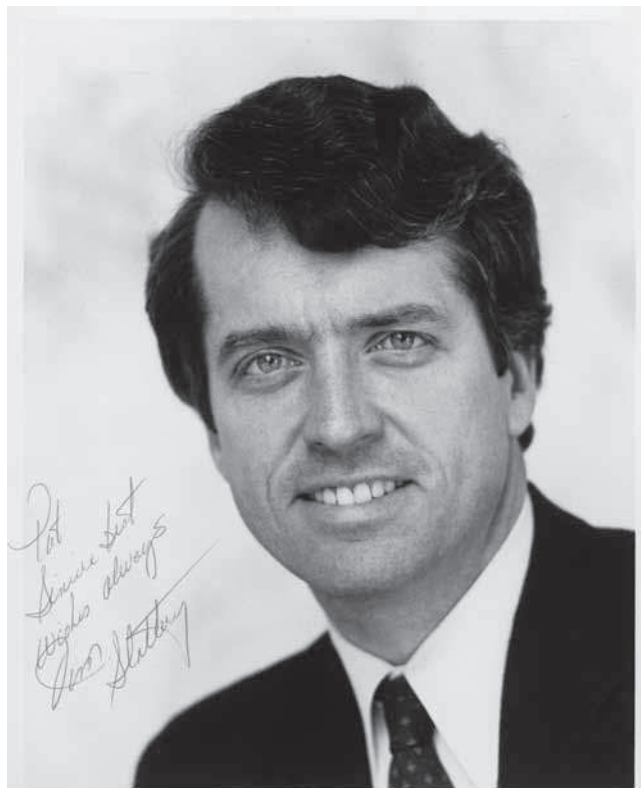
didn't know a whole lot about. I was listening closely to how he responded, which would help then give me a way to respond at later dates.

[My campaign] was worried that I was too nice a campaigner. So there was a poll leak that was designed to inspire people; to get [them] fired up; [and] to show that we weren't doing as well as we thought. It's even a little more insidious than that. My brother-in-law had come to help out with the campaign and he and one of the other campaign aides came up with the notion of concocting what turned out to be a phony Jim Slattery briefing memo that highlighted all of the things they viewed as the campaign weaknesses I had that they were planning to exploit. These guys actually conned me into believing that they had come into possession of this document, which was the road map that Jim Slattery was going to follow, and that I needed to take notice of those things and make an extra special effort to counter those points. In fact they just made it up! All they were doing were trying to get inside my head and get me to be the candidate that they knew or hoped I would be. I believed the points that were raised were legitimate. What they called on me to do was to be more assertive in campaign debates on certain points. It really worked quite well.

A couple things worked against Congressman Slattery's campaign. One was the timing was not good; 1994 was just a very Republican year. It was Newt Gingrich and the "Contract with America."³⁰ So for a

house until 1979 and served in the U.S. House from 1983 to 1995, representing the Second District of Kansas. After Slattery's 1994 loss to Graves, he joined a law firm in Washington, D.C., but returned to Kansas politics in 2008 when he challenged incumbent U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, hoping to be the first Democratic member of the U.S. Senate from Kansas since 1939. He was unsuccessful, losing the race to Roberts, 36 to 60 percent. "James Charles Slattery," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-present, bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000477; "Jim Slattery Biography," Collection Guide to the Papers and Other Historical Materials of Jim Slattery, State Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, kshs.org/research/collections/documents/personalpapers/findingaids/slattery_jim_collection_guide.pdf; and Tim Carpenter, "Slattery launches campaign to unseat Roberts," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 30, 2008.

30. Spearheaded and cowritten by Georgia congressman Newt Gingrich, the "Contract with America" was a campaign document issued six weeks before the 1994 congressional election, the first mid-term election of Bill Clinton's presidency. The document provided precise details on how House Republicans would vote on many key issues if they became the new majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. The unique approach of the "Contract with America," dissatisfaction over a slow-recovering economy, and Clinton's failed 1993 health care reform are all cited as factors in the eventual Republican landslide, where a massive fifty-four-seat swing in the House brought about a Republican majority for the first



As it turned out, Governor Finney decided against a second term, and Graves found himself challenging a very different type of candidate. "All of a sudden she steps aside and you get Jim Slattery, a six-term Democratic congressman who was very bright, a very good public speaker, and had broad support throughout the state."

Democrat to come home from Washington and say, "I'm the solution to your problems," just didn't resonate. It was a tough sell given the public's general perception of what had been going on in Washington. So Jim picked a tough year to be the Democratic nominee against what was a fairly well-managed, focused Republican campaign. Any other year our race would have been much, much closer, but timing is everything and Jim picked the year that if you were a Democrat anywhere in this country, you weren't going to do very well in an election, and that was certainly true in Kansas and it turned out to be a lot easier than we had anticipated.

On Election Day the polls closed at seven o'clock and I'm sitting at my office at my desk having some pizza, just sort of keeping an eye on things, and Lew Ferguson, a well-respected journalist, came in and he handed me a wire service story that said, "Bill Graves

time since 1955. Newt Gingrich then became speaker of the House, where he served from 1995 to 1999. For further reading see Steven M. Gillon, *The Pact: Newt Gingrich, Bill Clinton, and the Rivalry that Defined a Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

is the Governor of Kansas.”³¹ It still chokes me up today because you work, you work, you work and then all of sudden, boom, you get an affirmation. It’s not exactly the environment that I thought it would happen in, sitting alone in my office eating pizza, but that was the beginning. There is a moment where in the back of your mind you say, “Oh my God, I won.” I mean, this is for real now; we have to go and figure out how to do all of these things that we said need to be done. I remember the first thing we did was begin the process of building the transition team with the focus being on the larger team we were going to assemble to work on behalf of the state. I believe to this day that nothing else matters as much as the quality of the people that you surround yourself with.

MASSIVE TAX CUTS

When we went through the real enormous conversations about tax cuts in the early stages of my administration I think people wanted to somehow believe I wasn’t a proponent of tax cuts. The truth of the matter was I was always in favor of tax cuts. I was just trying to strike that nice balance between cutting enough to satisfy what we can cut but making sure we don’t mess up the services that we’re committed to providing. Conservatives tended to believe there’s no tax cut that is too big and to the extent we do err, all we’ll do is properly realign government in a smaller way.

The conservative legislators weren’t interested in the approach of just one-time refunds of cash because they wanted fundamental change in the various rates of taxation. What I think will get lost in the history is I was making decisions about tax cuts in an attempt to build a large enough coalition that could overcome even more aggressive proposals that the conservatives were making. They were making them in such a way that some of our coalition were sort of spooked almost into joining them, saying, “Governor, we can’t go home and not have been for this proposal. It’s really going to look attractive to our folks.” So I would work with groups and say, “If we could go this much further, is

31. Lew Ferguson was the longtime writer for the Associated Press and is featured in the 2005 documentary *The Kansas Governor* ([youtube.com/watch?v=jwcvQ_F3jBg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwcvQ_F3jBg)). For Ferguson’s story that Graves read on Election Day, November 8, 1994, see “Graves wins easily,” *Hutchinson News*, November 9, 1994. The subhead of the story read: “Victory threatens to become one of the biggest blowouts in Kansas history.”

that enough that you’ll stick with us?” and avoid this catastrophic approach that more conservative members were taking.

There are some people that look back at my tenure and [say], “He went too far.” Well, hindsight is pretty easy in that game because you weren’t there when we were looking right down the barrel of proposals that *really* went too far. There isn’t any doubt that we went too far. But the dilemma was at that moment that logic didn’t work, saying, “Well I’m sorry, we aren’t going to go there.” That didn’t work. We had legislators that saw these huge influxes of new revenue into the state coffers and they were going to figure out ways to go home and give the money back. While I certainly always supported that, I guess my operative word was moderation. Let’s move cautiously toward it.

Dirk Kempthorne, the governor of Idaho, called me shortly after he was elected—a former United States senator who went home and became governor of Idaho.³² He had the same huge surplus issue and said, “Bill, give me some advice on what to do.” I said, “To the extent you can you need to reign in the rush to aggressively cut taxes. You can always adjust going forward if you want to go a little more but you can’t pull it back once you give it back.” If I didn’t have to worry about the legislature I would have done things differently. But given the dynamic of the moment, I thought we did pretty well.³³

I’ve often wondered if sometimes it is not harder to govern in good times than it is in tough times. Because in good times you always have opportunities and therefore everybody has got an idea. You’re tugged in so many different directions about what to do. Whereas when things get tough you kind of have limited options to deal with the tough times. We had some of our most contentious discussions over how large

32. Kempthorne served as a Republican from Idaho in the U.S. Senate, from 1993 to 1999, won the governorship in 1998, and served until 2006, when he accepted appointment as secretary of the interior in the George W. Bush administration. See “Past Secretaries of the Department of the Interior,” U.S. Department of the Interior, [doi.gov/whoweare/past_secretaries.cfm#kempthorne](https://www.doi.gov/whoweare/past_secretaries.cfm#kempthorne); and “Dirk Kempthorne,” Bipartisan Policy Center, bipartisanpolicy.org/about/secretary-dirk-kempthorne.

33. Not everyone agreed, of course. At the turn of the twenty-first century and one year into Graves’s second term, Kansas journalist David S. Awbrey called the governor a “transactional” politician who needed to remake himself into a “transformational leader.” “Graves needs transformation,” *Kansas City (Mo.) Star*, January 22, 2000.

or small tax cuts should be, because people have different ideas about whether the money really should stay in the treasury and be spent. We had arguments about whether we ought to not have any indebtedness. And you sit back and you think it's just amazing that during prosperous, great times we had so much difficulty making a public policy decision.

THE HIGHWAY PROGRAM

The highway program would be one example of where I clearly had a passion for the project. Everyone knew about my history in transportation so it wasn't like I was new to the subject. I give former governor Mike Hayden great credit for having launched the first of what was a comprehensive plan. When I arrived the program was ending and we had to make a decision whether we wanted to continue along the same lines. I thought we did, although we needed to expand our approach beyond just building roads and repairing bridges. We needed to look at airports, rail infrastructure, all the different modes.

I knew to get the legislature to agree to any kind of revenue package and tax increases that we would need broad public support and encouragement. So I created a blue-ribbon panel and I had them tour the state. They basically met and said, "Tell us your needs." As we expected the response was overwhelming. We were told that we needed \$30 billion in total needs, and we couldn't come anywhere near affording that. But we did come up with a program that was about \$13 billion over ten years.³⁴

What we did to get that bill passed and passed so easily was we developed a broad coalition of stakeholders and said if you want support for general aviation airports, you have to be in our deal; if you



The major legislative initiative of the Graves administration's second term was the Comprehensive Transportation Program of 1999. The bill, which the legislature passed and Graves signed into law on May 10, 1999, provided a total of \$13 billion over ten years from a combination of bonds, taxes, and reallocation of funds. While Graves says he did not need to twist arms to get his plan passed, getting it through the legislature still involved a lot of hard work, compromise, and old-fashioned politics by the governor and administration officials led by Secretary of Transportation E. Dean Carlson, pictured behind the governor at the back of the crowd gathered here for the bill's signing in Paola. A Nebraskan, who had just retired from a thirty-six-year career in the Federal Highway Administration (the last five years as its executive director), Carlson led the Kansas Department of Transportation for all eight years of the Graves administration and had "a good time" doing so. "We put together a detailed plan," explained Carlson in July 2013, "and he [Graves] pushed it through the legislature; I did a lot of talking to the legislators but he basically was the one who got it passed." Photograph courtesy of the Kansas Department of Transportation.

want roads and bridges, you have to be in our deal; if you want public transportation, you have to be in our deal. We decided that we were going to harness all that energy and not let anybody freelance on us, so we got lots of diverse community and political support because of that.

That was number one. Number two: I led with my chin. I was from a trucking background but I said if we're going to build real infrastructure we're going to have to have real money, so we're going to raise the fuel tax. I think at the end of the day, Kansans get that. People

34. Chaired by Mary Turkington, Graves's blue-ribbon panel was called the Transportation 2000 Task Force. It toured the state in the summer and fall of 1998, holding a dozen open hearings. Newspaper reports said that the Task Force received \$17.5 billion worth of suggested projects. See "Taskforce builds tenets of statewide highway

bill," *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 22, 1998; "Graves's proposal calls for no new taxes," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 7, 1999; and "Graves signs highway bill on road trip," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 11, 1999.

understand you don't get stuff for nothing. It's not free. I think the other thing was we floated initially a really aggressive bond program that would have worked, but a number of legislators didn't like the idea. In fact it was one of those days when there was a sort of phony baloney vote out on the house floor just to embarrass me. I wasn't embarrassed by it; it was actually okay because it made the point that we're not going to do this massive bonding thing. It turned out the [legislature] came back and said they would do pretty substantial bonding coupled with the use of federal funds coupled with the use of a fuel tax increase. And we had the quarter-cent sales tax still left over that we dedicated to highways. Unlike Governor Hayden, who just had to almost pull teeth to get his initial plan, it was remarkable that it just all came together.

My approach from the very beginning was to empower lots of community involvement, lots of business leaders, chambers of commerce, these diverse advocacy groups. I never was good about twisting arms, and at the end of the day I didn't do a heck of a lot of it. I just managed the process and the votes fell into place. Everybody knew we needed the program, so I ended up getting one of my proudest legislative accomplishments without really doing too much. When you talk about \$13 billion over ten years, you're going to put a tremendous amount of investment into the state infrastructure, and I feel very good about that.³⁵

35. Graves's initial proposal for funding his transportation bill avoided raising any new taxes by asking the legislature to issue \$2.1 billion in bonds. As Graves notes, legislators balked at this idea because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in interest the state would end up paying out over the thirty years of the bonds. The plan that the legislature passed and Graves signed into law on May 10, 1999, provided a total of \$12.6 billion over ten years. It was funded by \$995 million in bonds, a four-cent per gallon increase on motor fuels, and an increase to 12 percent from 7.62 percent in the state sales tax revenue allocated to the state highway fund. See "Graves inks transportation bill," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 11, 1999. While Graves says he did not need to twist arms to get his plan passed, getting it through the legislature still involved a lot of hard work, compromise, and old-fashioned politics by the governor and administration officials, led by Secretary of Transportation E. Dean Carlson. Roger Myers, writing in the January, 1, 1999, *Topeka Capital-Journal*, said "Republican lawmakers are bad mouthing the governor's comprehensive transportation plan," and "Bill Graves isn't getting much respect from the Legislature," while other newspaper reports detail how Graves did not hesitate to use pork-barrel spending and political logrolling to sweeten the deal for some legislators. In

TOUGH FIRST-TERM ISSUES: CLOSING STATE HOSPITALS AND CONCEALED CARRY

We had a number of people in state institutions with both developmental disabilities and with mental retardation issues and there was a sense that those people could be better served by being in more community-type services. So we met, the legislature and governor, and we talked about it and we decided that it was such a tough issue with lots of challenges that we would create the blue-ribbon panel approach. We had a group get together and we empowered them, which I thought was most unusual. We virtually gave them the power of the law to recommend which state hospitals would be closed and the only way that those recommendations would not take effect is if they were overridden by a legislative vote. They did their work and we supported them. They recommended not one, but two state hospitals be closed. Traumatic for families, traumatic for the patients, traumatic for state employees that were working at those institutions, but we went forward. I supported the recommendations, we implemented the plan, we closed the hospitals. We created more community-based services for them and I think it worked pretty well. That was an example of legislative/gubernatorial [cooperation].³⁶

One of the really classic moments in my tenure as governor was when the two chambers passed the concealed carry of weapons bill, strongly pushed by the National Rifle Association, which basically said that any citizen is entitled to carry a concealed weapon. I was never convinced that was good public policy and never convinced it was public policy that most Kansans supported. I thought it was public policy that a fairly

particular, Myers asserted that Graves promised to sign an upcoming school funding bill if Democratic legislators would support his transportation plan. "Graves signs school finance bill," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 16, 1999; see also "To save dying transportation plan, Graves promises government pork," *Wichita Eagle*, February 16, 1999; and for more on Secretary Carlson, see Matt Truell, "Transportation chief knows what on the road means," *Garden City (Kans.) Telegram*, December 9, 1995; and E. Dean Carlson, interview by Virgil W. Dean, July 2, 2013, Dean's personal collection.

36. The State Hospital Closure Commission was authorized by the legislature in April of 1995 and held hearings in Parsons (Parsons State Hospital), Winfield (Winfield State Hospital), and Topeka (Topeka State Hospital and Kansas Neurological Institute). On October 26, 1995, the commission voted to close Winfield and Topeka State Hospitals. Topeka closed in May of 1997 and Winfield closed in March of 1998. For a thorough examination of the history behind these closings, see Fred D. Seaton, "The Long Road Toward 'The Right Thing to Do': The Troubled History of Winfield State Hospital," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Winter 2004-2005): 251-63, especially 259-63.

narrow group of Kansans, but a loud and insistent group of Kansans, promoted. So when the bill got to my desk—and it was not an easy decision because you knew there was going to be political fallout and repercussions—I vetoed the concealed carry bill.³⁷ That was in the year just prior to my reelection and there were people that said this is going to come back to haunt you politically. You know, I won reelection with 73 percent, so it didn't seem to have a whole lot of impact. But I can tell you at the moment we were dealing with the issue, it was stressful. Lots of people within my administration had different opinions on what to do.

We had several [issues] like that where we just had different opinions. That's what's great about the process. Everybody gets to have their say. I did say this quite often, "You know, if you don't like the way I'm doing the job, then just run for governor and you can be governor and you can make those decisions."

KATIE AND CHILDREN'S ISSUES

My wife Linda and I had both been very busy in our professional lives. We were married in 1990 and came to the decision in 1993 that we would start a family and never bothered to think that might just not be possible. It turned out that we weren't able to have a family in the traditional way, so we started thinking about adoption. It was a fascinating experience for us and it motivated us to support and promote adoption services. We were blessed. We were able to bring home a beautiful little girl and surprise everyone, because the first lady certainly hadn't looked like she was expecting a child before we pounded that "It's a Girl" sign in the front yard of the governor's residence! It was fun for about a week in that there was a media frenzy over pictures of the First Baby. Katie was terrific. She grew up in the residence as a daughter of the governor and I just enjoyed sharing that experience with her.³⁸

From the moment she came into our lives it changed my perspective in a variety of ways. I discovered that

37. The bill would have set up a system for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to license gun owners to carry concealed handguns if they were able to pass a criminal records check and firearms training course. Graves vetoed the bill on April 21, 1997. In his veto message he wrote, "For many Kansans, knowing hidden guns are on our streets does not contribute to their sense of security. In addition, more guns mean more injuries and deaths from accidental shootings." "Graves vetoes hidden firearms," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 22, 1997.

38. The governor and first lady adopted Katherine Preston Graves on October 14, 1995. See, for example, "It's a Girl," *Hays (Kans.) Daily News*, October 19, 1995; and "It's a girl for Gov. Graves and wife," *Hutchinson News*, October 19, 1995.



Linda Richey, a Kansas City area attorney, and then secretary of state Bill Graves met in 1988. "We were going to have a first blind date at a gala function in Kansas City," remembered the former governor, "and I thought that she understood that she was to attend and I was going to meet her there. She assumed I would call her and more formally ask that she meet me there, so she didn't show up. I put my tux on and went to the event, and she wasn't there, which made me all the more curious. . . . As a secretary of state I was fascinated that an attorney would stand me up! She would later say that she never stood me up; that I didn't call. So I called her a few days later and I remember saying, 'I think you owe me a date.' And she took it in good stride, good humor, and we went to dinner following that, and got married in 1990." The Graveses are pictured on an invitation to a 1994 Kansas Day celebration.

you can give children's issues all the sort of lip service you want, but until you have a child, until you understand the nourishment requirements, the healthcare needs, the safety, child-safety seats, how you child proof a room, how you keep a child from falling down a staircase—there's a whole new world that you discover when you take on the responsibility of raising a child and that helped me a lot [to] think about budgetary priorities. We put a lot more emphasis on Head Start programs and Parents as Teachers programs



In 1994 the Graveses prepared to move into the governor's mansion, Cedar Crest, and in October 1995 they were joined there by daughter Katie, pictured with the governor. Graves recalled, "It turned out that we weren't able to have a family in the traditional way, so we started thinking about adoption. . . . We were able to bring home a beautiful little girl and surprise everyone, because the first lady certainly hadn't looked like she was expecting a child before we pounded that 'It's a Girl' sign in the front yard of the governor's residence!"

on the policy side. And it made it harder for me to be away from home because I was always missing my daughter and my wife.³⁹

REPLACING BOB DOLE IN THE U.S. SENATE IN 1996

I was in Washington in a meeting of the Republican Governors' Association at the Willard Hotel. Bob Dole came over and we went to the side of the room and sat down. He leaned over and said, "I'm going to make an announcement tomorrow that is going to involve you," and I initially thought he meant he was going to announce some money for McConnell Air Force Base or that he'd done something for the farm program. He could tell from the blank expression on my face that I

39. In his 1999 inaugural address, Graves said: "There is a significant difference between the Bill Graves who took the oath of office four years ago and the Bill Graves of today. That difference, in one word, is 'Katie.'" He then pledged to make children's well-being the top priority for his second term. "Graves shifts focus to children," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 13, 1999; and William Preston Graves, "State of the State Address, 1999," January 12, 1999, Kansas State Library, Topeka, kslib.info/government-information/kansas-information/kansas-governors/william-preston-graves.html. The governor had actually launched his "Children's Initiative" a year earlier; see "Graves urges funds for kids," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 12, 1998; and William Preston Graves, "State of the State Address, 1998," January 12, 1998, Kansas State Library, Topeka, kslib.info/government-information/kansas-information/kansas-governors/william-preston-graves.html.

didn't know where he was going. So, he then said, "I'm gonna resign." I whispered back, "As Senate Majority Leader?" He said, "No, from the Senate." It was one of those moments where you could have knocked me over with a pin because it just all sort of cascaded on me, the implications of "we're going to lose our Republican Majority Leader of the United States Senate, we're going to lose the senior senator from Kansas," and I'm going to be in a position where I'm going have to name a replacement for Bob Dole.⁴⁰

Trust me, there's a lot I want to aspire to do in life, but picking a replacement for Bob Dole is really not one of them! Because what happened almost immediately is lots of people started lobbying, lots of people wanted a free U.S. Senate seat. And you discover very quickly that you can only pick one person and that person is likely going to believe that they were the one that should've got it and everybody you don't pick is going to be mad you didn't pick them, so it's a thankless job. The other thing is the news media coverage. That was the most intense few days of media scrutiny I've ever experienced in my life. They were everywhere I went. Every time I got out of the car they were there with the cameras rolling, wanting to know, "What are you going to do?" And obviously I needed some time to really think about it.

I never once thought about myself as a successor to Senator Dole. I loved what I was doing. I loved state government, and the more time I spent in state government the more I appreciated how little the federal government held no attraction to me. I talked with a lot of people. My chief of staff, Joyce McGarity; Gary Sherrer; my lieutenant governor Sheila Frahm; and Kent Glasscock, those were probably my four closest advisors. I also talked pretty extensively with Senator [Nancy Landon] Kassebaum about the whole thing.⁴¹ I guess the blessing and the curse was I could

40. On May 15, 1996, Dole announced he would be leaving the Senate. Senator Robert J. Dole, first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1968, launched his third bid for the presidency on April 10, 1995, and resigned from the Senate on June 11, 1996. Dole lost the 1996 presidential election to Bill Clinton (Clinton: 49.2 percent; Dole: 40.7 percent; Ross Perot: 8.4 percent). "Third time around," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 9, 1995; "Dole: 'I am a candidate,'" *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 11, 1995; and "Dole's departure draws varied reviews from Kansans," *Hutchinson News*, June 12, 1996.

41. Nancy Landon Kassebaum (now Kassebaum-Baker) is the daughter of former Kansas Governor Alf Landon (1933-1937), who ran as the 1936 Republican presidential nominee. She served in the U.S. Senate from December 23, 1978, to January 3, 1997. (After Kassebaum won the Senate seat in the November 1978 election, her predecessor, U.S. Senator James B. Pearson, resigned, and Kassebaum

name a dozen people that were really fine people, capable of being members of the United States Senate, but I only had one to pick. At the end of the day when my lieutenant governor Sheila Frahm said, "I really would like this appointment," it was very difficult for me to say no because I had gone to her and asked her to sign up as my lieutenant governor and she had then played such a key role in my election. That just goes back to kinda who I am. I couldn't deny Sheila that opportunity and I thought she'd be very good at it. I believe she would have been very good as senator. I think she would admit that she stumbled as a political candidate for Senate in that next election.⁴²

People that were interested in Senator Dole's vacancy communicated in a variety of ways. Some simply just called me. Some just said, "Hey, I'm interested." Sam Brownback was one of those people. He was serving in Congress at that point. He was very interested in the Senate seat, and he called me and it was a very amicable, professional conversation. I think I knew even at that point it was not likely that I would designate Sam. He said to me, "If I'm not your appointee, then know that I'm pretty well inclined that I will run for the Senate seat when the opportunity presents itself." It wasn't personal, it was just business, and he obviously followed through, had a real sound plan in mind for how he'd accomplish that and was successful. Life goes on.⁴³

was appointed to finish the last couple weeks of Peason's term.) Kent Glasscock was a Republican member of the Kansas House of Representatives from 1991 to 2003, representing a district in Manhattan. He was speaker of the house from 2001 to 2003. In 2002 he flirted with the idea of running for governor but eventually ran for lieutenant governor with Wichita Mayor Bob Knight at the top of the ticket; they lost to Tim Shallenburger in the GOP primary. Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 2002, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka, Kans.: Secretary of State, [2003]), 94-96.

42. The results of the August 5, 1996, special GOP primary election for Dole's unexpired term: Sam Brownback: 187,914 (54.8 percent); Frahm: 142,487 (41.6 percent); Christina Campbell-Kline, Reform Party: 12,378 (3.6 percent). Journalist John Hanna noted that early in the campaign one poll showed Frahm with a twenty-point lead and wrote: "Frahm was the choice of moderate Republicans, but even some of them acknowledged she ran a relatively poor campaign." John Hanna, "Brownback ousts Frahm," *Lawrence Journal-World*, August 7, 1996; see also Lew Ferguson, "Frahm here to Washington," *Hutchinson News*, May 25, 1996; and Shelia Frahm, interview by Bob Beatty, September 17, 2004, Beatty's personal collection.

43. Two days after Dole announced his resignation, Brownback announced he was running for the seat, regardless of whether Graves appointed him or not. See, for example, Lew Ferguson, "Selection will likely trigger hot campaign. It will pit Frahm, a moderate, against Republican conservative Brownback, now in Congress," *Hays Daily News*, May 26, 1996. A constant in Kansas politics since



UNITED STATES SENATE
OFFICE OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BOB DOLE
KANSAS

June 11, 1996

Dear Governor Graves:

I hereby resign my office as a United States Senator from Kansas effective June 11, 1996 at 2:00 p.m. eastern daylight time.

Sincerely,

BOB DOLE

The Honorable Bill Graves
Governor, State of Kansas
State Capitol Building
Topeka, Kansas 66617

HAND DELIVERED

When U.S. Senator Bob Dole informed Graves of his resignation, "It was one of those moments where you could have knocked me over with a pin because it just all sort of cascaded on me," the governor recalled, "the implications of 'we're going to lose our Republican Majority Leader of the United States Senate, we're going to lose the senior senator from Kansas.'" According to Graves's then lieutenant governor Sheila Frahm, Dole's resignation "came as a surprise to all of us. Of course the immediate question is, 'Governor, would you like to take that appointment yourself?'. . . . That's not an impossible scenario that the sitting governor would want to do that. As soon as the governor knew that he was not intending in any way to assume that responsibility then he asked if I would make a decision as to whether that was something I would like to do." Frahm decided that it was and served from June 11 to November 5, 1996; but she lost the special election for the remainder of Dole's unexpired term as well as the Republican primary for that office.

BITTERSWEET: THE 1996 REPUBLICAN CONVENTION

The 1996 presidential convention was a moment that should have been a political high point in my life because a Kansan, a person I respected and admired, Bob Dole, was the nominee. We had gone to Russell,

1986, Brownback's political career includes: Kansas secretary of agriculture, 1986 to 1993; White House Fellow, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, 1990 to 1991; U.S. House of Representatives, Kansas, Second District, 1995 to 1996; U.S. Senate, 1996 to 2011; Kansas governor, 2011 to present. Brownback also made a short-lived bid for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination; he pulled out of that race on October 18, 2007. See "Sam Dale Brownback," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-present*, bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000953; and "Governor Sam Brownback," *Kansas. Office of the Governor*, governor.ks.gov/about-the-office/governor-sam-brownback.

that's when he announced Jack Kemp was going to be his running mate, and we had all traveled back to Hays. The Russell airport was not large enough for the Dole plane to land and take off from so the whole entourage had to land at Hays, go to Russell, and do this announcement. We all flew and I rode with Senator Dole on the plane to San Diego. You know, everything was aligned to make it a very special moment. But simmering under the surface was this developing sort of situation with myself and my wing of the Republican Party and the more conservative wing of the party; and because of our differences of opinion, I ended up going to San Diego, but I didn't go as a delegate of the party at that time.⁴⁴

Control of the party was such that I wasn't even a delegate at the very convention that was going to nominate Bob Dole to be president. There's a whole lot more to that story, but maybe the most important piece might be that there was a suggestion that I wouldn't be down on the convention floor and wouldn't be involved in that very special moment when Kansas is afforded the honor of casting those votes that make Senator Dole the Republican nominee. The Dole campaign had to contact the chairman of the state party and say we want Governor Graves on the floor at the microphone delivering on behalf of Kansas the votes to nominate Senator Dole.⁴⁵ And I tell that story as just a way to sort of set the stage for how contentious our situation was.

44. Conservatives won control of the Republican Party in 1994 by winning local precinct committee positions, after which Graves openly fought with the party hierarchy until his moderate allies won back enough precinct committee positions to take over in 1998 (see "Kansas delegation opposes abortion plank," *Lawrence Journal-World*, August 1, 2000). Graves's bitterness at the events that transpired in San Diego at the convention was such that he told journalist Lew Ferguson that he was thinking of not running for reelection. In our 2004 interview we asked Graves specifically about that moment, and he replied: "That was one of those moments that you say something you wish you hadn't. But my actions spoke louder than my words a couple of years later." This moderate (or progressive) versus conservative rivalry was nothing new to Republican politics in Kansas, of course. Governor John Anderson had a similar experience before the 1964 Republican National Convention. In Anderson's case it was because Kansas conservatives in charge of the party were not happy that he had supported moderate Nelson Rockefeller, governor of New York, over conservative Barry Goldwater, senator from Arizona. "They wouldn't even give me a place on the committee that went to San Francisco for the national convention!" said Anderson. "I mean, I went out there, but I wasn't a voter." Bob Beatty, "For the benefit of the people," 264–65. See also, "Dole And The Quarterback. Russell throws a great party," *Salina Journal*, August 11, 1996; and Lew Ferguson, "Conservatives downplay Graves Support," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, June 23, 1997.

45. Lew Ferguson, "Kansas delegates savor the moment their votes sent Dole over the top," *Salina Journal*, August 16, 1996.

1998 PRIMARY CHALLENGE AND SECOND TERM

As I think back on my election in 1994 and the emergence of social issues and social conservatives [in] the Republican Party, my timing was probably fortunate in that I was not a candidate later. I would have had a much harder time if I was running today than when I ran then. In fact, by 1998 the conservatives had taken over the state party and David Miller felt compelled to run against me when I ran for reelection, which speaks a lot about how I just missed the edge of that real strong conservative wave.⁴⁶ We were extremely energized in the reelection year and very focused, more so than the first time in 1994. I was frustrated by the fact that I thought reasonable people could agree to disagree without being disagreeable, but that just didn't work in the political system. To have your state party chairman step down to challenge you as a sitting incumbent didn't set well with me. There was a bit of frustration with what I thought [would happen] when I was elected in 1994, that we would all come together, pull together, unify as a party, work through differences in a very orderly, civil way as opposed to a sort of civil war that broke out over our differences.

So we went about the business of developing one of the better run political efforts that I've been aware of in Kansas. We pulled out all the stops. We organized right down to the person making sure we turned out our vote. We had the resources it took to get our message out and to energize the grassroots, the base. And the [results] were pretty rewarding.⁴⁷

I think my eight years is characterized by a very interesting and challenging time within the Republican

46. David Miller, Republican from Eudora, served in the Kansas house from 1981 until 1991 and ran for lieutenant governor with gubernatorial contender Nestor Weigand in 1990, losing in the GOP primary to Mike Hayden. In the May 5, 1998, *Topeka Capital-Journal* article, "Miller considering bid against Graves," Jim McLean wrote, "After that loss, Miller set about teaching conservative Republicans statewide how to become involved in the political process, building a network that gained control of the state GOP in the 1994 party precinct elections. Those Republicans elected Miller state chairman in January 1995." For an account of Miller's role in the conservative movement in Kansas, see Steve Kraske, "Once rebels, Kansas conservatives now see a legacy," *Kansas City Star*, January 1, 2012.

47. In the 1998 Republican primary Graves tallied 225,782 votes (72.8 percent) to David Miller's 84,368 votes (27.2 percent). In the general election Graves received 544,882 votes (73.4 percent); Democrat Tom Sawyer garnered 168,243 votes (22.7 percent); Constitution Party candidate Kirt Poovey tallied 21,710 (2.9 percent); and Reform Party candidate Darrel King mustered 7,830 votes (1.1 percent). *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1998*, 36–40, 102–4.

Party. I had great friends and colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle, but during my eight years the number of Democrats in the legislature was so small, so for the most part it was a Republican dominated time and within that large Republican house and senate we disagreed daily on just about everything.

So a large part of my second term was [contentious]; as a more conservative element of the Republican Party asserted itself I felt like I had to push back on occasion because I represented all Kansans. I represented conservative Republicans and moderate Republicans. I represented independents that had no affiliation and Democrats. Once the election is over you somehow have to put the politicking aside and recognize the total responsibility of governing. So, I shoved on conservatives a little bit and they shoved on me a little bit. And it wasn't always the most enjoyable part of the job, but it was just the way things were.

TOUGH TIMES: BUDGET CUTS AND RAISING TAXES

The final years were challenging and they weren't the years I would have preferred to have. [The first six years] we had so much money we argued over how big the tax cuts [should be] and how big the spending increases were going to be. It was a great time to be governor. I suppose I felt like in those final years that it's your job and you owe it to the next governor and the next legislature [to do it right]. You can't just simply walk away from the hard job when you've had the benefit of six years of the easy job.

While there were certainly legislators who didn't care a whole lot for me and my philosophy and my governing style, I think those first six years I did develop some friendships. I think people knew me to be an honest broker, and I decided that my responsibility was to lead with my chin. I just did what needed to be done and did it in a way that I think legislators said, if the



Bill Graves first knew his future lieutenant governor and political confidant, Gary Sherrer, as a Salina High School speech and debate teacher. In later years Sherrer encouraged his former student to join the "Bush for President" campaign and helped him acquire a job in the secretary of state's office. Once Graves moved into the governor's office, he tapped Sherrer as secretary of commerce and then lieutenant governor. In 2007, Graves's successor, Democratic governor Kathleen Sebelius, appointed Sherrer to the Kansas Board of Regents where he served until 2011. The Graveses are pictured with Bob Dole and Judy and Gary Sherrer; courtesy of former governor Bill Graves.

governor can stick his chin out and lead on this, [we can act]. The cuts at the end were some of the most difficult and painful decisions, but only because of where we had been. But you play the hand that's dealt you, and we had tough times in 2001 and 2002.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND THE SHIFT TO THE RIGHT IN THE KANSAS GOP

I think there was clearly an emergence of—and it started in 1994 with the Gingrich revolution in Congress—the social agenda and many of the items that the conservatives passionately believed in. I don't fault folks at all for strongly held beliefs. But I clearly represented a more centrist part of our party and what I thought was a more accurate representation of what Kansans, in total, were looking for.

I have to say, I'm the son of a businessman. I saw government as a business whose job was to provide services and take care of the needs of people, and I know it irritated a lot of conservatives that I didn't just buy into all of the angst and the concern over some

of the social issues. I know how important they are to other people but they just didn't rise to that level on my "to do" list enough that satisfied others.

I just didn't invest a lot of time and energy on the social issues. To the extent I did, I was certainly a moderate Republican who tried to find a compromise position. Whether it was abortion, whether it was guns, whatever it might be, it was just like the dynamic today, where people were beginning already to believe on the conservative side that compromise was just not possible, that it wasn't doable. I kept trying to be a guy willing to compromise, so we tended to agree to disagree.

On abortion, Linda and I adopted a baby at birth so we feel very strongly about the rights of unborn children to come into this world and grow up and be in loving, caring homes. But I can also sort of segment myself and say that I do understand that there are circumstances where a woman has a right to, and a need to seek to terminate a pregnancy. So we went to great lengths to try to be as supportive as we could of pro-life concerns, supporting adoption, tax credits, all the things we did, but I always tried to stop short of crossing that legal line that I think has been drawn and reaffirmed. I think we handled it reasonably well. The fact that I had people on both sides unhappy with decisions I was making tells me I was probably about in the right spot.

When you're the governor you quickly understand that lots of times there are just shenanigans that go on in the legislature. They may not like to have it called that, but it is what it is. They just craft and do things to try to embarrass other members of the legislature or embarrass the governor. I was always willing to talk to people but there was a point at which we had to finally make a decision and do business. I vetoed a couple of bills. It was gut wrenching to do that. One was on concealed carry [in 1997]. We also dealt with a number of abortion issues. But there were plenty of opportunities for Kansans to object to my work as governor at the polls in 1998, and for conservatives to support David Miller in 1998, and it didn't happen. In fact 1998 was the best political year I ever had. So, I'd like to think that we were doing a fairly good job of responding to what Kansans were looking for in a governor.

There's no doubt that moderation and centrists in the political world are few and far between, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat. The shrill, loud volume is coming from the far left and from the far right and to some extent shame on us, those of us that occupy the

middle, because we've kind of gotten lazy and allowed those two extremes to dominate. I had a state senator come into my office one day and simply tell me that compromise was a dirty word. Well, much like today in American politics, that idea starts to create a dynamic where it's hard for anything to happen. I probably sound like an old fuddy-duddy, but I have a lot of respect for the Alan Simpsons, the Nancy Kassebaums, Bob Doles, the Bill Bradleys, you know, the statesmen-like public officials who could be great politicians when it was time to be a great politician, but also understood the moment when that stopped and the business of governing begins.

The tension that exists between conservatives and moderates is very real because both view how we should deal with issues very differently. I mean, in hindsight, David Miller did me a great favor because he gave me reason to motivate the centrist base and to really get out and sort of flex our muscles. I still think that's very doable politically, but it scares people to death who are currently in that position. People tend to want to run more to the right, because they're just afraid of what might happen to them in the primaries.

THE AWKWARD SHALLENBURGER ENDORSEMENT OF 2002

It's hard to get used to the fact that you're going to be gone and somebody's going to come in and shake your hand and then it's over. But when the house speaker, Tim Shallenburger, got the nomination in 2002, it was awkward for me because he had defeated candidates who had become great friends of mine. Kent Glasscock, a running mate to Bob Knight, was one of my best friends and Dave Kerr was president of the senate and had become a good friend, and he had Connie Hubbell with him, who was one of my cabinet secretaries. So these people were all near and dear to me and yet they lost to the more conservative candidate.⁴⁸

48. Because of the moderate/conservative split, the 2002 Republican primary featured more plot twists and intrigue than an Agatha Christie novel. In October of that year Senator Brownback had a meeting at his home with Shallenburger and other conservatives where pledges of support to unite behind Shallenburger were purported to have been made. Moderates put their hopes on Attorney General Carla Stovall, but when she dropped out of the race, Graves hosted a meeting of his own at the governor's mansion on April 10 that included as guests GOP party chair Mark Parkinson; Kent Glasscock; his wife Joyce Glasscock (Graves's longtime chief of staff); and Graves's lieutenant governor, Gary Sherrer. Both Sherrer and Glasscock were considering running, but in the end Glasscock became Wichita Mayor Bob Knight's lieutenant governor pick and Sherrer decided not to run. Dave Kerr (Kansas senate, Hutchinson, 1985–2005) also ended up running. Kerr

What I said to Tim was that he needed to be careful about seeking out my endorsement because people are not stupid. People can read and understand the history and relationships and if I just run right out and say, "Oh, never mind, forget all that that you've heard and read for the last four years, we really do like one another!," they are going to see through that in a heartbeat. They will know it's not a sincere endorsement and that it's fake.

What I suggested was that rather than rush right out and do that, we try to spend more time discussing some issues, building some relationships with other key people in the party and that we make sure people understand that it was a genuine endorsement. But there's a catch-22. If you delay, people focus on the fact that you've delayed and think that you come into that kicking and screaming, that you're dragged into it. But if you do it too quickly it looks perfunctory and there is no benefit to it. Maybe it was a lose-lose situation. We were going to take flak one way or the other. It was just awkward and I probably didn't handle it that well.

I knew that Tim was going to have a very difficult time with Kathleen Sebelius because she was well established in Kansas politics [and] had a great deal of support not only amongst Democrats but independents and probably more moderate Republicans. She was a formidable candidate. So Tim had his work cut out [for] him irrespective of my endorsement.⁴⁹

was supported by Connie Hubbell, Graves's secretary of aging and a member of his administration since 1994. Graves did not endorse anyone in the primary, but clearly would have been happy with either Knight or Kerr winning the nomination. Instead it was Shallenburger. The results: Shallenburger: 122,141 (41.5 percent); Kerr: 86,995 (29.5 percent); Knight: 77,642 (26.4 percent); and Dan Bloom: 7,726 (2.6 percent). For details see "Stovall plans announcement; uneasiness grows for moderates," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 12, 2002.

49. The Graves/Shallenburger endorsement drama dragged out from September 3, 2002—when Graves met with Shallenburger for an hour and withheld his endorsement after that meeting—to September 19, when he formally endorsed the GOP nominee in a ceremony that some observers noted as uncomfortable. "Throughout much of the news conference," wrote Chris Grenz of the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, "Graves stood with his arms crossed looking at the floor, while Shallenburger stood apart from the governor, unsmiling." Graves's "non-endorsement endorsement," if anything, probably helped Kansas Insurance Commissioner Kathleen Sebelius, who defeated Shallenburger in the November 5 general election: Sebelius, 441,858; Shallenburger, 376,830; Ted Pettibone, Freedom Party, 8,907; Dennis Hawver, Libertarian Party, 8,097. *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 2002*, 94–96; and "Graves endorsement for Shallenburger," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 19, 2002.

EXECUTIVE VERSUS LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

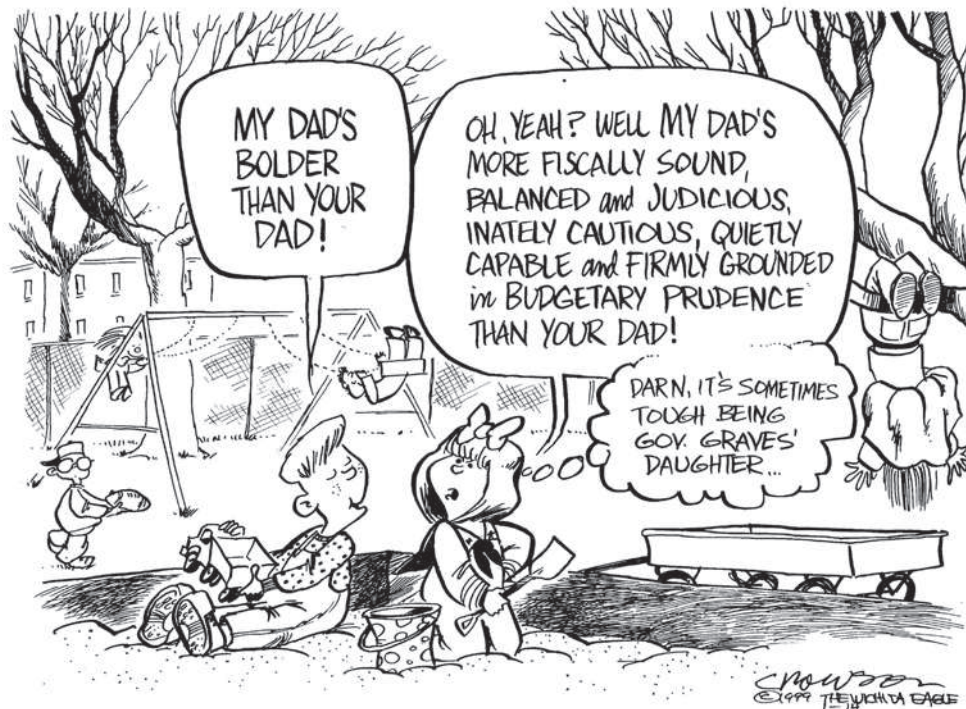
Executive branch officials and legislators have a different view of the world. I always considered myself to be a businessman who took those skills and abilities to state government, managed people, managed resources, and made programs work. I was almost as much interested in the policy at the point of execution as I was the policy at the point of creation. Legislators, on the other hand, are obsessed about the point of creation of the policy and how that whole process works. In terms of the delivery of the service I always found them to be too engaged in a game of "gotcha." More often than not when they got enamored with something it was because they wanted to have a committee hearing and drag somebody in front of the committee and just tell them what a lousy job they were doing. The irony in that is we probably already knew that. We are our own worst critics.

We were trying to do our best. And to the extent there was a program not performing, we felt as bad about it as anybody. We were as committed as anybody to getting it fixed. This whole legislative thing simply distracted us. Instead of a senior management person being over at their place of business trying to fix something they were over there jumping through the hoops for the legislature, to talk about why it wasn't working and what we were going to do.

I always enjoyed the executive branch. People asked me about an interest in running for Congress after I left the office, and I was not interested at all because I don't view myself as a legislator, a person that would simply enjoy casting votes on policy issues. I enjoy the administrative side, making things work.

GUBERNATORIAL STYLE

I tried to always to remain calm. I've always felt like even when things aren't going well that you need to keep your wits about you because people are looking to you to make decisions and to lead. If you're letting it get away from you you're wasting your time and also not setting the example that people expect from a governor. My style was I surrounded myself with a great team and I empowered those people. You know the old adage about "I gave them enough rope to hang both themselves and me." You've got to let people go. You've got to give them room and put faith in them. I liked to take in lots of advice and counsel. But then, you know, I get to make the decision, and once we make it we move



Throughout his political career, Graves enjoyed an impressively high level of popular support. He preferred and practiced a non-confrontational gubernatorial style. Of his approach, Graves noted: "I don't think you ought to burn any bridges that you don't have to burn. In this business you never know who you're going to need as a friend and ally the next day. I survived two terms and I tell people all the time I had the same wife, I wasn't indicted, and I got a job when I left office. I think that's pretty good." Graves's critics, however, argued that he seldom used his political capital. Cartoon of a schoolyard conversation between Graves's daughter and a politically minded playmate from the Wichita Eagle, January 14, 1999, used by permission of the artist, Richard Crowson.

on down the road. I like full, healthy discussion and debate. I'm known for telling people I don't mind if we disagree, I just don't like disagreeable people.

There were some times where people wanted me to do things that I thought were too theatrical. They were too staged. I think Kansans and most people see through those kinds of kind of staged events. For me I was maybe a little more low key than some would have liked.

To a certain extent a governor has to be able to check their own personal ego at the door and let other people shine, let other people have their moment in the sun. You don't have to be at the forefront of everything. You don't have to get the credit for everything. You don't always have to go out and try to figure out how to steal away from them and repackage it and call it your own. There's enough credit to go around that you can share a little bit of it. There's certainly enough blame to go around that everybody will get a little bit of it.

MOVING ON AND THE GRAVES LEGACY

I left office on the thirteenth of January of 2003 and really had no regrets whatsoever. I think it is critically important, as a governor, to keep that service in perspective. You're given that moment and you need to give it your very best while you're there, but you need to keep in mind that there is an end, this is not something that you're going to have forever. My passion was always the state of Kansas. I grew up there, went to school there, got my political start there, enjoyed those sixteen years in elective office there, and [running for Congress] just never appealed to me. By 2003 that would have been really eight statewide elections, four primaries, four general elections. I had been in twenty-two years of state government service and I'm a believer in term limits. I like the idea of people getting in office, serving with great passion and conviction, but then moving out of the way to let some new ideas and some new energy enter. I had enough confidence in Kansas

and our system that I was comfortable that life would go on without Bill Graves as an elected public official for Kansas.

I hope [people] remember that we were all fortunate that we lived through some incredibly prosperous times and during that time we had the opportunity to do some wonderful things. I'm very proud of the list of accomplishments. We wrestled with tough issues involving the welfare of children and how we care for people with mental health and mental retardation and developmental disabilities. We restructured the governance of higher education. We launched a new highway program. We cut taxes six years in a row. I hope they remember one year that kind of got a little tough as the economy turned south. And of course the last year I hope they remember that when we needed to take steps as a state to address the new fiscal problems we had that I was willing to acknowledge that we had a problem, and we needed to raise some taxes, and we needed to reorder our priorities in order to deal with it. I think it helped set the stage for a smoother transition for Governor Sebelius and the next legislature.

Politics and public service is a tough business. Sometimes I think people make it more so than it needs to be. I remember there was a *Wichita Eagle* political cartoon, something about "Billy the Boy Scout," and it was really about me being too nice. I think I had the ability to be aggressive, and doing what needed to get done, when it needed to get done. But I wasn't one of those people that got up every morning and felt like I had to prove to everybody that I was the meanest, baddest guy on the block. I don't think you ought to burn any bridges that you don't have to burn. In this business you never know who you're going to need as

a friend and ally the next day. I survived two terms and I tell people all the time I had the same wife, I wasn't indicted, and I got a job when I left office. I think that's pretty good.

I had more good days than bad days in serving the people of Kansas. It's pretty special to have the opportunity to be the governor of your state. I think the first time I was sworn in I remember my second grade teacher was in the crowd and I thought, "She's probably the most shocked person in the crowd today that Billy Graves has become the governor of Kansas." Because I bet when I was in her second grade class she would have hardly imagined.

Upon leaving the governor's office Bill Graves returned to his familial roots and became president and CEO of the largest national trade association for the trucking industry, the American Trucking Associations (ATA), based in Arlington, Virginia. ATA represents more than thirty-seven thousand members and has the goal of "advancing the trucking industry's image, efficiency, competitiveness, and profitability." In October 2011 the ATA Board, saying that under Graves the ATA staff had been doing "an exemplary job of advancing the goals and interests of the trucking industry," signed him to a new three-year contract as president.⁵⁰

*Graves's job with ATA and the role of trucking in American commerce has made him a key figure in Washington, D.C. He appears on television frequently and is very busy travelling to industry conferences and trade association shows. Except for being featured prominently in the 2005 documentary, *The Kansas Governor*, which aired on Kansas and Missouri public television, Graves stayed out of the Kansas political scene after leaving office until 2012, adhering to his comment above that "life would go on without Bill Graves."⁵¹ [KH]*

50. See the ATA website: truckline.org.

51. See pp. 34-35 above; see also "Moderate Senate candidates have a friend in Bill Graves," *Kansas City Star*, July 17, 2012; and "Graves: 'Days of playing nice are over,'" *Kansas City Star*, July 19, 2012.