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“BE WILLING TO TAKE SOME RISKS TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN”

A Conversation with Former Governor John W. Carlin

edited by Bob Beatty

John William Carlin, born in Salina, Kansas, on August 3, 1940, served as the state’s fortieth chief executive, from January 8, 1979, to January 12, 1987. At age thirty-eight when he was sworn in, he was the youngest twentieth-century Kansas governor. Carlin enjoyed considerable electoral success, becoming the first Kansas governor to be reelected to a second four-year term in 1982. Despite his youth, Carlin entered the governor’s office with eight years of legislative experience under his belt, having been elected to the Kansas House of Representatives in 1970 over Republican Gary Sherrer, who later served as lieutenant governor under Governor Bill Graves. Carlin gained valuable political and legislative experience as minority leader from 1975 until 1977, and speaker of the house from 1977 until 1979, during an extremely rare two years when the Democrats had a majority in the Kansas house.¹

In the 1978 Democratic gubernatorial primary Carlin defeated State Senator Bert Chaney of Hutchinson and Harry G. Wiles of Topeka, who had served as the National Commander of the American Legion. Carlin was aided in the primary by the absence of Attorney General Curt Schneider. An early favorite who enjoyed the support of

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1. Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 224–26; *Kansas Legislative Directory, 1977–1978* (Kansas City, Mo.: Halgo Publishing Inc., [1977]), 62.

Governor Robert Docking, Schneider became embroiled in a scandal that scuttled his hopes for higher office.² In the general election, Carlin stunned the opposition and political experts when he beat the incumbent governor, Republican Robert Bennett, by a razor-thin margin of 49.4 to 47.3 percent. In 1982 Carlin won reelection more comfortably, defeating his Republican opponent, Wichita businessman Sam Hardage, 53 to 44.4 percent.³

Although Homer Socolofsky wrote that Carlin "continued the pattern of fiscal conservatism established by his Democratic predecessors, the Dockings," Carlin was very much an activist governor who sought change when he felt it was needed and was willing to fight for the changes he wanted.⁴ Carlin's two terms as governor were served with Republican legislatures, so the Democratic governor had to be politically adroit, flexible, and convincing to muster the majorities needed to get his programs passed and the margins needed to sustain his vetoes. He issued 127 vetoes, none of which were overridden. However, when the legislature said no to Carlin, he was not averse to taking his case to the people. The most well-known example of this tactic was his proposal for a severance tax on oil, natural gas, and coal, which the legislature rejected in 1981 and 1982. Carlin campaigned on the issue in 1982 and after reelection was able to get his tax proposals passed. Constitutional amendments allowing liquor by the drink, parimutuel betting, and a state lottery were also adopted during the Carlin years. Joe Pisciotte wrote that, "All things considered, Carlin's is a legacy of change," and his approach was that of "pragmatic progressivism; a type of leadership steeped in pragmatic dreaming." This combination of change and pragmatism was reflected as early as Carlin's first inaugural speech, when he said, "This is a different era, which requires new approaches, but the issue of managing the government well must be the central concern of the Carlin administration."⁵

2. Facing accusations, supported by some photographic evidence, that he had been involved in an extra-marital affair during the late summer of 1977 (among other things), Schneider chose to forego a shot at his party's nomination and instead sought reelection. He lost the general election contest for attorney general to Republican Robert Stephan by a vote of 389,398 to 328,010. "Schneider Claims Pictures Part of Plot to Destroy Him," *Wichita Eagle*, September 14, 1997; "Chaney Dives In; Waits for Others," *Hutchinson News*, July 25, 1977; "Schneider, Stephan have clear sailing," *Lawrence Journal-World*, June 21, 1978; "A.G. Race Challenges Voters," *The Wichitan* 1 (October 1978): 50–51, 72–73; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1978, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printer, [1979]), 73.

3. *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1978*, 27, 69; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1982, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printer, [1983]), 66.

4. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors*, 224.

5. Joe Pisciotte, ed., *The Selected Papers of Governor John Carlin, 1979–1987: An Index of Social and Political Change* (Wichita: Hugo Wall School of Urban and Public Affairs, Wichita State University, 1993), 4, 16; see also Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854–2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 376–86.

Carlin successfully championed other issues while in office. He was able to get passed a series of changes relating to how the state interacted with utility companies and the building of power plants, passed the aforementioned severance tax package that led to increased money for education and state highways, and passed a long overdue overhaul of the Kansas property tax appraisal system. Somewhat to his own surprise, he encountered political opposition from his own party when he resisted the calls for patronage and appointments that had normally followed a change in party control of the governor's office. This intraparty division led to the replacement of Lieutenant Governor Paul Dugan by Tom Docking in 1982. Pisciotte, who concluded that Carlin's eight years were marked by energy and activism, wrote "Carlin was a risk taker; he frequently chose the less popular alternative. . . . In the final analysis, history will record Governor Carlin as an agent of change, and will evaluate him on accomplishing what he set out to do."⁶

Unable to run for a third term in 1986 due to the term limit constitutional amendment passed in 1974, Carlin accepted an appointment to teach public administration at Wichita State University in 1987. In 1990 he sought an allowed, non-consecutive third term as governor but was defeated in the Democratic primary by State Treasurer Joan Finney, 47 to 46 percent, in a three-way contest that also featured the now infamous Reverend Fred Phelps, who captured almost 7 percent of the total vote. Finney went on to defeat the incumbent Republican Mike Hayden in the general election and thus became Kansas's first female governor.⁷

This article is excerpted from two interviews conducted with John Carlin in February 2004 and March 2008. 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 February 12, 2004, interview, which was part of a series of conversations with Kansas's six surviving governors, are available at <http://www.kshs.org/publicat/history/2008summer.htm>. 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. "Be Willing to Take Some Risks to Make Things Happen': A Conversation with Former Governor John Carlin" is the third in a series of articles based on those interviews.⁸

6. Pisciotte, *The Selected Papers of Governor John Carlin*, 5; "Lt. Governor's discontent gets Carlin's attention," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 10, 1980, evening edition; "Campaign Profiles," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 30, 1982.

7. Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1990, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1991]).

8. For this published version of the interviews with Governor Carlin, the 2004 and 2008 conversations have been merged and passages have



Carlin grew up on a farm near Smolan, Saline County, Kansas, where he is pictured here in October 1980 attending to his Holstein operation. Carlin attributed his initial successes in local elections to his being a dairy farmer, stating that in 1970 everybody in his district "associated milking cows with working hard. And if I milked cows, I would work hard, and they'd kind of like to have a hard working representative."

been omitted and reordered in some instances for clarity and narrative effect. The words are the governor's, however, and the editor has not altered the meaning or original intent in any way. The first article in the series, "'For the Benefit of the People': A Conversation with Former Governor John Anderson, Jr.," was published in *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 30 (Winter 2007–2008): 252–69 and is available at www.kshs.org/publicat/history/2007winter.htm; the second article in the series, "'You Have To Like People': A Conversation with Former Governor William H. Avery," appears in *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Spring 2008): 48–67 and is available at www.kshs.org/publicat/history/2008spring.htm.

GROWING UP DEMOCRATIC IN KANSAS

I was born in Salina, Kansas, at St. Johns Hospital on August 3, 1940. I grew up in that area on a farm near Smolan. Lots of work, lots of fresh air, outdoor activity, lots of time in the barn. With the dairy operation going seven days a week there's no day off. Cows are milked twice a day. I look back and it was a great opportunity growing up to develop a work ethic and an appreciation for some of the basics of environmental issues as to what makes agriculture work, and it certainly served me well in a variety of things I've done over the years. I was active in the 4-H and graduated from Lindsborg High School and went to Kansas State University. Got a degree in dairy science and came back to the farm.

[In my family] education was always considered important and the discussion of politics was very frequent.

My folks weren't active in politics but they took an interest. Never in the context of running for public office or making any plans, just following what was going on and taking an interest on the issues. I think my folks intended that I would get a college education and it would be in agriculture, specifically dairy science. Then I would come back to the family farm with my father for a short period of time and then ultimately by myself run the dairy operation.

I can remember following the 1948 conventions of both political parties on the radio. I remember [voting for Harry S. Truman in the third grade]. . . . primarily because President Truman didn't do very well in Smolan Grade School in the fall of 1948. But I was very proud, even at that young age. It was clear which side of the aisle I was to sit on and I voted for Mr. Truman.

My folks were Democrats. I was raised with what I call the more progressive philosophy and was comfortable with it. And I was a township Democrat committeeman in the sixties for Smolan Township. I really don't know if the Democratic family part goes back beyond my parents to be honest. I didn't ever hear my parents say, "We're Democrats because of . . .," but I heard a lot of general comments about the fact that they were Democrats. It wasn't like there weren't any [in Kansas]. And the ones who were, they would associate with [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and what was done for us out there, just in terms of the Dust Bowl. For example, planting all those Osage Orange trees up and down the mile lines to break the winds. And the tragic thing that's taking place now is that they are being torn out because everyone wants every inch to plant wheat with the market the way it is.

I was one of six 4-H'ers across the nation that had the opportunity to present to then President Eisenhower as he was leaving office. It was a fantastic experience. But I didn't have the Clinton experience with the photo with President Kennedy that started supposedly his political career. I was still headed towards agriculture and a focus there. I was very proud to have the opportunity and in particular to be a Kansan and to be able to present the report to one of our own. But that's how I got to the Oval Office when Eisenhower was president. And because I was from Kansas, I got selected to be the one actually to make the presentation of a Dogwood tree to be planted at Gettysburg.

POLITICAL BEGINNINGS

There was no plan to run for public office, that I can assure you. Living on a farm in Smolan, the Sunday *Salina Journal* came about eleven o'clock on Monday morning. So

my first look at the Sunday paper was usually while having what we would have said dinner then, we call it lunch now. It would have been dinner at noon. This would be September of 1968. There was an article about the legislative candidate for the Democrats who had moved out of the district we happened to reside in. I wasn't even aware of what district we were in to be honest with you. And he was no longer eligible. The Democrats were desperately looking for someone who might have an interest in filling this void. I can't explain why really, but it just kind of struck me as, "Hey, this might be interesting." Back in Smolan in 1968 we still didn't have a dial telephone system, it was the old crank on the wall with neighbors listening in. I went over to a pay phone in what used to be an air base—Schilling Project, not too far from the farm—and called the county chair, somebody I never met, and said I would like to talk to you about that. From that discussion in September there was still time to get my name on the ballot. I ran and I lost. But it started my interest in public service in an elected capacity.

Before that phone call. . . . I was a Democratic township committeeman. The one thing I had done politically was in the 1960 primary. The son of a neighbor, John Shultz, he was working for Frank Theis, a long-time federal judge out of Wichita, very active in Democratic politics, and he was running for the U.S. Senate against [Joseph W.] Henkle, who was Governor George Docking's lieutenant governor. Young Shultz comes to me and says, "Will you contact all the Democrats in Smolan Township?" It took me, off and on, some time for about three days. The Smolan Township primary, and I can't give exact numbers, but it was something like 44 to 2 for Theis. And it wasn't because people liked John Carlin (and they didn't know who Theis was!), but because somebody asked them. That's what I teach today. That's the reason [Barack] Obama beats [Hillary] Clinton in the caucus states: because he's got people on the phone asking for their vote.

Henkle was more well known, and I would've bet you he would've carried Smolan because there was no reason for them to vote for Theis. Not a name they were familiar with. Theis didn't have enough money to make much of a campaign in the primary. But it really taught me a valuable lesson. Now, [that experience] did not generate any interest in politics, in running. I mean, my story is the honest-to-God truth. Reading the *Salina Journal* on that Monday in September, an inside cover story, "Democrats looking for a candidate," I can't explain to this day, why, suddenly, out of the blue, I went over to the pay phone and called the county chair saying I was interested.

In 1968 [I lost to] the incumbent Bruce Johnson, farmer/rancher, and friend of my father's. In 1970 I beat Gary Sherrer, who was debate coach at Salina Central at the time.⁹ So how did I win if it was just one nice guy against the other? I think the difference was—and totally unfair, I'll be clear about that—I think there was not the most positive perception of teachers in general going into politics at that time, but there wasn't anything in the campaign out in the open.

The big factor was that I was a dairy farmer. And in 1970 almost everybody in the district was only one generation, at the most, removed from being on the farm and milking cows and they associated milking cows with working hard. And if I milked cows, I would work hard, and they'd kind of like to have a hard working representative, and I think that's why I won. I mean Gary is attractive, articulate; you know, he had everything going for him, including that he was a Republican in an urban district. So how did I win? I think because of the dairy farm. I mean, it was interesting to go door-to-door, and with the family helping do that work . . . connect[ing] John Carlin, candidate for legislature with the dairy farmer in Smolan, Kansas. It was primarily a Salina district, it wasn't a rural district, and it was Republican. A lot of folks were folks who had milked cows; if not their folks, their grandparents had. There was always a tie to that. Seems like everywhere we turned people had a connection with somebody that was a dairy farmer. And they associated a dairy farmer with somebody that worked hard and they felt good about, because there weren't any issues that dominated at all. It was simply a personality contest going door-to-door. And I had a very personable opponent. That's the only explanation I have, that I could win in a district like that.

THE STATE LEGISLATURE

When I was elected in 1970 and started my experience in January of 1971, my memory is there were forty-one [Democrats in the House]. And it takes sixty-three to have a majority. And then out of the 1972 election we went to forty-five. In the election that wasn't much of a change. But there was some really great talent added to our ranks in those early years, talent that wasn't satisfied with just

9. Carlin defeated Sherrer, who served as lieutenant governor (1996–2003) under another governor from Saline County, in the 1970 general election by less than 400 votes. Two years before, Carlin lost by 450 votes. Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1968, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Print, [1969]), 129; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1970, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printer, 1970), 57, 112.

being there, they wanted to do things. Not in a partisan way. They wanted to be part of the dialogue and in making decisions. It was obvious that as a minority—and [a] very small minority—we weren't really that influential. But then with growing interest we went to fifty-six out of the 1974 election, and we really got serious about the opportunity. It was before partisanship really took on the vicious feel I sense and fear is out there now too frequently. And we had a few issues that worked our way. But for the most part we recruited great candidates. And like I say, we got ahead of the partisan flow. There was no combined Republican effort to shoot us all out of the water at the level there is now, in any way, shape, or form. I'm not saying there wasn't an effort; they were competitive races. But I think to some degree at least we snuck up on them [in 1976], and we lost that majority the next election. Came back one time, held it for another two-year period, and the numbers now are back to where they were in 1971 when I arrived in Topeka.¹⁰

One of the things we did was highway funding. We had what we call the Graber amendment on the floor of the house—Walt [Walter W.] Graber, Democrat, Pretty Prairie. My example here is when we had fifty-six Democrats, we were in a minority, and there was this highway bill on the floor, and we offered Walt Graber's amendment, and I have to believe it was one that was helpful to rural Kansas. That's my memory. And the Republicans, I know, believe they lost the majority because of that. I think it was more than that. I think we fielded a great team, and they had never been opposed for so long. We kind of caught 'em napping. They just couldn't believe that this state would elect a Democratic majority. We championed the amendment, and we got it passed, and then we used it in the election against Republicans who had voted against the Graber amendment. So we picked up a lot of seats in rural Kansas and out west.

[A Democrat who was very important to me during my time in the house was] my mentor, who had a huge influence directly and indirectly, [Richard C.] Pete Loux [of Wichita], who passed away a few years ago. He was minority leader in the house when I came there in January of 1971. He gave me an opportunity to help him, and it was him allowing me—and my willingness to work—that allowed me

10. Democrats held a slim majority in the lower house for a single term following the 1990 election. Allan Cigler and Burdett Loomis, "Kansas: Two-Party Competition in a One-Party State," in *Party Realignment and State Politics*, ed. Maureen Moakley (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 176. For an impressive analysis of the workings of the legislature at the beginning of Carlin's career, see Marvin Harder and Carolyn Rampey, *The Kansas Legislature: Procedures, Personalities, and Problems* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1972), especially 131–46.



Carlin “had no plan to run for public office.” His initial decision to enter politics, which was a surprise even to him, came in response to an article in his local newspaper. Later he decided to run for governor over lunch at the China Inn in Topeka. Above, a campaign pamphlet from Carlin’s first gubernatorial race in 1978.

to build support to where I was starting up the ranks rather quickly. Because I was only there four terms, and was assistant minority leader my second term, and minority leader in my third, and speaker in my fourth. But Pete Loux was key, direct and indirect; indirect because he accepted an appointment from Bob Bennett to join the Corporation Commission, which allowed me to run for minority leader, and then to be speaker when we took the majority after the 1976 election. So he had a huge, huge impact on my career.

[My last year] there were nineteen Democrats in the senate, so we ran things. Because there was Norman Gaar, Republican, Westwood, and Ed Riley, Leavenworth, was a Republican you could count on on a lot of issues. We had three or four Republicans who on a lot of issues could partner with Democrats, and then with the house majority we had a good run there. Norman Gaar was a very, very significant state senator in those years. Republican, lawyer from Johnson County. He was labeled an arch opponent and enemy of Governor Bob Bennett, and I really don’t know how accurate that is. They did oppose each other quite frequently, and Gaar, who was majority leader, was comfortable—Bennett is governor at this time, they were former colleagues in the senate—Gaar was comfortable on many occasions working with us, the Democrats. I don’t think it was anti-Bennett. Gaar was a progressive Republican, and

saw things that should be done and was willing to work with us to do it.

You know, I ticked off the unions when I led the motion to override Docking’s veto on farm-labor legislation. It was during my time in the legislature. It was when Cesar Chavez was coming into western Kansas and trying to organize workers, and I wasn’t opposed to them being organized, but I was opposed to their ability to strike during the harvest. I said that’s too much. If they can strike during the harvest they rule the roost, and I felt collective bargaining should be balanced. And we passed legislation that was balanced that allowed them to organize. Docking went with the unions and vetoed it. I had unbelievable threats. It was the one time Pete Loux really didn’t like what I was doing. The Republicans came to me, they obviously knew that the only way they could override was for the Democrats to help, so they came to me and asked me to help and I felt they were right and I was comfortable doing it. So I literally went to the floor and made the motion to override Docking’s veto and we overrode it. It didn’t help my relationship with unions and Docking Democrats, for sure, which was one of the issues that made my race in that 1978 Democratic primary more difficult.

The legislative experience helped in a couple ways. First of all, it was very educational on the issues. When I

was elected [to the legislature], I knew very little or nothing. There were no issues involved when I started my campaign for the legislature. So those eight years—those four terms—were really eight years of education on the issues facing Kansas and the responsibilities of the legislature with the governor.

ON GOVERNOR BOB DOCKING

My observation and experience would be that from a political point of view he had a master thinker in Norbert Dreiling. The lawyer from Hays was not just your average Democratic politician. He was smart, savvy, and there was a clear focus on Docking winning and Docking being re-elected. And I don't know if Norbert gets the credit, but Docking in my lifetime mastered the concept of repeating one's message and staying focused. Docking had one speech and for eight years he used it, and it worked. I mean we all had it memorized. I'm exaggerating here, but he had a line that was in every speech, "austere but adequate," and he ran on that.

He never made the mistake of talking too long, which is smart politics, and he really cultivated his supporters in every place in Kansas. I mean he put together a team everywhere, and he was loyal to them, and every time he went to that area, they were never forgotten. And so there was a team across Kansas that would just live and die for Bob Docking. They would do anything for Bob, because he remembered them, he respected them, he never forgot that they helped him win his first race, and so it just went on and on.

Docking was always an executive, not a legislative type. He had a very minimal legislative program as governor. It was primarily defensive; very "austere and adequate." And most of the legislative battles were over vetoes and so forth. I think Docking is the only governor in the history of Kansas that vetoed more legislation than I did. The difference is all my vetoes were sustained. He had a number overridden, so I had the record for the number of vetoes upheld. You know, a lot of governors in four years have a handful of vetoes; both Docking and I had over 120 vetoes!¹¹

11. The Democratic Dockings were one of Kansas's important political families of the twentieth century. George Docking served as Kansas governor from 1957 to 1961, his son Bob Docking was governor from 1967 to 1975, his son Tom Docking was lieutenant governor from 1983 to 1987, and his wife Jill Docking was the unsuccessful Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate in 1996. For more on the Dockings see Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors*, 206–11, 215–18; see also the two previous articles in this *Kansas History* series on governors Anderson and Avery, which deal extensively with Anderson's defeat of Governor George Docking in 1960 and Avery's loss to Bob Docking in 1966.

ON GOVERNOR BOB BENNETT

I think it starts with his election, and beating Vern Miller [in 1974]. Vern Miller should have defeated him, because he was following a very popular Democrat in Bob Docking, he was well known, he was the attorney general. And Bennett was not popular. It wasn't like, "We all want Bob Bennett!" Bob Bennett is Johnson County, he's a lawyer, he's an aristocrat, wears a beard, and not your ideal candidate for rural Kansas, and western Kansas in particular. But Vern is, you know, his own worst enemy, jumping out of car trunks, and trying to keep the planes from selling liquor when they were flying over Kansas and that sort of thing. And it finally just got to a point where Bennett was able to beat him in a close election. The people were kind of embarrassed by an attorney general that acted like that. But those two or three things aside, Vern was a very popular attorney general.¹²

The question is how could Bennett lose [in 1978]? What did he do? Well, he didn't come in as a really popular governor. Secondly, he didn't do anything during his four years to improve his popularity. I don't think they sat down and said, "You know, we're kind of lucky, now what do we need to do? What is it we need to do so that in four years we'll be in a position to win reelection?" As an observer, I couldn't see that they were doing anything. He was still kind of that aristocrat down there that was proud of the fact that he was smarter than anybody else—and he was very, very smart. But that isn't the kind of approach you need to take. You know, people were saying he needed to shave his beard, and he kind of put his beard in their face and said, "Hm-phh, you're not going to see me doing that." He remained sort of a respected, but not really loved, politician.

Then in the four years he was governor—and I use this and the Republicans really hate this but it's true—he more or less was comfortable with utilities doing what they wanted to do. During this period of four years, utility rates were going up [and] the Wolf Creek nuclear plant was being discussed as to whether it should be built. How could rate payers live with what had to be huge rate increases? And his position was, we just have to accept it, and if anything needs to be done, the Corporation Commission will

12. Carlin's discussion of former Kansas Attorney General Vern Miller, tinged with respect and bafflement, is apt as Miller made headlines as a "political character" during his time in office (1971–1975). For an account of the controversies Carlin alludes to and many more, see Brian Moline's "Vern Miller: Kansas' Supercop," in *John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers In Kansas History*, ed. Virgil W. Dean (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 306–16.

do it; it's inappropriate for the governor to step into something like this. And this approach was somewhat true on other things as well. And it was why we as Democrats, with [Republican] Norman Garr, were able to do some things despite his threat of veto.

DECIDING TO RUN FOR GOVERNOR

Again, it was never a plan at all. I recall some people floating my name—and it would have been 1974, when Governor Bennett was running—that I might make a lieutenant governor partner for Vern Miller. But it didn't go anywhere and I didn't take it very seriously at all. In the election of 1976, when the Democrats took the majority in the House and I had been the minority leader and then became the speaker of the house, sometime in that first year of being speaker I remember having lunch—I made the transition I think by then from dinner to lunch in Topeka—with my very good friend and then chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Fred Weaver from Baxter Springs. Fred and I had lunch at a Chinese restaurant over in North Topeka. And my memory is for the first time the idea came up there. It was in north Topeka, a major Chinese restaurant: the China Inn.

I don't remember if it was something I raised or something Fred raised, but for the first time there was a discussion [that] maybe—and this would have been in early 1977 for the 1978 election—consideration ought to be given to running for governor. One of the reasons I was willing to do it was I was never one that would have stayed doing something forever. There were folks in the legislature that had been there for twenty, thirty years. That was something that I would never have been comfortable with. So it was a combination of issues and challenge, but also in that I was willing to move on it and take the risk of losing and returning to the farm and not worrying about it, that I was willing to consider running for governor.¹³

1978 DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

I didn't have near the name recognition that I thought I had. That's one of the things I pass on to folks, particularly people that consult with me. You get the idea that you're pretty well known, but unless you are the governor or a long-time U.S. senator or whatever, people don't know who

13. By mid-1977 at the latest, "most observers" expected to see Attorney General Schneider and Speaker Carlin in the Democratic primary, even though "neither has said for certain he will run. Both have said they are 'interested' in running." "Chaney Dives In; Waits for Others," *Hutchinson News*, July 25, 1977.

the hell you are. And a lot of them don't give a hoot who you are!

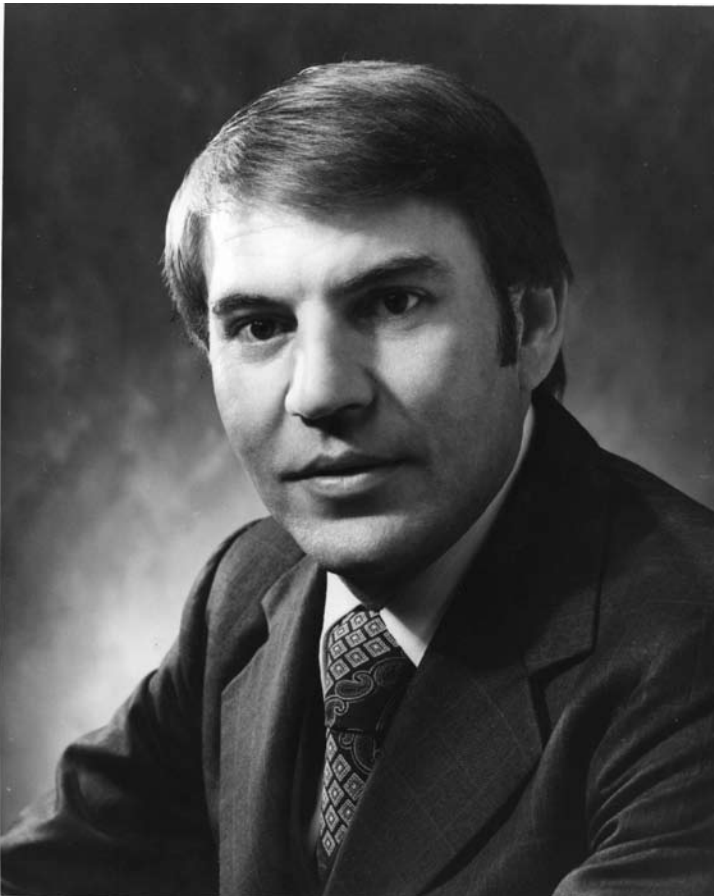
Curt Schneider, a lawyer from southeast Kansas, was, if not handpicked, anointed by the Docking Democrats to be the heir apparent to the Docking legacy. So he was handpicked early in Bennett's term to run against Bennett. He was the sitting attorney general, so he was in a better position than I was. Curt had a little trouble crossing the state line with a woman. I mean, it was a news story, it wasn't a rumor or speculation; it was a story that was documented, not just hearsay. It was enough of a story to do him serious damage. It took him down. He ended up not even running.¹⁴

But early on in my speculation about running he hadn't gotten out. When I was working in the summer of [1977] I had a lot of people threatening, saying, "You're wasting your time. The Docking team wants Curt." But he didn't leave the race because of me, he left because of this scandalous story.

I ended up with two really strong opponents. They were better known than myself and had special interests—traditional Democratic stakeholder groups—behind them. One was Senator Bert Chaney from Hutchinson; teachers for sure and some unions supported him. The other one was from St. John and many times a commander of the American Legion, Harry G. Wiles. He was prominent in the Democratic Party, a very well-known Democrat. Certainly he had the veteran's organizations that were going to get involved and some of the unions. But I had my volunteers. I was this upstart.¹⁵

14. In a July 25, 1977, *Hutchinson News* article, "Chaney Dives In; Waits For Others," Dean Hinnen wrote that Schneider, a Democrat from Coffeyville who was elected attorney general in 1974, had the support of Governor Docking and was closely aligned with the "party's so-called 'old guard,'" while Carlin had been endorsed by former party chairman Bob Brock, "considered a key man in the party's new wing." In the same article Bert Chaney noted that the incumbent, Bob Bennett, "can be beat. But I think it will take a lot of work to do it." Schneider was indeed organizing his race for governor when rumors of marital infidelity began circulating in the media. David Klepper and Steve Kraske wrote that, "A private investigator photographed Schneider outside a Joplin, Mo., motel and restaurant with a young woman described as a family friend. The photos were released to the news media. Soon after, Schneider abandoned his bid for governor and sought a second term as attorney general. But in 1978, Republican Bob Stephen defeated him and eventually won a record four terms." The Schneider fall from grace was briefly back in the news in 2007 when another Democratic attorney general, Paul Morrison, became embroiled in a marital infidelity scandal, eventually leading to his resignation. See Klepper and Kraske, "Paul Morrison: Political Powerhouse to Tattered Target Amid Sex Scandal," *Kansas City Star*, December 10, 2007, at <http://primebuzz.kcstar.com/?q=node/8834>; "He Snapped Photos for Documentation" and "Schneider Knows Crawford County," *Wichita Eagle*, September 14, 1977; "Schneider 'Unlikely' to Enter Race; Dreiling Withdraws His Support," *Wichita Eagle*, September 16, 1977.

15. The final results of the 1978 Democratic gubernatorial primary were as follows: Carlin/Dugan, 71,336; Chaney/Smith, 34,132; and Wiles/



Curt Schneider, a lawyer from Coffeyville and the state attorney general from 1975 until 1979, was, in Carlin's words, "anointed by the Docking Democrats to be the heir apparent to the Docking legacy. So he was handpicked early in Bennett's term to run against Bennett. . . . Curt had a little trouble crossing the state line with a woman. . . . It took him down. He ended up not even running."

I won the primary for two reasons. I outworked and out-organized my opponents. I was organized in every single county. I did it the old-fashioned way. Secondly, was that TV ad. It was so outrageous that in about three days it had taken "Carlin" outside of our organization to Democrats knowing me and I won the primary. I just know it pushed me over. It was only on the air no more than three days, maybe just two. We ran it in Topeka, southeast Kansas, and Wichita. I mean, it was an ad that was a grabber.

Lang, 23,762. Harry G. Wiles (St. John, later Topeka) was the Democratic Party's unsuccessful 1964 gubernatorial candidate; as mentioned, he served as National Commander of the American Legion, from 1975 to 1976, and was a practicing attorney in Topeka when he entered the primary contest in 1978. Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1978*, 27; "Welcome Home' Harry Wiles!," *Topeka Magazine* 3 (August 1976): 10–11, 15.

You see, insiders in my campaign were very upset, but to the general public—I don't know if the issue message came across—but they caught the tag line, "Carlin for Governor." And so I think I got the uncommitted vote. None of us candidates had a lot of money, and I don't think the others ran TV ads. What was fascinating to me is that we previewed it with a lot of our people in Wichita one night—I'll never forget that—and people felt good about it, and then we put it up on television and all hell broke loose. Gee gods, I had relatives calling, saying "Jiminy, this is destroying your image, John! You know, you're a good Lutheran, you're a 4H boy, how could you possibly do this?"

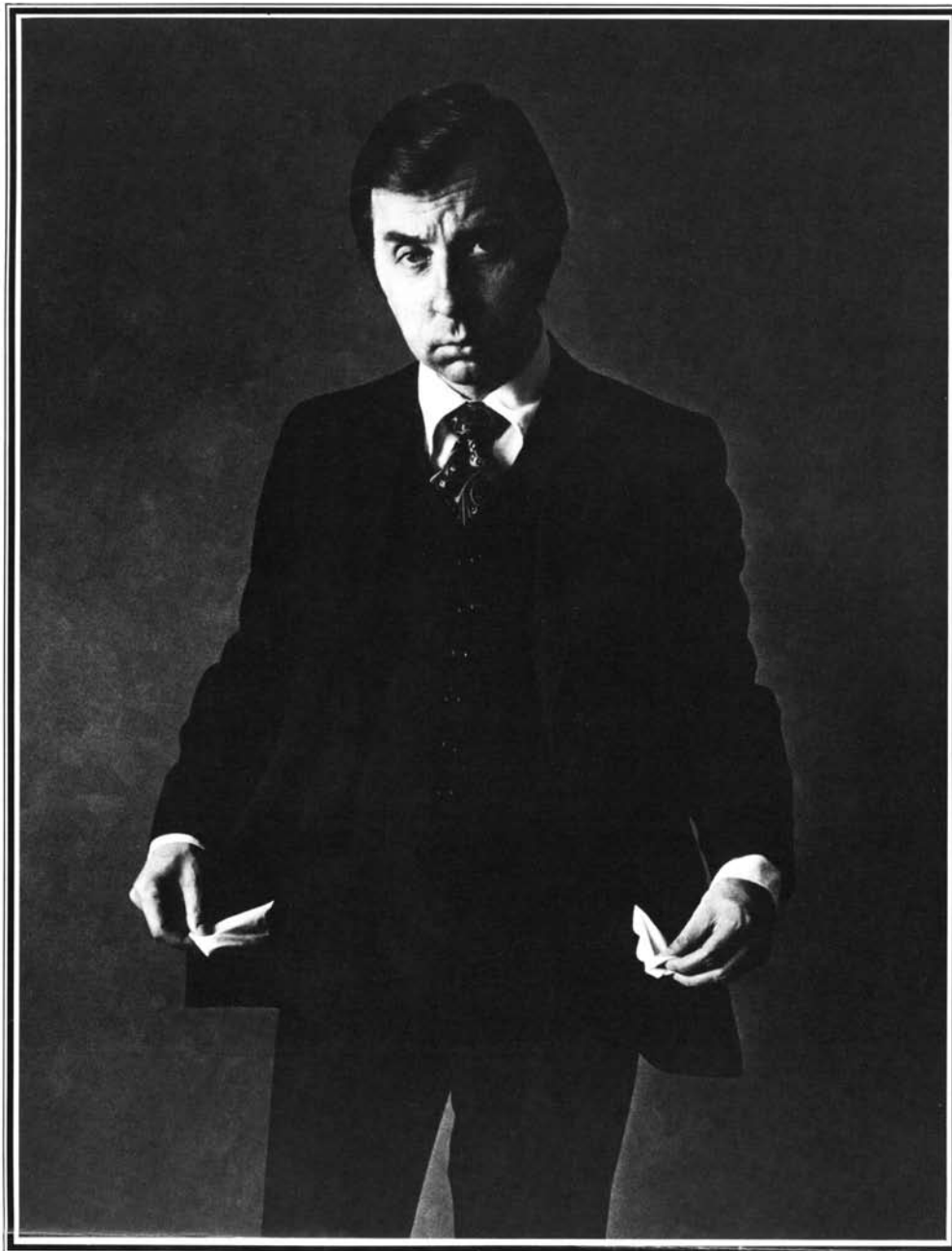
Now, to this day I don't think it was that bad. It was clearly comical. It was clearly outrageous. I wasn't calling Bennett an "egg-sucking dog" or anything terrible, I was just pointing out that he kind of expanded government. I think the ad worked with the public. That's my opinion. It galvanized the race; it was run right before the primary. To the people voting in the primary who hadn't come to events, whom my organization hadn't reached, [they] suddenly saw that ad and said, "I think I'll vote for Carlin." And it sort of goes back to the fact that at least I had asked for their vote. But for my close supporters it didn't represent the image they wanted to communicate. And so we yanked it because the support team was disintegrating, and never used it again.¹⁶

A TRUMAN-LIKE VICTORY

I don't think you can overstate [how surprising the victory was]. The first edition of the *Topeka Capital* had my opponent winning. That came out in the Wednesday morning edition, the "[Dewey Beats] Truman" type of headline. I won for a variety of reasons and issues. To be quite honest with you, I won because I didn't raise much money. That may seem a little strange to you, but the answer is really that. I had so little money that I was only on television statewide the last week. Now think of that compared to today's

16. This ad was actually relatively tame by modern campaign standards. It featured a bedraggled man identified as a "taxpayer" sitting at a table with his wallet out, handing money to three overweight, sweaty, cigar-smoking, chortling men identified as "state government," "more government," and "even more government." At the end of the ad a fourth cigar-toting man appears—also profusely sweating—and he reaches across the table and grabs "taxpayer's" credit card. While all this is going on, the narrator intones: "Kansas government is in business to serve the people. But in the past four years, problems developed. Government hired an extra three thousand state employees as the budget increased by \$750 million dollars. Meanwhile, you've been paying for government you didn't want, didn't need, or couldn't use. John Carlin is running for governor because it's time to put a lid on Kansas government; time to stop listening to big spenders. It's time to have your say again."

HELP!



Carlin attributed his 1978 primary win in part to a television ad he ran against Bennett. The ad, which depicted state government as a cadre of overweight, sweaty, cigar-smoking men muscling money out of a taxpayer, did not sit well with some of his staff and supporters, though as Carlin noted, "to this day I don't think it was that bad. It was clearly comical. It was clearly outrageous. I wasn't calling Bennett an 'egg-sucking dog' or anything terrible, I was just pointing out that he kind of expanded government." Carlin used similar images and ideas in this print ad, "Help!," depicting a taxpayer with his pockets turned out.

elections where you have many, many weeks of television for any serious campaign. But I could only be on the last week. Now this was not by design. We did not sit down and say let's not raise very much money, we'll sneak up on them! We were trying to raise money but just couldn't. We raised just a little bit.

People misread the polls. I was down. In fact, the Sunday *Topeka Capital* before the Tuesday election had me down 16 points: "Latest poll: Bennett leads Carlin by 16 points." But, see, the poll was in the field, like, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday before the Tuesday election.¹⁷ Well, I had just started on TV! So the repetition really hadn't started to take effect until Saturday, Sunday, Monday, so that poll missed my whole advertising campaign. Bennett had a much better financed campaign. He had a lot of ads. . . . There are a lot of people who were trying to figure out who in the hell is his opponent and we want to check that out before we vote for the incumbent, and I got almost all those votes. There were thousands of Kansans who didn't know who John Carlin was until the last week of television. And they decided they weren't that thrilled with the incumbent or they would have been casting their polling answers with the incumbent. Once they felt comfortable then the incumbent held his 48–49 percent and I went to the 50 percent.¹⁸

If I had raised a lot of money, I very likely might have lost because it's a Republican state and there was an incumbent, a very competent incumbent. We had our major differences on issues but there was no personality set of issues.

17. That final poll, completed a week before election day, actually favored Bennett by 13 percent, not the 16 points that Carlin recalled, and pegged the race at Bennett, 56 percent, to Carlin, 43 percent. Pollsters had "allocated the undecided vote in the governor's race among the candidates" to reach that figure; before allocation the spread was 9 percent, according to the *Topeka Capital-Journal*. "Bennett widens lead; Stephan closes on Schneider," and "Poll indicates Carlin effort missed," *Topeka Sunday Capital-Journal*, November 5, 1978.

18. The 1978 gubernatorial campaign was indeed a heated one. Governor Bennett ran a total of twenty-three different TV ads, the second highest number of ads in Kansas history, while Carlin ran only four (see Bob Beatty and Mark Peterson, "Kansas Gubernatorial Election TV Ads Analyzed in New Study," *Speaking of Kansas: Washburn Center for Kansas Studies Online Newsletter*, April 2007, www.washburn.edu/reference/cks/newsletters/S2007.pdf). Carlin made up for his lack of finances with campaign intensity, keeping relentless heat on Bennett. As early as August 1978 Carlin was calling Bennett's campaign proposals on taxes "unbelievable" and "a political charade," saying "I can't believe that after opposing the property tax lid for more than eight years Governor Bennett now would suddenly try to present himself as a person concerned about Kansas taxpayers." See Roger Myers, "Democrats Assail Bennett Proposals," *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 23, 1978. For his part Bennett tried to convince voters that Carlin could not be trusted, but the Bennett campaign also realized that the incumbent had an image problem, even running a TV ad that featured Bennett's wife, Olivia, trying to explain how her husband was not the distant and cold man he was perceived in public to be.

We respected each other. If the Republicans would have had polling early enough to come back it could have been different, because they allowed my program on utilities to go without a response. They couldn't see it in their polling doing anything. Well, I started in September but I didn't have any television message to get out. And let's face it, it's a reality, you reach the masses through the mass media. And I think that's the explanation. In a thirty-second message we tried to get across the utility issue. And it played right into our hands because we were running that and the incumbent had ignored the issue and had not taken it seriously. His advisors were I'm sure telling him, "This isn't polling, it's not working; let Carlin spend his money on this issue," and they found out too late. I understand their tracking polls over the weekend prior to Tuesday showed what was happening, but it was too late.

I could feel it. When I was campaigning the last weekend compared to having worked almost two years campaigning, you could feel it. Going to bowling allies, people recognized me. They were positive. Before I had to go in and shake hands, explain who I was . . . what I was doing. And they were polite, but now it was like they were connecting. And they connected the issue with the person and the decision they were going to make on Tuesday. And I won.

We spent a lot of the evening in my speaker's office [on election night]. That's where we were trying to keep track, evaluating the counties as they came in. We started feeling fairly good as early as 8:00–8:30 p.m. just based on what the earliest precincts showed us. We had no polling to show where we were. But we started to confirm the good feeling we had the last few days that, hey, we were going to do okay, that this wasn't going to be over real quick. But it was well into the night before it was confirmed. Like I say, the first edition of the newspaper had already come out because Bennett led most of the evening. It was in the late returns that I was able to secure the victory.¹⁹

UTILITY BILL ISSUE

One of the evolving issues that some of my friends on the other side have made light of for many years—but

19. "Bennett blast belies 'not bitter' banter," *Salina Journal*, November 8, 1978; "Carlin appears headed for upset win," *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 8, 1978; "Carlin credits 'grass roots effort,'" and "Bennett blames 'false issue,'" *Topeka State Journal*, November 8, 1978. Although the regular morning edition of the *Topeka Daily Capital* correctly called the election for Carlin, the *Salina Journal* carried a front-page photograph—labeled "Shades of HST!"—of Carlin holding "aloft an early edition" that "prematurely announced the re-election of Gov. Robert Bennett in a box across the top of page one which said 'Kassebaum, Bennett win for GOP.'"

Kassebaum, Bennett win for GOP

Kansas vote
at a glance

National offices
SENATE
1,118 of 2,867 precincts
R—Kassebaum 159,087.
D—Roy 115,194.
CONGRESS
1st District
86 of 913 precincts
R—Sebellus*, unopposed.
2nd District
274 of 559 precincts
R—Jeffries 32,865.
D—Keys* 30,910.
3rd District
80 of 323 precincts
E—Winn*, unopposed.
4th District
43 of 356 precincts
R—Litsky 2,157.
D—Glickman* 7,974.
5th District
195 of 650 precincts
E—Whittaker 24,998.
D—Allgeuer 16,814.

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Official State and
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64 Pages

Topeka, Kansas, Wednesday, November 8, 1978

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The Topeka Daily Capital

Roy concedes to Kassebaum

Dr. Bill Roy, Topeka Democrat, conceded his defeat by Republican Nancy Landon Kassebaum in the U.S. Senate race about 10:30 p.m. Tuesday.

By KEN PETERSON
Staff Writer

Republican Nancy Landon Kassebaum, declared the winner by two television networks shortly after the Kansas polls closed, gained a wider than expected lead in the U.S. Senate race Tuesday night against two-time Democratic candidate Bill Roy.

The Associated Press declared Kassebaum the winner at 9:54 p.m. Tuesday. Unofficial and incomplete tabula-

tions throughout the night gave Kassebaum, the vice president of two Wichita radio stations, a consistent 54 to 42 percent margin. With 11 percent of the vote counted statewide, Kassebaum led Roy 45,864 to 36,055.

Kassebaum, 46-year-old daughter of former Kansas Gov. Alf Landon, is the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate since Margaret Chase Smith in 1948 and the first woman senator ever from Kansas.

Kassebaum, contacted at her Wichita headquarters early Tuesday evening, was not about to claim victory but said she would attribute a potential victory to a willingness by Kansans to try a

new approach.

"I think they were perhaps looking for something that represented to them a little different," she said. "As I traveled across Kansas, I sensed a degree of confidence and trust and a willingness to try something different."

Both CBS and ABC declared Mrs. Kassebaum the winner a half-hour after the polls closed at 7 p.m.

The projections cast a dismal spell on Democrats, who went through a similar type loss in 1974 when Roy, a former congressman, lost to Sen. Bob Dole in a race decided by 13,532 votes out of almost 800,000 cast.

Topeka businessman Robert L.

Brook, Roy's campaign co-chairman,

said at the Democratic victory party. "It looks like we're right back to where we were 30 years ago," a reference to the fact that the last Democratic U.S. senator from Kansas was George McGill of Wichita, who served from 1930-1939.

Roy was returning from Wichita by plane and could not be reached for comment.

Kassebaum's victory is the GOP's biggest political prize in the off-year election. She was seeking the seat vacated by her former boss, retiring senior Sen. James B. Pearson, who returned late in the campaign to work on

her behalf. Kassebaum worked as an assistant in Pearson's office.

The Senate campaign was one of the toughest political races in the state, displaying an ebb-and-flow momentum between Kassebaum and Roy in the final three weeks before election day. Kassebaum became more aggressive in the closing days, notably by pointing out she is not a professional politician, a label she tried to hang on Roy.

The Republican campaign seemed to gather strength in the closing three weeks. Kassebaum aides said they detected a notable shift in momentum when Kassebaum began taking a more

(Continued on Page 2, Col. 1)

Carlin was surprised by his 1978 win over Bennett, though he recalls that he and his staff "started feeling fairly good as early as 8:00-8:30 p.m. just based on what the earliest precincts showed us. . . . But it was well into the night before it was confirmed." In fact, an early edition of the Topeka Daily Capital declared Bennett the winner in a "Dewey Beats Truman" type of headline shown above. Image courtesy of John W. Carlin.

I'm still very proud of the campaign we ran—was making utilities a significant issue. I say that because—and I would remind Kansans—that's when Wolf Creek was being built [near Burlington, Kansas], our first and only nuclear plant, and it was very controversial in a variety of ways. I raised several specific ideas on how I felt (if I was elected governor) we needed to deal with it: where the laws needed to be changed; where I felt that the governor should play a significant role; not just appointing commissioners to the Kansas Corporation Commission, like judicial appointments, then just let them do their thing. I felt that there was too much at stake with what was evolving and there needed to be an aggressive program.

I put together a six-point program for utilities . . . if I'm governor, here's what I'm going to do. It was the campaign. There was also a lot of talk about growth in government and spending and I made it kind of an issue, and it was a good issue politically following the last Democrat, "austere but adequate." But if you're talking about the race in 1978 then the economy was really not an issue. You can look back and say the economic problems were starting, but it wasn't really graphic until the early 1980s.

Now you have to understand on that utility deal, this is my assessment: . . . it was a real issue. It wasn't one we contrived. I mean the typical Kansan would say, yeah, utility rates are going through the roof, and all the talk about Wolf Creek had just gone on top of that. So I said, if you can get your advertising to parallel what's on the news you got a real winner. If what you're saying in your ads is foreign to what the news folks are covering you're going to need to take a hell of a lot of money to get that point across. But if you're on the short side on money you need to find something.

And then the third element that was so key to this is Bennett refused to respond. He absolutely refused to respond. He stuck with his position that there wasn't anything the governor could do. And I had my six-point program of leadership action points for myself as governor to address the issue, and they went into law. The Republicans like to say I just took a hokey issue and played with it. You know, we had a door hanger at the end, it looked like a utility bill; particularly in Wichita we used that. They can say what they want, but as far as I'm concerned the key was Wolf Creek and that legislation we passed salvaged that whole deal.



Carlin made utility prices a major issue in the 1978 campaign and during his administration. One factor in the debate was the ongoing construction of the Wolf Creek Generating Station near Burlington, Kansas, the state's first and only nuclear power plant. The controversial 1,100-megawatt plant was opposed by groups throughout the state, some driven by environmental concerns and others by antipathy toward what they saw as technological commercialism. Pictured are protesters trying to stop the 380-ton, \$50-million-dollar reactor containment vessel from making its way to Burlington in 1980, just a year after the accident at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania. Image of reactor vessel, detained by protesters and bearing a sign reading "Wolf Creek Plant: Saves oil . . . makes jobs . . . saves money," courtesy of the Topeka Capital-Journal.

You see the old law was that the Corporation Commission either approved or disapproved; either allowed the utility to fully recover the cost of building a new plant, or you denied it—they had to eat it all. Well, Wolf Creek was so expensive, for the first time something was so big, it would bankrupt the utility, but if you put it all on the rate payer, there would have been no way to do that. So our legislation would have simply changed the law to allow the Corporation Commission to, as best they could, balance things. So if this thing is going to be built and it's going to be part of the source of our utilities, we're going to try to come up with a compromise that allows them to survive but also protects the rate payer and, you know, the sophistication of that was probably, maybe more, certainly more, than we could communicate in the campaign.²⁰

20. Construction on Wolf Creek Generating Station, the state's first and only nuclear power plant, began in 1977 and the facility was operational by 1985. Built near Burlington, Kansas—90 miles from greater Kansas

But I felt very, very comfortable as a candidate being out there championing the general cause because I felt we had a case. We were going to take the sales tax off, and we did, and there were three or four other things that were of less significance. But five of the six went into law while I was governor and the sixth one after I was governor. When I was running in that campaign, if you had a twenty dollar utility bill you paid sales tax on it too, and we said, you

City and 120 miles from Wichita, the two largest communities Wolf Creek was meant to serve—the 1,100-megawatt plant was originally projected to cost \$200 million dollars, though its final costs exceeded \$3 billion. During Carlin's administration, as costs for the project rose exponentially each year, the governor continued to speak out against rising utility rates. By 1985 the Corporation Commission organized a public hearing to discuss the utility companies' plans to double rates once Wolf Creek came on line. The commission's refusal to grant rate increases led to major restructuring of the utility companies involved in the deal, with the more solvent rescuing the nearly bankrupt. See Craig Miner, *Wolf Creek Station: Kansas Gas and Electric Company in the Nuclear Era* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); Miner, *Kansas*, 353–60; Tim Carpenter, "Plant launched amid protests, permits, and politics," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, October 28, 2007.



Carlin recalled that “the old law . . . either allowed the utility to fully recover the cost of building a new plant, or you denied it—they had to eat it all. Well, Wolf Creek was so expensive, for the first time something was so big, it would bankrupt the utility, but if you put it all on the rate payer, there would have been no way to do that. So our legislation would have simply changed the law to allow the Corporation Commission to, as best they could, balance things.” Pictured here, lawyers discuss procedures for the Corporation Commission’s hearing to discuss utility company plans to double rates during a 1985 session at the statehouse. Image courtesy of the Topeka Capital-Journal.

know, one thing the state could do—we never pretended it was like a life saver to people—but at least we could take that off.

THE TRANSITION

There wasn’t that much help for a variety of reasons. The first help we got were the keys the day before! The transition was primarily driven by the colleagues I had in the legislature. I don’t think there had been a tradition in Kansas to have a real formal transition where the outgoing governor and staff had a program or something. So we were starting from scratch. And we certainly didn’t have time and we didn’t waste time in the campaign focusing on, “what are we going to do if we won?” I mean, issue-wise, we were prepared. But the structure that has got to be put together, all the decisions . . . like the swearing in, the inaugural activities, obviously we hadn’t thought about.

There was no advance planning. People would have laughed at the idea that we were going to win in 1978, aside from a few of my inside people who remained, saying “there’s still a chance, there’s still a chance!” But it would have been a joke if there had been a story that leaked that Carlin was planning a transition. That would have been just one big opening for cartoonists to really hurt me. So not

only were we smart enough not to do it, we were realistic enough to not do it. So we win and then it’s starting from scratch—inaugural activities, what to do, putting it all together. I mean it was chaos.

But a first budget, a first legislative session, some of the specifics all came at one time and with not a lot of help, and certainly understandably so because I had defeated an incumbent, an incumbent whose administration assumed they were getting a second term. I don’t say that critically, I understand why they would have assumed that. Why would they even have thought they might lose? So they weren’t prepared. It was a shock. So it was not a model transition from anybody’s point of view. And out of that experience, when I left office, I really worked on putting a plan together. In fact, we published with the National Governors’ Association sort of a transition plan that I thought might be helpful in other states as well.

But on the budget, there’s where we were in good shape, that was our strength, because I’d been on the Ways and Means Committee when we had the majority in the legislature. I mean, we were taking Bennett’s budget and writing the legislative budget, so we knew the process, we knew the key people, we knew how things worked, we had experience with the immediate budget we were inheriting. So in that sense we were in good shape. We were not

outsiders, we were insiders, both in terms of me as well as my key folks, so that was not a problem.²¹

You know, every budget is a challenge. But it wasn't like I was an executive in business out of Wichita with a Wichita kind of chamber staff and we win and say, "Budget? Who's the budget director?" You know, I inherited the budget director, Jim Bibb, who had been there forever, and I had worked with him for six years as a legislator.²²

Later I made a change. I said it was time for a different approach. I brought in an outsider, outside the state of Kansas, Lynn Muchmore, and we established some very different procedures. And one of the things that I'm very proud of is that for a so-called "tax and spend liberal Democratic governor," when I left office there were no more state employees than when I took office. And we were able to do that because one of the things Muchmore brought to me, he said, it's not complicated . . . when you have a cabinet secretary come in and say, "I got this great idea, I'm going to need six full-time employees," all you have to say is "Find 'em." Because if this is so great, you've got to cut something not so important.

DEATH PENALTY

Okay, first of all, the death penalty, it was an issue when I was in the legislature. I always voted against the death penalty. I never considered it as like one of my key issues. I never went to the well to speak against the death penalty. I just cast my vote. There were prominent Republicans and

21. On March 27, 1980, *Kansas City Times* reporter Stephen Fehr wrote an extensive account of the Carlin team and their impressions and interactions with the governor. Included in this valuable article are Fehr's observations that Carlin staffers, "Realize that their boss is more conservative than they are, is hard to get close to, rarely praises anyone and occasionally offends lawmakers and special interests. Nevertheless, Carlin is admired for spending more hours than anyone in the office and being firmly in control." Fehr also noted that staffers found Carlin to be "Even-tempered and genteel, not overbearing. He rarely gets mad at his staff, but he does hold grudges against people who have crossed him." Reportedly both Carlin and his staff tried to emulate other politicians around the country who were rejecting "politics as usual" and "good old boy" approaches to governing. This approach by Carlin would lead to a significant rift within his own party, which Carlin describes in his interviews for this article. Carlin's staff included Pat Hurley, Joe Harkins, Barbara Sabol, Dan Watkins, Charneil Hadl, Nancy Ingle, Bob Wootton, Mike Swenson, Deb Miller, John Myers, Terri Johnsen, Steve Millstein, Steve Holsteen, Sister Jeanne McKenna, Larry Wolgast, Bill Hoch, and Shirley Allen among many others. During the interviews Carlin stated that he "would put the team I had up against anybody's team. . . . this was a team that enjoyed the work. . . . there was some transition, but I had a solid team right to the end. And consequently we were working until the last day. We were looking for opportunities to do good right to the last."

22. For more on Carlin's first term legislative agenda and first budget see "Carlin hopes for peace with GOP," *Kansas City Star*, January 7, 1979; "Governor Vows to Hold Tax Line," *Hutchinson News*, January 24, 1979; and "Energy—Where Carlin Cut," *Kansas City Times*, January 25, 1979.

Democrats who led the attack against it and it really never passed the legislature and it never was really very close. I mean there were a lot of votes for it, but it wasn't like nail-biting down to the last vote. In the house, my guess, my memory would be like 70-some against, 50-some for.

So that's the first key point. It was not a big issue for me. I wasn't on the stump campaigning against it. It wasn't one I always hammered, I never brought it up, it was no big deal. And Bennett was a supporter. In the campaign in 1978—and I can remember Fred Weaver and I talking about this and basically what we decided, and I was very comfortable, I was very honest about it—that I would never propose it. I would never come out as a proponent. If the legislature changed—and again, they'd been voting it down, voting it down, voting it down—but if they passed me one that wasn't blatantly unconstitutional or whatever, I'd sign it.

I mean, it was out there in the public record but very seldom did it come up. I don't recall it ever being an issue, a real issue in the campaign. I don't recall Bennett making it an issue or trying to carve out a real wedge issue kind of thing. And so the fact was that I did make this statement maybe once that I don't think that I would veto it, I was very comfortable with that. It wasn't that big a deal; I voted against it in the legislature but I wasn't going to fight the majority as governor.

When the legislature brought it up again, my folks were a little surprised, there wasn't a lot of thinking about it, but the first session after I was elected and "boom!" they passed it, towards the end of the first session, and my staff assumed I would sign it. There was never any discussion or review or any attempt on anyone's part to say, "Now governor, let's review this. You always voted against it even though you said in the campaign blah, blah, blah, and we think politically you can survive it." There was nothing. No discussion.

And as I've said many times, the only way I could explain it was to draw the parallel with people being selected to the jury with capital crime being one of the issues and swearing to the prosecuting attorney that they were very supportive of the death penalty and then finding themselves, after having decided the guilt of someone, not being able to vote for the death penalty. It was then that I started thinking about it. And I hadn't been a real active participant [on the issue], so I hadn't really articulated very much in depth in my own view, in my own conscience, the logical reasons for opposing, and I got sort of thinking about the poor representation of a lot of poor people and the potential

for error and at some point I said to a member of my staff, "I don't think I can sign this." And that's when somebody [Sister Jeanne McKenna] drafted me a veto message and, much to the entire shock of my staff, I signed it and sent it back to the legislature.

I made it very clear to my staff. I said, "I realize this is not the smartest political move but I just can't, I can't do it. If I lose reelection, I mean that's just the way things have to be." But I have to say in credit to my staff, although they were shocked, they supported me. I did not have anybody sit down and say, "John, John, John, you can't do this." Philosophically, my staff agreed with me, but they had accepted the direction they assumed I was going to take and did not interfere.²³

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR IN A REPUBLICAN STATE

I had Republican leadership the whole way in the legislature. It was kind of an amazing hat trick or however you want to put it. I was dependant upon Republicans to pass my program and dependant on Democrats to protect my vetoes. That's the honest-to-God truth—you look at the votes! Particularly towards the end, because the Democrat numbers were not good. I vetoed measures that passed unanimously and got the Democrats to accept the fact that they made a mistake. I gave them the logical argument—you know, here's a problem, here's your answer. I'm not aware that any of them got in trouble because they stood behind me. Generally we vetoed and went to them right away. Then my legislative affairs person would go to the Democratic caucus and simply lay out: "here's the deal, we're not trying to play games, but unfortunately there's a flaw here, a serious flaw, and it needs to be corrected. You pass me a bill, a corrected bill, and I'll sign it." I vetoed a lot of bills and I stand by those vetoes to this day and am proud of the fact that my Democratic colleagues upheld all of them despite the fact that Republicans tried to override every one of them. We were able to sustain the vetoes, which is important for a governor. It [also] applies to a president. If your vetoes have no respect, then the Legislative Branch is going to run all over you.

23. In his veto message, Carlin said, "I am an optimist. I believe that society can find a way to deal with violence without using violence," and in addressing his decision to veto the bill when he had previously indicated he would sign it, Carlin explained, "for decisions which are most serious for all of us, it is not always possible to know in advance what one's decision will be." See "Message to the House of Representatives of the State of Kansas," April 4, 1979, in Pisciotte, *The Selected Papers of Governor John Carlin*, 811; "Carlin Vetoes Death Penalty Bill," *Topeka State Journal*, April 4, 1979; for more on the death penalty veto, see "Governor's options on death penalty bill reviewed," *Topeka State Journal*, April 3, 1979; "Carlin turns to convictions in death bill veto," *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 5, 1979.

But the Republicans, they always looked for an opportunity to override my budget to embarrass me, or override my veto. So even though they weren't overly ticked off that I vetoed the bill, they made the Democrats line up and be the ones to be on record. They wanted their vote in the record to be consistent. They could say they voted for it originally, they voted to override the governor's veto, and it was those damned Democrats who didn't know where they were.

But a lot of basic things were done. I worked well with the Republican legislature. An example that comes to my mind is the water plan that we put together. I had a very capable person in Joe Harkins running the water office. It was very easy for me because of my agriculture background and his expertise and experience to come together and agree the state of Kansas needed a water plan. We also were aware that this brought controversy and certainly would bring different points of view. So we worked in a very open way. We recognized that both houses of the legislature were controlled by Republicans, and that they were going to have to be major partners. I think of Senator [Charlie] Angell, for example, as one in particular, and Representative [David] Heinemann. Both were from western Kansas. Although water was an issue all across the state back in the 1970s and early 1980s, I think that most people thought, well, that's a western Kansas irrigation issue, that aquifer going down type thing, and people that live in the east didn't have to worry that much about it. But we recognized it was statewide and we had to have key leaders like Heinemann and Angel working with us.²⁴ On the Democratic side, Senator [Paul] Feleciano [Jr.] from Wichita was one of the key players. But it was a very open, back and forth exchange. Joe Harkins and his staff worked very closely with me with he and his staff developing specifics, slowly step by step putting the plan together, back and forth very much openly working with the legislative folks and leadership on this issue, and then over time, developing something we could take to the legislature. Because we had bipartisan involvement, from the get go we were able—with a lot of public hearings, a lot of work involved—to get it passed into law in my tenure. I was very proud of that.

Also, my decision in November of 1982 to publicly say, "I will not run against Bob Dole in 1986," was a strategic decision of significance. I had a lot of people, they didn't like

24. State Senator Charlie L. Angell, a second term Republican from Plains, was identified as a banker and a farmer. Representative David J. Heinemann, a Republican attorney from Garden City, was first elected to the legislature in 1968 at age twenty-three. *Kansas Legislative Directory, 1977-1978* (Kansas City, Mo.: Halgo Publishing Inc., [1977]), 22, 78.

it. Because here I was going to finish two four-year terms as governor of Kansas, you know, gee gods, why not take Bob Dole on and beat him? But I wanted to accomplish as much as I could in my term and I knew I couldn't do it if I was thought of as a political animal. You know, how could I sit down with Republicans during the day and expect them to help me and at night be running against Bob Dole?²⁵ It couldn't work, so that was the first thing.

And that, more than anything else, allowed me to partner with Republicans in the legislature to get endless things done. I mean you look at the second term. There were successes in the first term, but at least 80 percent of what I did successfully was done in the second term by partnering with Republicans. Because, you know, Jack Steineger, who was the Democrat leader in the senate, he was not going to let his Democrats vote for anything that required a revenue measure. So all of the revenue measures—we had sales tax increase, gas tax increase, fee increase, the severance tax—all came in my second term. Because the economy got just continually worse.

Ross [O.] Doyen [from Concordia] was thought of as a hard-nosed conservative Republican leader of the senate, and he was, but we could work together. He was not the kindest to me in the public arena, but, getting the work done, we worked together. Bottom line: Republican legislators in those days wanted to do what was best for the state. And so consequently we got a lot done.

At the end of my second four years, the constitutional amendments were very, very significant and I was able to get a two-thirds vote to get all those on the ballot. And particularly I'm proud of the fact that I got a two-thirds vote on every one, and [Mike] Hayden opposed me, I think on every one, certainly the significant ones, and he was speaker of the house and I was able to get a two-thirds vote to get all those passed. There was a partnering with some powerful special interest groups that helped and just working it, working it, working it. But the lottery, parimutuel betting,

25. Carlin also would have realized that his chances of unseating the popular, incumbent U.S. senator, Robert J. Dole, would have been slim at best. Dole was in the midst of his third term in 1982, having defeated the Democratic challenger in 1980 by a vote of 598,686 to 340,271; in 1986 the senator from Russell defeated the Democratic nominee by an even greater margin: 576,902 to 246,664. Of course, an outgoing governor—i.e., John Carlin—would have been a higher profile challenger, but at the time Kansans had not elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate in over fifty years. Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1980, Presidential Preference Primary, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1981]), 79; Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1986, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1987]), 70; see also, Burdett Loomis, "Robert J. Dole: Driven to Perform, Destined to Motivate," in *John Brown to Bob Dole*, 328–41.

internal improvements, the property tax amendment, those four were the major ones.

ANGERIN DEMOCRATIC PARTY STALWARTS

One thing that was very frustrating for me [was that] the laws and the system for personnel had changed dramatically. You have to keep in mind Robert Docking was not only a good governor but a very popular governor and had pleased a lot of Democrats across the state with what I'll call patronage, which was legal and appropriate and accepted at the time. But things changed due to spin-offs of what was going on in Washington and so forth. The rules changed and the governor could no longer dictate who got those highway jobs in counties across the state.

It all came out of Watergate. All the states kind of changed the rules. And it went from Bob Docking's time and prior to that where if you had a buddy, say in Sheridan County, and he called you up and said he had a nephew who needed a job this summer, he'd be working on the highway crew. And it was legal, politically sound, not criticized; it was the way it was operated. When it came to permanent hires in the highway department across the state, you know none of those hires were done without the blessing of the local county party chair. At this point Docking had all of them in his camp. Well, then the rules changed. And what made it more complicated was Bennett followed Docking, so you had four years of a Republican administration and the Democrats out there didn't expect to be able to call up Bennett and get their nephew a job, and during that four-year period we have all of the Watergate changes.

So I come in in January of 1979 and the rules are totally different. And the political mistake I made was not having had the history of that and therefore a communication strategy to go out and sort of say to those good old Democrats, "The rules have changed." I just started following the law. I always believed that you do things right, this is the way you operate: we're going to put good people in, but it was hell. I don't think as legislators we were as aware of the politics of patronage. I don't think it was something that got on our radar screen that much. So I think we walked in to the governor's office kind of blind to the possibility of real serious political problems. So it was frustrating to work the political scene, do what was right and ethical and legal in a system that had changed. But people had a hard time understanding that across the state.

I recall my first appointment, selecting a Republican over a Democrat, and I took a lot of heat. You know, I had just won an election, Democrats were thrilled, but my first

district court appointment was a Republican in southeast Kansas. But I took a lot of heat. I tried to demonstrate right then, not only did I believe that the person I selected was the best for the bench at that time but that I also wanted to send a message that I took this responsibility very seriously. Yes, I would appoint Democrats and I appointed a lot of Democrats to the bench over time. But that didn't mean Republicans were automatically disqualified.

THE SEVERANCE TAX AND THE 1982 CAMPAIGN

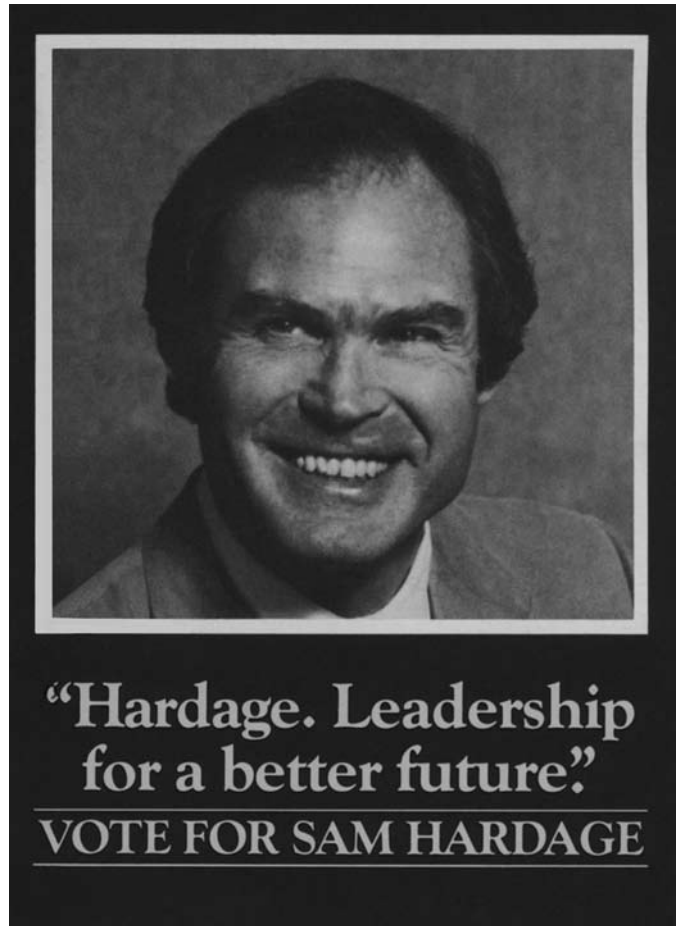
In the early 1980s we had an economic problem, which led to a serious revenue problem. Serious. And as I looked to the 1980s, through the mid-1980s, we needed to have something. And Mike Lennen, who was my secretary of revenue, as much as anyone, said, "Look, we're one of the few rural energy producing states of significance that doesn't have a severance tax. All that coal coming in from Wyoming, that we use to make electricity, Kansas citizens are paying Wyoming severance tax." So, in terms of looking at the options, I decided that was the one I would go to the legislature and fight for. Now, the legislature, in the sessions of 1981 and 1982, they turned me down. So the 1982 race was set up. You know, it made no sense to abandon it. I was clearly on record, so why not run on it? I made it very clear that was going to be the issue I was going to run on for reelection.

It's kind of populist, yes, absolutely. But again, from my point of view, it wasn't just a wild populist move that didn't connect with reality. It connected to the real issues we had, in that to me this was the fairest and best choice. And [the Republican nominee, Sam] Hardage [a businessman from Wichita], then, was not going to support the severance tax; that would be counter to all his supporters. But he supported a user gas tax, because it was a combination of education funding and transportation funding that was needed.

So it worked beautifully because in 1982 there was an acknowledged recognition that we had a funding problem. And there were at least some in the news media that would give me a fair presentation on the severance tax. So once again, the news (to some degree at least) and my campaign meshed. It made for a powerful reelection issue, far more powerful because Hardage was willing to promote the gas tax increase. That allowed me to say, "Folks, the choice is very simple, do you want to pay a higher gas tax or do you want the rich oil companies and utility users out of state to pay a severance tax?"²⁶

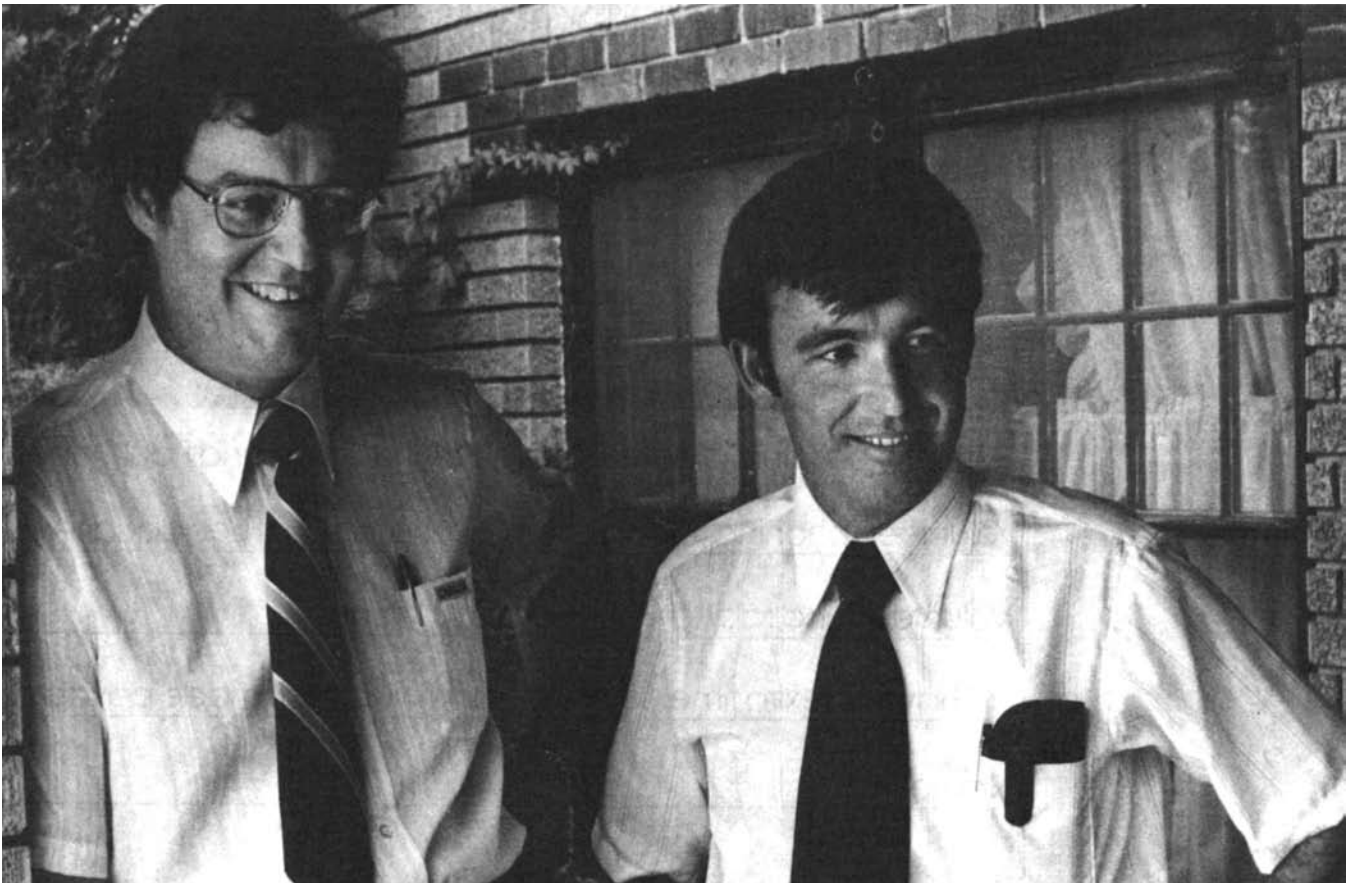
26. For more on the severance tax campaign by Carlin, see "Carlin continues severance tax campaign trips," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 21, 1981; "Carlin hears opposition to tax in Ottawa meeting," *Topeka Capital-*

I could never have been elected in the first place and certainly not reelected in today's climate, because from . . . Hardage . . . abortion was never an issue, nor in my entire career. Not only was abortion not an issue, but in the 1982 campaign it was my tax increase recommendation versus his that was the issue. You know, if you want evidence of



Sam Hardage, a businessman from Wichita pictured above, was Carlin's Republican opponent in the 1982 general election. "I could never have been elected in the first place and certainly not reelected in today's climate," said Carlin. The controversial issue of abortion, for instance, was not a gubernatorial campaign issue in 1982. "Not only was abortion not an issue," recalled Carlin, "it was my tax increase recommendation versus [Hardage's] that was the issue. You know, if you want evidence of how things have dramatically changed, there it is."

Journal, April 22, 1981; "Carlin calls vote pro-tax message," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, November 5, 1982. See also Miner, *Kansas*, 376–80; Russell Getter, "The 1982 Election of Governor Carlin: An Analysis of the Vote and Comment for the Future," in *Electoral Politics in Kansas: A Historical Perspective*, by Marvin A. Harder and Russell Getter (Topeka: Capitol Complex Center, University of Kansas, 1983), 65–85.



Paul Dugan, the Wichita lawyer and businessman pictured here, was Carlin's running mate in 1978. "The Docking Democrats were very unhappy with some of my appointments and the death penalty," Carlin remembered. "Paul, in the first two years—I can't say exactly when—but certainly in the first two years, he abandoned me. He kept the office of the lieutenant governor, but he made it very clear he was no longer a part of the Carlin team and that very likely he would run to oppose me in the primary in 1982."

how things have dramatically changed, there it is. He not only did not make a big deal about me vetoing the death penalty, he opposed my severance tax and he wanted to raise the gas tax. Gas tax? I mean, it was like when he did that, we started feeling pretty good. That wouldn't happen today.

This is true consistently through the history of Kansas—the Democrats have won when the Republicans screwed up. The early screw-ups were not this moderate-conservative divide, it was two different factions within the Republican Party, different power families dueling and dueling in the primary and not coming together. That's how we won. You go back all through history, Democrats occasionally won one term, then Republicans would unite, throw the Democrat out. That is until George Docking. The factions then were so strong that they only finally got together when Docking tried to go for a third two-year term.

A TALE OF TWO LIEUTENANT GOVERNORS

[In 1978] it's Paul Dugan, Wichita. We had served together in the legislature. The thinking was, one, we knew each other. We had somewhat of a similar background—although he was a Wichita lawyer [and] business man—had kind of a small town, rural background. He was not an urbanite, but yet brought Wichita and Sedgwick County into play and Sedgwick County was much more Democratic in their voting pattern then than they are today. And so it was a logical move.

The Docking Democrats were very unhappy with some of my appointments and the death penalty. Paul, in the first two years—I can't say exactly when—but certainly in the first two years, he abandoned me. He kept the office of the lieutenant governor, but he made it very clear he was no longer a part of the Carlin team and that very likely he would run to oppose me in the primary in 1982.

Bill H
Copy to Shirley



The Union State Bank

P.O. BOX 928 • 316-442-5200
ARKANSAS CITY, KANSAS 67105

ROBERT DOCKING
PRESIDENT

August 26, 1982

*Called a
Response
9-2-82
It was
very
upbeat*

Governor and Mrs. John Carlin
Governor's residence
Cedar Crest
Topeka, Kansas 66606

Dear Karen and John,

When you were in Arkansas City recently you told me to feel free to make campaign suggestions. Listed below are three suggestions that come to mind since our last visit:

✓

Item #1 The week preceding the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson and during the first week of the Fair, I suggest that radio spots for your campaign be purchased from Wichita and Western Kansas Radio Stations. Historically the "Fair Poll" has given momentum to the candidates who do well in this poll; however, although losing the poll badly is not necessarily politically fatal it certainly is damaging to momentum. I well remember that in 1968 I received 27% of the votes against Rick Harmon in the poll. This was following the Chicago convention and we had a lot of time to settle down. Radio advertising is relatively cheap compared to television and, as I recall, many people are affected by radio driving to and from the Fair.

Item #2 The Sunday before election the Docking for Governor Club ran a ad in the Wichita Eagle-Beacon. It listed all of the appointments, Republican and Democratic, that I had made in Sedgwick County. This ad thanked these people for serving in our Docking Administration. By using this method it was not necessary to receive endorsements from each person. The ad was simply to thank them for serving. The long list of "well thought of people" may have been construed as a endorsement by those who did not recognize the "Thank you" portion of the ad. This ad received many favorable comments and no negative reaction of which I am aware.

*Be sure
this gets
named!*

Shirley could document list

Governor and Mrs. John Carlin
Topeka, Kansas

Page 2

*This idea
Good also to
remember what
I have in respect
for this group
of individuals*

item #3 I don't know about the availability of
of Tom's personal schedule and business
work schedule. If his schedule permits
I suggest Tom make personal calls on
particular individuals who are well respected
themselves and appear to influence large
numbers of people. I realize that during
the campaign a incumbent Governor could not
call upon these people without being
viewed as selfserving. Some of the people
I have in mind are Archbishop Strecker, the
Reverend Dick Taylor and other people
representing large groups. Perhaps the list
of Lobbyists should be reviewed for large
group contacts.

The above suggestions are simply submitted
for your consideration.

With every good wish,



Robert B. Docking
President

RBD/lg
CC - Tom Docking

Given that he was not Governor Bob Docking's first choice of successor, in the interviews Carlin was upfront about the fact "that there was no love lost between the Carlins and the Dockings." He qualified this by noting, "I'm talking about all those county chairs across the state [who didn't receive patronage during Carlin's administration]. I'm not necessarily focusing on the family. You know, Bob Docking cut an ad for me in the 1978 election. Now some would argue that he should have gone further, he should have called all these people and said, 'Get behind him.' But, he did what he did." In the 1982 election, when Docking's son Tom stood as Carlin's running mate, Docking served as honorary chairman of the campaign. In the memo reproduced here Docking offers the incumbent campaign advice, outlining a few of the advertising techniques that secured Docking four terms as governor. The memo, annotated in Carlin's hand, confirms Carlin's contention that "there wasn't this one-on-one duel between me and Bob Docking."

Twenty-seven-year-old Tom Docking, son of four-term Governor Bob Docking and grandson of Governor George Docking, was Carlin's choice for lieutenant governor during his reelection campaign in 1982. In his choice Carlin was "driven by a visible decision to merge the Carlins with the Dockings," and throughout their political alliance Tom was "loyal, dedicated." In 1986 Docking, pictured here with his wife Jill and son Brian, ran for governor but was defeated by Speaker of the House Mike Hayden.



The good, loyal Democratic county chairs across the state were very, very unhappy with Carlin. They didn't follow issues, they followed patronage. They followed what they had run on to become county chair. And, you know, people were asking, what's going on here? And so [county chairs] out of Wyandotte County, Shawnee County, Sedgwick County, were very, very upset. That was giving Paul Dugan the idea that, "I want to be with them as soon as possible. The only way to make that clear is to separate myself from Carlin," and so he quit coming into work. And of course that job was part-time then. It wasn't like it was suddenly a big issue. He was getting a very minimal salary. He had a staff of one, maybe two.

[The lieutenant governor job] was an opportunity for him to be visible and maybe to succeed me down the road, that sort of thing. And suddenly he saw the opportunity to succeed me much earlier! Now, this was in the first two years. By the time the second two years came along, that possibility drifted away. He never did run; it never did develop into something real. You see, if Dugan had been a good, loyal lieutenant governor I think we would have had a very different picture. But he made it wide open for me, with him not on the list. I mean, nobody would have thought that I would go back to Paul Dugan and say I forgive you for abandoning me. *Whatever*. That would have been stupid. We later connected and we speak now. We're not close but, I mean, we're certainly not enemies. Dugan did what he thought was logical and I fully understood him.

So I obviously had an opening to pick Tom Docking [in 1982] and did, driven by a visible decision to merge the Carlins with the Dockings. When I say that there was no love lost between the Carlins and the Dockings, keep in mind when I'm talking about that, I'm talking about all those county chairs across the state. I'm not necessarily focusing on the family. You know, Bob Docking cut an ad for me in the 1978 election. Now some would argue that he should have gone further, he should have called all these people and said, "Get behind him." But, he did what he did. It was all those others who weren't happy.

In sitting down with Tom Docking, there was no big repair, no pleading or whatever. Tom came on board because he saw an opportunity, and he was loyal, dedicated. He and [his wife] Jill were friends and supporters. So, you have to understand this in the context of the whole picture. There wasn't this one-on-one duel between me and Bob Docking.²⁷

27. Tom Docking was only twenty-seven when he joined Carlin's 1982 gubernatorial ticket, but his serious mien, campaign work ethic, and family name turned out to be a great benefit to the Carlin campaign. Reporter Angelia Herrin, noted that "While he's out campaigning, Docking doesn't exploit the fact he comes from the most prominent Democratic family in Kansas—but neither does he struggle to separate his identity from it," and that Docking's mother told him "It's okay if they want to meet you first because you're the governor's son—because later they'll find out they like you for yourself" ("Lieutenant Governor Race a Battle of Traditions," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, October 13, 1982). Tom Docking would go on to be the Democratic nominee for governor in 1986, but he lost to Speaker of the House Mike Hayden. Secretary of State, *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1986*, 75.

THE 1990 PRIMARY CAMPAIGN

I ran because I felt there were additional opportunities. I certainly left office never thinking I would run again; I was looking for other opportunities. I thoroughly enjoyed my teaching at Wichita State University for three semesters and getting back into the private sector doing entrepreneurial things. I think it was looking at the issues, looking at the direction of the state, feeling that in some areas where some things had been started and they weren't going necessarily how I felt comfortable with and saw that maybe there was an opportunity to provide some additional leadership for the state.

The crux of the problem in 1990 was one, overconfidence, with my staff, myself, my supporters. And secondly, totally underestimating a woman [Joan Finney] that had gone to every damn bean feed, for sixteen or twenty years, that the Democratic Party had ever held in the state of Kansas! And, she was a former Republican, and she retained some of that Republican support. She had been a staff person for [former Senator and Governor] Frank Carlson for many, many years.²⁸

One of the lessons I took from 1990 is it is very, very difficult to debate someone who doesn't want to have an in-depth discussion of all the issues. Joan Finney, whether by intention or not, she had these two or three points and she stuck with them and there was no discussion of anything complex. And what I teach my students is—I use [former Democratic Illinois Governor and presidential candidate] Adlai Stevenson as an example—you don't want to be the "egghead." And if you are, you gotta have a strategy to address it as much as you can. To some extent I think that reasonable people would say that I was the egghead in 1990, but I wasn't against Bob Bennett in 1978. That was to my advantage in 1978, I was the one who was connecting with "Joe six-pack." But in 1990 I had come out of sixteen years of government service, I was the former speaker, the former two-term governor, I understood the damn issues and I had a plan that I felt would correct the problems of Hayden's four years, in depth.

28. As mentioned in the introduction, Joan Finney, a Topeka native who served as state treasure for sixteen years (1975–1991), won the 1990 Democratic primary with 47 percent of the popular vote (Finney/Francisco, 81,250; Carlin/Johnston, 79,406; Phelps/Groves, 11,572), and defeated Mike Hayden in the general: 380,609 to 333,589. Finney chose not to seek her party's nomination for a second four-year term in 1994; she died in July 2001 at age seventy-six. "Former Gov. Finney dies," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 29, 2001; Lynn Hellebust, ed., *Kansas Legislative Handbook* (Topeka: Government Research Service, 1990); Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1990*; Warren Armstrong and Dee Harris, eds., *Populism Revived: The Selected Records of Governor Joan Finney, 1991–1995* (Wichita, Kans.: Hugo School of Urban and Public Affairs, Wichita State University, 1998).

In the 1990 primary we didn't do polling that much. I mean, why waste money? We were raising money. And also the other factor that we didn't anticipate, Fred Phelps was in the race. I learned something from that, you know. You've got to watch these multiple candidate primaries, particularly when there's no runoff. And I really believe a lot of people that were very friendly and supportive of me voted for Joan because they didn't want her embarrassed. You know, a woman running for governor, always been good to their bean feeds and supporters. And don't get me wrong here in terms of how I'm describing her, I'm just trying to paint it in a picture of how I saw it. She had paid her dues, Joan Finney had, and she'd been a loyal Democrat, and had put together a grassroots [organization] for the 1990 race that eclipsed my 1978 effort in many respects. Whether it was organized or not, it was there. And it was still close. What it would have been like one-on-one without Fred Phelps, I don't know.

To put this in context, in 1988 the Phelps family was very, very active, and publicly so, in the Al Gore [presidential] campaign. It was before going crazy on the gay stuff. "Before the Now Fred Phelps," is the way to put it.²⁹ We had endless primary debates. Debating Joan Finney and Fred Phelps was like a nightmare. I mean, it *was* a nightmare. The classic one with Fred was at a Hutchinson church. And see, what I had failed to acknowledge, both of them were attacking me. Joan Finney attacked me because I was not a populist. I was opposed to initiative and referendum. I was opposed to the people running the state of Kansas, okay? And this kind of triggered a little bit with some of the old Docking thinking because Norbert Dreiling always wanted me, when he would privately kind of advise me a little bit, he'd push this issue, the initiative and referendum. I just frankly think that's bad government.³⁰

So they were both attacking me. And I failed to take into account that I wasn't responding. I mean, why would I have to respond to Fred Phelps? Why would I have to respond to a very nice lady but one never involved in issues beyond initiative and referendum? Why would I? Even

29. The "Now Fred Phelps" Carlin refers to engages, along with his congregants from the Topeka-based Westboro Baptist Church, in activities against homosexuals and the government, people, and culture of the United States. These activities include, but are not limited to, picketing the funerals of soldiers killed in the Iraq War. For extensive coverage of Phelps's activities, see the *Topeka Capital-Journal's* online resource: <http://www.cjonline.com/webindepth/phelps/>.

30. Miner, *Kansas*, 388; James W. Drury, with Marvin G. Stottlemire, *The Government of Kansas*, 6th ed. (Topeka: Public Management Center, University of Kansas, 2001), 93–94.

though she's likable, loved by Democrats? Voters understood. Anyway this night at this church, they're both going after me, but Fred Phelps's attack is: "John, I love you like a brother but, you know, on liquor by the drink, you're wrong." He didn't get into the gay issue; they were starting that a little bit, but he didn't bring that out in the campaign, but he did the alcohol issue. He said, "Every death on the highways in Kansas, it's your fault, John Carlin, and the people of Kansas need to remember that. He's the one that has brought us all these alcohol problems. We wouldn't have this if he didn't do it."

Yeah, liquor by the drink. It was one I literally pushed through and debated the Reverend [Richard] Taylor on that in that 1986 campaign.³¹ You know I went out to Beloit in one of the Chautauqua kind of revivals in the tent. It was significantly covered [by the media]. But anyway, Fred Phelps that night at the Hutchinson church says, "John, I love you like a brother but you're just as dumb as molasses on this one." Just ripped me, but it was over and over, the standard: "John I love you like a brother, but . . ." So at the end of the debate, I had the end of my ninety seconds to wrap up and so I turned to Fred and said, "Fred you know we have a lot of these to go," (this is maybe June), "we have a lot of these to go. If you keep up this 'You know, I love you like a brother,' by the time we get to the election, people are going to start to get suspicious about our relationship." He went white as a sheet and had no response. That was one of my great moments with Fred Phelps. He's gone from that position he took then to what I think is literally hating me. I don't know if I'd put it in the context of hate or not but it comes out like that when they attack people.

But, like I've always said, you know, losing can be helpful. I probably didn't think so [right after the election] but it opened up new opportunities. And certainly the opportunity to be Archivist to the United States [was] an incredible one. A fantastic set of challenges. Looking back in hindsight, it worked out beautifully for me and opened new doors that wouldn't have opened if I hadn't have taken on a challenge that probably wasn't the right one. It was time to move on and do something different. I had had my two terms. I probably should have been smart enough to know that was enough.

31. The Reverend Richard E. "Dick" Taylor was a long-time leader and highly visible spokesperson for Kansas United Drys, later Kansans for Life at Its Best, which opposed liquor by the drink, parimutuel betting, and the lottery. See Taylor's *I Love Kansas! History Made—History Remembered* (Leawood, Kans.: Leathers Publishing, 2001).



Joan Finney, a Topeka native who served as state treasurer for sixteen years (1975–1991), narrowly defeated former Governor Carlin to capture the 1990 Democratic gubernatorial nomination and went on to a relatively comfortable victory over incumbent Governor Mike Hayden in the general election. "The crux of the problem in 1990," according to Carlin, "was one, overconfidence, with my staff, myself, my supporters," and two, "totally underestimating" Finney's widespread, grassroots appeal. Kansas's first female treasurer and governor chose not to seek a second four-year term in 1994 but tried a political comeback two years later. The seventy-one-year-old Finney waged an unsuccessful campaign to capture the Democratic Party's nomination for the U.S. Senate seat formerly held by Senator Bob Dole.

GUBERNATORIAL STYLE

I don't know if activist is the right word but I certainly believed in taking charge. I wasn't shy about speaking up. I wasn't shy or uncomfortable about making decisions. And so I wanted to be involved. Yes, I had a chief of staff. Yes, I had a cabinet secretary. And I certainly delegated a lot of areas, almost all the specifics, because they weren't areas where I brought expertise. But in the bigger picture, putting a budget together for example, I was very actively involved in working with key partners and staff that was available

then to me from the executive branch in putting that first budget together and putting the legislative package together. I had people that helped me work the legislature but I was very actively involved myself. So I was very much a participant. I didn't exaggerate delegation, I can say that for sure.

[For example, as governor] I took a discussion literally across the state in a series of town meetings and public press conferences laying out where we were, laying out the challenges, laying out the options, alternatives, what we could do if we were willing to be supportive of additional revenue measures. And in the process we developed very strong editorial support across the state for investing in the future of the state, for doing what was right for the state. And so I was able in my second term—even though the legislature was even more Republican—to come back and to get the votes and the support necessary from a Republican legislature to pass a very extensive redoing of the taxes: income [tax], sales tax, user taxes (including somewhere in a couple of these areas [room] for transportation), [and] the gasoline tax, because highway needs were very evident.

But I think the key was going to the people first and being very open and clear about the issues, very clear about the needs and gaining support, so that when I went to the legislature they were aware that I was building some public support. They had the experience with me on the severance tax where they had to in the end come around and be supportive. Again, working very closely with them, and not making it partisan, making it Kansas oriented, what's best for Kansas. We were able to put together a revenue program that allowed us in very difficult times to invest in education and invest in transportation and take care of our people at a level that certainly is not ideal, but that was comfortable for all of us trying to do our best for the people of Kansas. We certainly as an administration demonstrated we weren't just treading water.

I think leadership skills and decision-making skills are absolutely critical. Yes, you want good decisions. But at some point one of the worst things that can happen is for a decision not to have been made or put off too long. A lot of times you can make a decision, then if it's the wrong decision make a correction and go on instead of stewing on it over and over and over again. Decision leads to accountability, and some people don't quite have the personality or the set of experiences in life that allow them to just do that.

I personally believe people are ready for tough decisions. They are ready for the truth, ready to be told the reality. But there's a tendency—and this is across the board,

this is not making a partisan statement in any way, shape, or form here—there's a tendency to get through the next election. And maybe times have changed a lot and maybe dramatically, and I certainly acknowledge things are much more viciously partisan today than in my tenure in public life. But I certainly took from my experience and also felt at the time that just taking a "here's where we are folks, here are realities," approach worked; saying "I'm not trying to dictate how we proceed, but here's some of my thinking," and then bring people along, [is a way] that you can bring about change. But change requires, first of all, leadership. And secondly, the capacity to make decisions, good decisions, and move things forward, and be willing to take some risks to make things happen.

THE CARLIN LEGACY

I think I would like [people] to know we worked hard. I say "we" because it was done as a team. And again, I want to remind people it was done as a team including Republicans and working with Republicans across the state. I would want folks to know that we tried to honestly address the challenges we faced at the time and that we worked very hard to do what was best for the people, that we felt like our responsibilities were not just for the short-term but the long-term. We had responsibilities to future generations as well, to do our best in a time in which we had the opportunity to lead what I've always considered the great state of Kansas.

John Carlin's defeat in the 1990 race for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination marked the last time he would put his name on a ballot for public office. But, as Carlin notes, the defeat led to an appointment by President Bill Clinton in 1995 to be the Archivist of the United States. The Archivist is responsible for safeguarding and making available for study all important public documents of the nation. After some early criticism of the appointment of a former governor to a position that had traditionally been non-political, Carlin gained the respect of many in the history, archival, and library communities. In 2000 William Maher, a former president of the Society of American Archivists—one of the organizations that opposed Carlin's appointment—said, "As it turns out, the National Archives under John Carlin has made significant progress on many issues important to archivists and historians."³²

32. William Matthews, "'Anytime, any place' archivist," *Federal Computer Week*, August 28, 2000.

In 2005 Carlin retired from the National Archives and moved from Washington, D.C., back to Kansas. But, like other former Kansas governors before him, he was not content to spend his retirement playing golf or taking it easy. Said Carlin, "At some dinner in Washington, D.C., I sat next to a heart doctor, who told me, without being asked, 'Don't ever retire. That's the worst thing you can do for your health. You can take on a less stressful job, that's smart. You can take a little longer vacations, that's smart. But don't retire!' So I haven't really retired." Indeed he hasn't. Carlin lives in Manhattan, Kansas, teaching courses on practical politics and leadership at Kansas State University, but

also spends time in Washington, D.C., as chair of the Pugh Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production. And, as Carlin noted, "I also serve on the Kansas Bioscience Authority and it takes a significant amount of time to stay on top of it and be a responsible member of the authority."

Carlin's passion for Kansas history and politics remains strong, as evidenced by his frequent references during the 2008 interview to what he is trying to teach his students at Kansas State about his experiences in government. In his "retirement" role as teacher, it is clear that Governor Carlin came back to Kansas to continue his public service, not retire from it. KH