



“YOU HAVE TO LIKE PEOPLE”

A Conversation with Former Governor William H. Avery

edited by Bob Beatty

William Henry Avery, born on a farm near Wakefield, Kansas, on August 11, 1911, served as the state’s thirty-seventh chief executive, from January 11, 1965, to January 9, 1967. Although his gubernatorial service was short, Avery’s outgoing personality and ability to win elections made him a central figure in Kansas Republican Party politics throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Avery first ran for the Kansas House of Representatives in 1950, but his political career really began years earlier when he was a leader of local opposition to the U.S. Corps of Engineers’s damming of the Republican River in their attempt to stop the disastrous flooding that had plagued eastern Kansas for years. Avery’s stake in the opposition was personal—the proposed dam would destroy the farmhouse his father, Herman W. Avery, built and in which he had grown up. He was never able to halt construction of the dam, but his fervent efforts not only led to his election to two terms in the state legislature (1951–1955), but also propelled him into the U.S. Congress, where he served from 1955 until 1965.

Unable to stop the Tuttle Creek Dam and Milford Reservoir and finally frustrated with being a Republican in the Democratic-dominated U.S. House of Representatives of the early 1960s, Avery gave up his seat to come back to Kansas and run for governor in 1964. In a crowded Republican primary election, Avery defeated seven opponents to secure the GOP nomination. In the general election he defeated Democrat Harry G. Wiles with 51 percent of the

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Avery grew up on this farm near Wakefield, Kansas. His entry into politics was a direct result of the Milford Reservoir Dam project, which threatened to flood the family farm. Although Avery later acknowledged that the Milford Reservoir and other dam projects were good for the state, he did lament the loss of his father's "fine big house," seen in this early picture of the farm.

popular vote to Wiles's 47 percent. But Governor Avery lost his bid for reelection in 1966, receiving only 44 percent of the popular vote to Democrat Robert Docking's 55 percent.¹

Bill Avery's two years in office were busy ones. In education the governor pushed through legislation that increased the state's share of elementary and secondary school funding from 25 percent to 40 percent and also expanded state services in areas

such as mental health, and it was his administration that established the statewide community college system. In order to pay for these services, Avery endorsed a package of income and sales tax increases. Along with his support for establishing a state income tax withholding system in 1966, the tax package was used by Democrat Robert Docking as a bludgeon with which to hamper and ultimately defeat Avery in his quest for reelection.²

1. Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1964, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, [1964]), 17–20, 63–64; Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 212–14; see also Joel Paddock, "Democratic Politics in a Republican State: The Gubernatorial Campaigns of Robert Docking, 1966–1972," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 17 (Summer 1994): 108–23. Avery was the first Republican governor since 1896 to lose a reelection bid after having received the party nomination; Governor Fred Hall failed to win the nomination for a second term in the party's 1956 primary election.

2. In his inaugural address Governor Avery gave notice that he planned to be an agent of change, saying "Any change or adjustment is usually inconvenient, sometimes even painful. It always presents some problems. Some of these problems beg a most difficult solution. We must never accept the status quo for our society unless we also accept being relegated to the status of a people who have lost their will to win and to progress. . . . The necessity for some changes are self-evident." See "Inaugural Address, Honorable Wm. H. Avery," copy for release Monday, January 11, 1965, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; for his more detailed remarks, see "Message of Governor Wm. H.

Governor Avery dealt with various social issues during his time in office. He denied a sixty-day reprieve request from the "In Cold Blood" killers, Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, who were subsequently hanged in April 1965. In that year Avery also allowed a controversial birth control information bill to become law without his signature. In the field of civil rights, Avery expressed support for the Kansas Civil Rights Commission, but also had to deal with seventy-five civil rights demonstrators who camped out in his statehouse office on April 2, 1965, demanding passage of a fair housing bill. Another ongoing social issue under Avery's tenure was the battle over liquor laws, which he tried to address by authorizing the state's first private club law.³

Avery was also a tireless "champion" of Kansas and genuinely enjoyed the ceremonial duties of the governorship that took him to countless county fairs, beauty pageants, ribbon-cuttings, and awards ceremonies. Very few governors in Kansas history enjoyed the job more than Bill Avery, something which made his reelection defeat a terrific blow to him personally and, considering it meant the end of his public life in Kansas, a loss to the state as well.

This article is excerpted from an interview conducted with William Avery in December 2003. Interviewer questions have been omitted, and footnotes have been added to provide further explanation of topics and relevant source citations. Video footage and a complete transcript of the December 3, 2003, interview, which was part of a series of conversations with Kansas's six surviving governors, are available at www.kansasmemory.org/item/212031. The overall project that gave rise to the interviews was an initiative by Bob Beatty and Mark Peterson from the political science department of Washburn University to capture on video the histories of Kansas governors John Anderson, William Avery, John Carlin, Mike Hayden, Bill Graves, and Kathleen Sebelius. "'You Have to Like People': A Conversation with Former Governor William H. Avery" is the second in a series of articles based on those interviews.⁴

Avery to the Kansas Legislature, January 18, 1965," Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; "Kansas Solvency Bid," *Kansas City Star*, January 18, 1965; for a later discussion of the various issues Avery tackled as governor, see "Withholding tax system initiated in Avery's term," *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 1, 1976.

3. "Governor Evicts 75 Demonstrators After Sit-In for Fair Housing Bill," *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 3, 1965; "For Stronger Law On Rights," *Kansas City Star*, February 22, 1965; and others, in "Kansas Legislature, Clippings," vol. 35, 1964-67, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; see also the extensive Correspondence of the Governor's Office, Governor William H. Avery, January 11, 1965-January 9, 1967, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

4. For this published version of our conversation with Governor Avery, passages from the 2003 interview have 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,

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

I grew up, of course, on a farm. But my father [Herman W. Avery] grew up just a little ways north [of Wakefield, Kansas] and his father organized a country school district up there. That's where my father went to school. I went to elementary school and high school in Wakefield. My father and mother [Hattie Coffman Avery] were both college graduates, which is a little unusual for their age. My father was a graduate of Kansas State. He lived just across the river from it you might say, twenty-five miles. My mother graduated from the College of Emporia, they called it at that time. She came to Wakefield to teach school and that's how they met. My wife came to Wakefield to teach school forty years later. That's how we met. And so we were both farmers, both married schoolteachers, and both our marriages lasted sixty-four years. I think theirs didn't last that long because my father died quite a few years of age younger than I am now. So their marriage probably lasted fifty years.⁵

My father graduated from K-State in 1898. That's one hundred some years ago. His father had taught school in Vermont before he came out here so he had an educational background. And on my mother's side—this impresses me—I'm not sure my grandfather was very excited about his kids going to school, they were in Lyon County, not too far from Emporia. My grandmother was determined her kids were going to go to Emporia State [University, previously Kansas State Teachers College]. So she rented a house in town and took in boarders so she could send her children to Emporia State. When you stop and think, she was probably in her late forties by that time, but it must have been a tremendous responsibility for her to move her children to a new environment and indicate to them that they were going

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.

5. Avery's grandfather, Henry Avery, who started his farm and family in Clay County in the late 1860s, raised purebred Percheron draft horses, but Bill Avery and his father concentrated more on a feed and livestock operation, although they also raised horses and Hereford cattle. Hattie Coffman Avery attended the State Normal School, later Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, not the Presbyterian college of that name. The governor's father, Herman Avery, served a term in the Kansas state senate, from 1909 until 1913, as a delegate to the Farmers' National Congress, which met at Niagara Falls from September 22 to October 10, 1901, and as a long-time member of the State Board of Agriculture and was president of the board in 1922. Avery discusses his farm in "Bill Avery Came Home to Putter, Not Politick," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, July 29, 1979; see also Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors*, 212; U.S. Census, Kansas, Republican Township, 1870, 1880, 1900; *Annals of Kansas, 1886-1925, Two Volumes* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1954, 1956), 1:508, 2:25; "A Roster of Kansas for Fifty Years," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1903-1904* 8 (1904): 535; "Official Roster of Kansas, 1854-1925," *Kansas Historical Collections, 1923-1925* 16 (1925): 677.

to have the opportunity to graduate from college. But I mention that to say that I had the unusual opportunity of having support for education on my father's side and also on my mother's side and both families were farmers. And very few farm children got to go to college in those times.

Practically all of the [Wakefield] high school graduates that went to college, of course, went to Manhattan because they could almost walk there. I'm exaggerating, but it was before the [reservoir] extended. It was only about twenty-two miles away. Now it's almost double that because you have to drive around it. I thought a lot about college and I

heard so much about Kansas State. My father bragged. He went to a few football games and he was on the Board of Alumnae and Alumni Association, blah, blah, blah, and he always had a first name acquaintance with the president of K-State. My brother and sister went to school there. And I came along and I decided I would like to do something a little different than that.

So, I got on a train and I didn't get off at Manhattan, I just rode on down to the next college town. That is a little of a misstatement because Washburn would have been between. Let me apologize. But at that time I don't think I ever heard



Avery genuinely enjoyed the ceremonial duties of the governorship that took him to countless county fairs, beauty pageants, ribbon-cuttings, and awards ceremonies. Very few governors in Kansas history enjoyed the job more than Bill Avery, pictured at the 1966 state fair in Hutchinson with the newly crowned Dairy Princess.

of Washburn. This was 1929 I'm talking about. I decided to go to the University of Kansas. And I'm not sorry that I did when I got into politics. It was not in my congressional district but I developed a very solid support group in Manhattan in Riley County despite having been a KU graduate. And then I had my KU friends, who are kind of scattered all over Northeast Kansas. So it kind of gave me a double base to campaign on. So I have to apologize to a lot of my friends around here because I didn't go to K-State as most of them did. But I have no regrets. I was very happy there.

I also had intentions—not commitments—but intentions, of possibly being a lawyer. So that was another attraction to me of KU because I knew it had a law school. I was taking some pre-law courses in the college, and that went alright. But then I had almost enough credits to graduate so they permitted me to enroll in law school to take two or three courses. I decided then I didn't want to be a lawyer after I had two or three courses. They resented my being there I found out later. The law school resented anybody enrolling in law school if they weren't going to be a full-time law student. So I know they didn't try to make me comfortable and they sure didn't.

I will remember this as long as I live. The first day of class [at KU] the professor came in with a big stack of cards. He would call the roll taking one card at a time and mispronouncing part of the names. I was accustomed to that because I was in my fourth year when I was over there. But the first day over in law school the professor came in, folded his hands and sat behind his desk and said, "I will now call the roll." And he sat there and called the roll without ever looking at anything. And I thought, "Boy, if this is what law school is like, I'm not sure this is for me." Well there were other reasons, of course, but that did shake me up a little bit. After seeing professors for three and a half years over in college and they had been there a lot longer than I had, and they were still using cards to call the roll. But this professor came in, didn't smile, just folded his hands and said, "I will now call the roll," and waiting for people to answer every time he called a name. That's a poor excuse [for not finishing law school], probably there were other reasons, but this is the reason I give for it.

"BIG DAM" POLITICS

Well it goes back to Milford Reservoir. I came right back from college and took over the farm. I evolved as kind of a spokesman for the lower part of the Republican Valley as opposing the reservoir and being in that group I became acquainted with a lot of people over at Tuttle Creek who

were opposing Tuttle Creek [Dam]. So when it began to get heated up some, why I knew that group and we worked together rather effectively. Well, I won't say effectively because they built both reservoirs, but we worked very hard at it, and mostly at our own expense.⁶

And I should say too, that we had the 1935 flood and we were concerned about floods and dikes along the cities of Topeka and Manhattan. Nobody was thinking about a shortage of water at that time, it just seemed like we had more water than we knew what to do with. And so my later appreciation of Milford Reservoir wasn't even thought of at that time.⁷ We didn't want to have to be dislodged for somebody else's convenience. That was a kind of selfish attitude, as I say I don't apologize for it. Being the third Avery owner of the farm, I didn't have it given to me. But it was arranged so I could acquire the other interest in it. And I was happy here.

I was encouraged to run for state legislature. I was encouraged because local people appreciated what I had done. They weren't very happy—I won't say it that way, but they thought they could be better represented, I'll put it that way. So I was encouraged to run [in 1950].

I'll never forget the day I had the crew getting ready to go out and bail hay. We had tractors and wagons and the crew just ready to leave to go to the field and here were

6. Opposition to the government's program to build big dams and reservoirs to "control" the rivers of the Missouri River valley originated in the mid-1930s and lasted for more than two decades. See Dale E. Nimz, "Damming the Kaw: The Kiro Controversy and Flood Control in the Great Depression," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Spring 2003): 14–31; Gary Baldrige, "Pottawatomie County Says No to Prairie Preservation," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 16 (Summer 1993): 94–107; Katherine E. Miller, "Remembering the Controversial Tuttle Creek Dam," *Kansas Quarterly* 20 (Fall 1988): 81–88. Construction on the dam of the Republican River that created the Milford Reservoir—and flooded more than half of the Avery farm, including the area where the main house stood—began on July 13, 1962. The Tuttle Creek Dam, which regulated another tributary of the Kansas River, the Big Blue, began a decade earlier, on October 7, 1952. Although Avery's political career was launched and fueled by his opposition to the reservoirs, he now believes that he was wrong and that the projects were good for the state. It was, however, a bitter pill for him to have to watch portions of his family farm disappear under Milford Lake. When he returned to the land in 1979, *Wichita Eagle-Beacon* reporter Al Polczynski wrote that Avery "stared across the shallow water where bare gray trunks of dead trees jutted from the surface. There was a sadness to his face. 'Dad had a fine big house. A very fine big house.' . . . [his] voice took on a scratchy quality as he talked about it" ("Bill Avery Came Home to Putter, Not Politick").

7. Ironically, as Governor Avery implies, during the late 1930s many Kansans were plagued by too much water, while farmers, of course, battled severe drought and dust, which often meant crop failure. By the time Avery himself seriously engaged the issue a decade later, drought was not an immediate concern of Kaw Valley farmers. Serious discussion of and planning for the construction of "tributary reservoirs" began in the wake of the 1935 flood and with the passage of the Flood Control Act of 1936. Nimz, "Damming the Kaw," 26–31; Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 326–31.

these people from Clay Center down asking me to run for the state legislature. I said, "Well, I hadn't even thought about it." I criticized my father, who I'm very fond of, for being away from home so much. I just stayed here and I got kind of my plan not to leave. Well, they gave a lot of reasons why they thought I should run. I said, "Okay, I'll make a deal. If you will guarantee I won't have a primary I'll probably consider to run, but I don't want to have to campaign at a primary and then possibly campaign in the general election." They came back in about a week and said, "We got it fixed; you won't have a primary." I said, "I hope you know what you're talking about. It is a little hard to control who might want to run for the legislature." They said they were sure nobody would run against me. That's the way it happened. And Clay County is one of the strongest Republican counties in Kansas, I think number one, two, or three, so I didn't even have an opponent in the general election, and I didn't have an opponent when I ran for my second term.⁸

RUNNING FOR CONGRESS

[I ran for Congress] to stop Milford Reservoir. Obviously that is what got me into this. So that was high on my list. I won't say it was the only issue, but this was in 1955 [*sic*, 1954], Eisenhower was running very popular and there weren't a lot of issues that people were concerned about. Unemployment was minimal and World War II had increased sales tax revenues so there were no serious tax problems.

Albert Cole had been congressman from Northeast Kansas and a very popular one. He had gone through the tough years of Truman and he was there just one term under Eisenhower. I can't remember if he ever had an opponent, an effective opponent anyhow. I was always for him, so I wasn't really concerned about him very much because he was conceded in this district—he was going to be re-elected. But Tuttle Creek came into his defeat.⁹ In the Blue Valley and Republican Valley action, he's opposed to Tuttle Creek and he's opposed to Milford, and that made him pretty solid in this area. Then after the 1942 flood that came

8. In 1950 Avery actually did have a Clay County opponent for that seat in the Kansas legislature—Prohibition Party candidate Ed Woellhof, who received 881 votes to Avery's 2,864. Secretary of State, *Thirty-Seventh Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1949–1950* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, 1950), 93.

9. Congressman Albert M. Cole, a Holton Republican, was first elected to the U.S. Congress in 1944 and indeed served through the Truman years; but he was defeated in his fourth bid for reelection in 1952, the same year that Dwight D. Eisenhower won the presidency. Avery's memory on this point was off by a couple of years. Miner, *Kansas*, 327; "Essay on Kansans in Congress," www.kshs.org/research/topics/politics/essay_congress.htm.

along, why there was a lot of damage downstream, and that revived the downstream support for the reservoirs. I knew Albert and I didn't interrogate him very seriously on this, but he gave me the impression he voted against putting this money in for Milford and Tuttle Creek. But he didn't get up and oppose it.

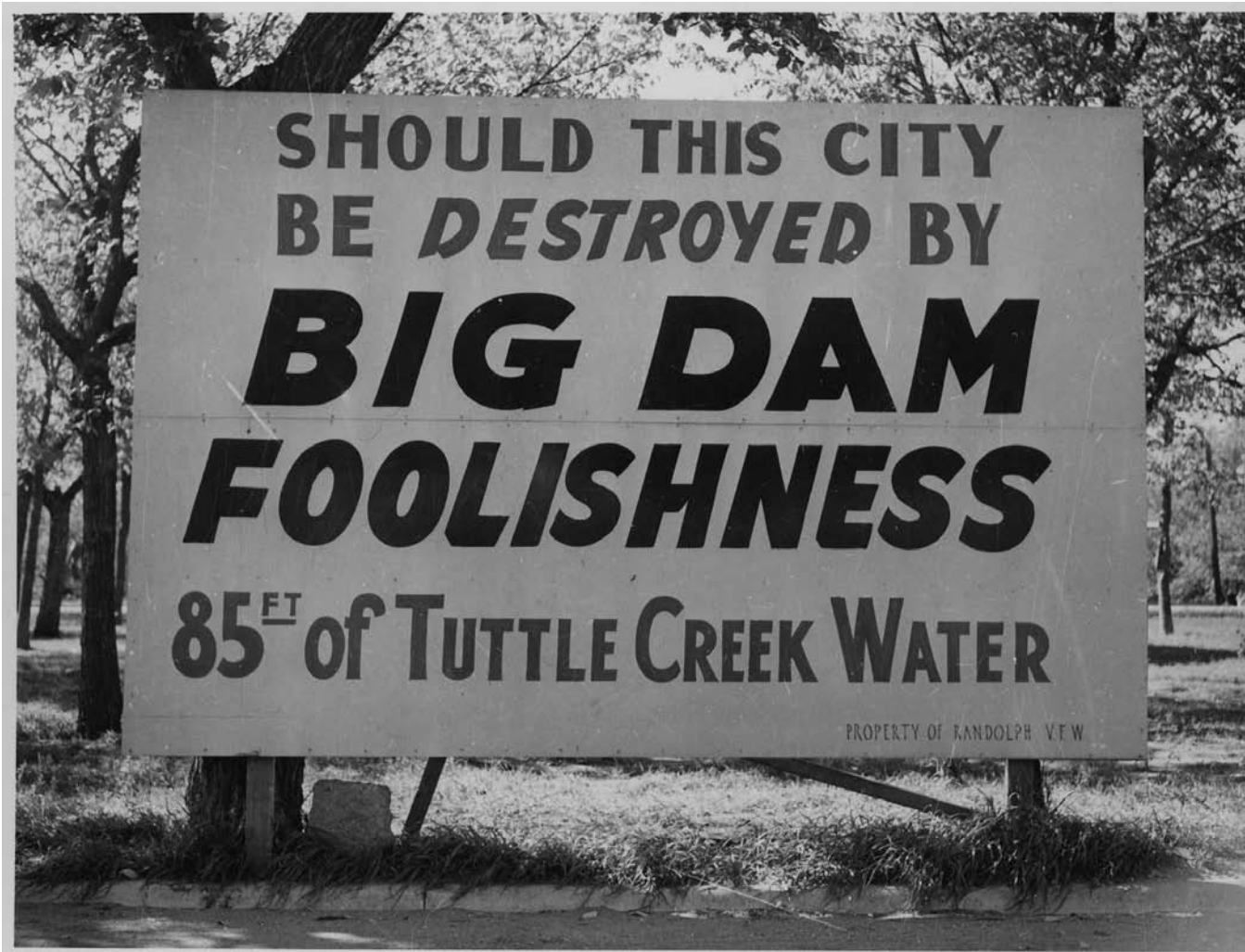
That turned on the so-called "Blue Belles" from the Republican Valley—it got quite a sensation at that time. They called themselves the "Blue Belles from the Blue Valley" and went out and campaigned against Albert in favor of a Democrat from Brown County who had never held public office before, Howard Miller. He defeated Albert Cole.

So that kind of set the stage for some other Republicans to run against Mr. Miller, and I had achieved some recognition in the opposition side. I could say that I've always been against the reservoirs, I'm just not against it because Howard Miller was against them. I got to run against him because I had a history in the opposition and I was known in the Blue Valley. . . . I was known and so I had kind of a basis of support to run for Congress.

I had some opposition. My main opponent was Doral Hawks, a supporter of reservoirs, and that gave him a solid base in Topeka because Topeka had been devastated by [flooding in] 1935 and damaged by [flooding in] 1942. So it came down to that contest. We were not close friends, but he had been a legislator, so I knew I was going to have some strong opposition. It went along and I had four or five opponents and I think that the two of us got most of the Republican votes. I didn't win overwhelmingly, but it wasn't a squeaker. I think by several thousand votes I won.¹⁰

After I was there a time or two Doral Hawks became one of my most loyal supporters, and when I ran for governor he took a very active part in my campaign in Shawnee County, something I'm very proud of because in a significant election the guy that's defeated in a primary, he can say what he wants to but it leaves a little scar. We became closer friends after I was elected than when we were campaigning. So that's a thing, an event, that I look back on with some satisfaction, that we had a very hard campaign and a fairly close campaign but no scars left over because it was on issues, it wasn't on personalities.

10. The Republican Party's 1954 primary, a five-way contest for what was then the Kansas First Congressional District, was quite close. Avery won a plurality with 40 percent of the votes cast (22,077), and Hawks came in second, receiving almost 37 percent (19,952). From 1943 to 1963, Kansas had six congressional districts; the First District contained thirteen counties in the northeast corner, including Clay, Riley, Brown, Leavenworth, and Shawnee counties. Secretary of State, *Thirty-Ninth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1953–54* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, 1954), 18.



"I evolved as kind of a spokesman for the lower part of the Republican Valley," recalled Avery, "as opposing the [Milford] reservoir and being in that group I became acquainted with a lot of people over at Tuttle Creek who were opposing Tuttle Creek [Dam]." Their position is captured on this sign, property of the Randolph, Kansas, V.F.W., highlighting the cost of the dam projects on local communities.

Then of course I had to run against this incumbent, Howard Miller. These Blue Valley Belles got a lot of publicity by campaigning for Howard Miller, saying he stopped Tuttle Creek. He didn't, Eisenhower took it out of the budget, that's what stopped it. He got the credit and was there and opposed it and Albert lost it. And Albert doesn't say this to me, but he was quoted as saying those Blue Valley women are the ones that defeated him. You could see that it aroused a lot of publicity for a bunch of women going out and campaigning. In Kansas, women hadn't been too much involved in campaigning, and the news media all picked it up and reported on all the campaign tours these ladies made. Then when I came along, it gave the

Blue Valley Belles quite a problem because I had been their friend and they had supported me. But some of them thought that they owed Howard Miller something. I still carried Riley County, but not in the proportion that I did later after Howard Miller wasn't on the ticket anymore. You ask a simple question and I gave you an excessive answer, but that's how I got in politics, and I don't regret it.¹¹

11. Avery's Democratic opponent in 1954 and again in 1956, Howard S. Miller, was a lawyer from Morrill, Brown County; he was seventy-three years old when he won his first and only term in Congress. *Thirty-Ninth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State*, 56; Secretary of State, *Fortieth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1955-56* (Topeka: State Printer, 1956), 24, 76.

CONGRESSMAN FROM KANSAS (1955–1965)

The [Kansas] House of Representatives was a pleasure. But as I say, being a congressman was a lot more appealing to me. After I got to Washington, I worked hard there and things went pretty well for me because the Republicans had not very good election experiences and my seniority rose a lot faster than it would in normal times. My second term, just my second term, I got a chance to go on the [Inter]state and Foreign Commerce [Committee]. I was interested in this because it had a lot to do with the agriculture industry as far as freight rates and things like that were concerned. I enjoyed that.

I had an opportunity to go on the Rules Committee, and the Rules Committee ran the Congress. And that, of course, was the highlight of my career. The Rules Committee is supposed to be an arm of the Speaker of the House, but it so happened that they lost control because there were ten Republicans and ten Democrats historically on the committee but two of the Democrats were always voting Republican and consequently [Speaker of the House] Sam Rayburn [D., Tex.] lost control of the Rules Committee. They decided to “pack the committee,” we call it, and they put on two more Democrats and one more Republican. That way it gave them a solid majority of one. And since the Democrats saw what



“I was a new kid on the block,” Avery remembered of his first years in Congress, “they all kind of just tolerated me for a while. They all, I think, thought I was too young to be in Congress. I was only forty-five years old or something like that.” Avery is pictured (far left) with the congressional delegation from Kansas in 1955, including (from left to right) Senator Frank Carlson, Representatives Errett P. Scrivner and Edward H. Rees, Senator Andrew F. Schoepel, and Representatives Clifford R. Hope, Sr., Wint Smith, and Myron V. George.

happened, their loyalty returned a little after that. But the chairman of the Rules Committee and a high ranking Democrat, one was from Virginia and the other one was from South Carolina, they tended to side with us part of the time anyhow. Even after they packed the committee the Speaker didn't run the committee, we ran it ourselves.

I often think about when I went to Congress, we had six congressional districts. You know, I was a new kid on the block and so they all kind of just tolerated me for a while. They all, I think, thought I was too young to be in Congress. I was only forty-five years old or something like that and most of them were in their seventies and eighties.¹² They all said nice things and said they were glad I was there and that gave the Republicans one nearer to the majority than it was before. I don't know whether my physical presence meant much to them but my being there meant something to them. I don't say that unkindly, kind of natural for those that have been there a long time. [They see] the whippersnappers that come there and they don't really know what they are getting into and they aren't going to contribute very much, especially if they defeated one of their friends, makes [it] hard to appreciate the new members. But the opportunity to serve in Congress is an opportunity. You have a perspective on national affairs and public life and issues of general consequence in the public. You get a lot of understanding or a lot of advice on both aspects of an issue and that makes you a better citizen and hopefully a better congressman.¹³

FAMILY SACRIFICES

I had a young family. I had a daughter, two, a son, four, another daughter who was seven, and Bill, my oldest son, I think he was thirteen. And I was gone a lot in the summer of 1954 campaigning

12. Actually, the rest of the Kansas congressional delegation, which included Errett P. Scrivner (R., Kansas City), Myron V. George (R., Altamont), Edward H. Rees (R., Emporia), Clifford R. Hope, Sr. (R., Garden City), and Wint Smith (R., Mankato), ranged in age from fifty-five to sixty-eight—their average age was sixty-one; but at forty-four, Avery was eleven years the junior of the next youngest member. The state's U.S. senators, Frank Carlson and Andrew F. Schoeppel, were sixty-two and sixty-one respectively.

13. For a discussion of Avery's style as a congressman, see "District's Bill Avery to Lead House Delegation," *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 4, 1960. Reporter Ron Kull wrote that "Avery's opponents wistfully admit that he is a hard campaigner—and an effective one. He isn't the mud-slinging variety. In fact, Avery seldom mentions his opponent's name."



*Governor and Mrs. William Avery
and Family*

"I didn't realize until recent years the responsibility [my wife] had in raising four kids," Avery recalled. "I can appreciate the responsibility she had raising four children and having them all turn out to be great friends and children that are concerned about their parents." Avery's family is pictured here on a gubernatorial Christmas card from 1966: (left to right) Bradley Eugene, Martha Sue, Mrs. Hazel Avery, Governor William H. Avery, William H., Jr., and his wife Alice Corley Avery, and Barbara Ann.

and I didn't realize the responsibility that left to my wife [Hazel Avery] to take care of four kids with ten or twelve years disparity in age.¹⁴ She wasn't on a budget and she always had a lot of help. I said, "You don't need to have me worry about that, so I can spend all my time on the campaign." I didn't realize until recent years the responsibility she had in raising four kids and especially with that age disparity. She had to make sure that they got to school and all the other things that go along with being a parent to school children. She had that all to herself for six months. I think it is appropriate to say here now: I can appreciate the responsibility she had raising four children and having them all turn out to be great friends and children that are concerned about their parents. I can't take much credit for that, a few genes perhaps. But as far as the day-by-day responsibility of raising a family, she has that all. I was home on weekends, blah, blah, blah. The kids were glad to see me and take them for a horseback ride or something, but that's not being a parent. From then on, the kids pretty much grew up in Washington. We were there for ten years.¹⁵

MORE "BIG DAM" POLITICS

Harry Truman had appropriated money for Tuttle Creek and planning money for Milford and Perry Reservoirs.

14. Hazel Bowles Avery was born in 1914 in Lathrop, Missouri, and grew up in Junction City, Kansas. She taught music in Wakefield, where she met Avery, and they married in 1940. She died on August 17, 2004. During her two years in the governor's mansion, Cedar Crest, Hazel Avery entertained frequently, estimating that she had over fifteen thousand guests. She also oversaw extensive renovations of the house. Said Mrs. Avery in 1967, "We wanted as many people as possible to have an opportunity to share our pride in the governor's mansion," and added that she had never been as busy in her entire life as she was during the time in Cedar Crest (Karen Carlin and Robert W. Richmond, ed., *Kansas First Families at Home: Residences, Residents and Recipes* [Topeka: Friends of Cedar Crest Association, 1982], 41-44). Hazel and Bill Avery also began a Cedar Crest tradition that continues to this day: the annual Governor's Easter Egg Hunt.

15. It is not just retrospectively that Bill Avery laments the time he lost with his children due to his political career and the sacrifices Hazel and the children made. In December 1960, the *Daily Capital's* Ron Kull wrote: "Avery seldom sees his wife, Hazel, or his four children during the fall months. This means that Mrs. Avery must take the full responsibility for getting the household going, starting the children in school, attending football games and the PTA. 'She's had very little help,' said Avery." In a February 1956 story in the *Kansas City Times* Avery's guilt over this lost quality time is evident. The story, "Kansas Politician Hauls Pony East to Make Children Happy," detailed how upset his four children were to have to leave their friends and home in Wakefield and move to Washington, D.C., noting that the children "loved country life and animals who were their friends." To try to alleviate their sorrow, Avery hauled the children's favorite pony, an Arabian named Korab, from Wakefield to D.C. for them to be able to ride. In fact, Avery mentioned retiring from public life in 1962 because of its toll on his family, saying "This isn't the usual way to raise a family." "Avery 'Interested' In Governor Office," *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 6, 1962; "Kansas Politician Hauls Pony East to Make Children Happy," *Kansas City Times*, February 6, 1956; "Avery To Lead House Delegation," *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 4, 1960.

When Eisenhower was elected he stopped Tuttle Creek and took out the planning money for Milford and for Perry. So then it became a challenge as to whether they're going to keep that money out of the Corps of Engineers program or stop the construction or whether it was going to proceed. This is a rather critical thing—and I hate to get into so much detail—but this is kind of part of Kansas history that I think is important and interesting. Eisenhower had stopped Tuttle Creek and he did not put the money back in for his second term. That left it open for the legislature, the Congress, to do what their will would dictate. The one ranking member on the House Appropriations Committee was from Kansas City, Kansas. Errett Scrivner was his name. And this story got back to me: He said, "I've been on this committee for fifteen years and never asked for anything before. Now I'm asking you to reinsert the appropriation for continuing Tuttle Creek Reservoir." And they did.

Andy Schoepel was senator at that time, and he conferred with the House, got word they were going to put it in, so Andy came out for it too. He was going to support the continuation of Corps of Engineers Flood Control Program. Here I was a new member, so the thing came back to me—my full responsibility was to get that item in the appropriation bill deleted. Well, you've been around long enough to know how much a new member of Congress, how much influence he would have getting an item out of the budget after the committee put it in without the president's recommendation, and also with a senior member of the Appropriations Committee being the principal sponsor of the item!

But I thought, well, I promised I was going to be against the reservoir so it is my responsibility to get this item out of the budget. So when the Appropriations Committee came up on the floor of the House, I prepared what I thought was quite an eloquent speech to delete the appropriation just for Tuttle Creek. That was the only one they put back in. And it came up for a vote. Cliff Hope was the only congressman from Kansas that voted with me. The other four [Errett P. Scrivner, Edward H. Rees, Wint Smith, and Myron V. George] all voted for the reservoir. I was kind of mad at the time. But, you know, stop and think about it, it'd be the second district at that time, southeast Kansas; every time it rained, they either had a flood or if it didn't rain they had a drought. Their soil was impervious to water, not like ours here. They had a problem. They were for all the dams they could get and they got quite a few since then. [Congressman] Wint Smith from northwest Kansas, he actually opposed my amendment to delete the fund. They always need rain in northwest Kansas. Before the vote he says, "I think we

ought to build a dam in every stream in Kansas just to save us water." I knew I didn't have any help there.

Let's see who that left, oh yeah, Congressman Ed Rees. I don't know how he decided to vote. I think he prayed a lot before he made up his mind. He had Wichita as his district and they had flood control out of the Arkansas River. He was from Emporia and they've always had floods. But he was a conservative. I think he would like to have voted for me, but he didn't. The whole thing came down to: I lost the Kansas delegation. So I came back to Kansas and to my home area and I said, get ready for Milford because I lost that vote on Tuttle Creek and I didn't get any help from the Kansas delegation, so accept this instead of fighting any longer; let's get with it and see what we can salvage and what we can negotiate to make this a developing area. I don't think I lost many votes over losing that, you know. We had been fighting that for thirty years, everybody was tired of fighting. A few diehards over in Blue Valley, well, I won't name any names, but I lost votes up in the upper part of the Blue River Valley. They thought if Howard Miller stopped it I ought to be able to stop it, too. But I didn't lose enough votes that made any difference.¹⁶

I can't really take issue with it because it enhances Kansas's supply of water, like all the other reservoirs, I include Tuttle Creek and the Perry Reservoir. We were all tied together in this fight. So we were all three in the same project. And I think time will make clear that these reservoirs were an economic benefit to Kansas despite all of the land that was taken off of the tax rolls and the income from that land.

ALLURE OF THE GOVERNORSHIP

How many former members of Congress do you ever hear about? I had been in the legislature and it was then that I appreciated the authority and the direction that a governor gives the state. Ed Arn was the governor and those were boon times, there were no financial problems. The sales tax had been enacted before him so all he had to do was count the money. He had his problems, but they were not difficult ones, they were political problems, not budget problems or unemployment problems.¹⁷

I don't think anybody that didn't make this decision

16. In fact, Avery's margin of victory over Miller in 1956 was virtually identical to that of 1954 (about 9,000 votes); but nearly 32,000 more votes were cast during the presidential election year of 1956. Avery captured 69,841 votes that year; Miller received 60,313. *Fortieth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1955-56*, 76.

17. Edward F. Arn, a Republican from Wichita, was governor during the years that Avery served in the legislature, from 1951 until 1955. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors*, 196.

would admit they ever thought about it. On the other hand I would say I think they all thought about it after they got in the legislature. To see the role, firsthand, see the role that the governor played not only in recommending and having to work for the passage of certain legislation, but he was also a public figure.

John Anderson was in his second term and no governor at that time had ever been reelected for a third term.¹⁸ And I was encouraged. I had a strong base in Topeka and I hadn't made any enemies in the legislature. You know, I've been around long enough—not many people remembered who their congressman was but they can remember who their governor was. You never hear much reference to Clifford Hope, who was a great congressman for Kansas and was there for forty years [*sic*, thirty years]. To the average person, Cliff Hope doesn't mean anything.¹⁹

One of my short campaign speeches and campaign program proposals was, "I want to be the number one salesman for Kansas." I tied that to, "A job for every young lady and young man graduating from our Kansas schools." That was remembered and they threw it back at me, sometimes in a friendly way and sometimes critically.²⁰ But you know, about being number one salesmen, they made fun of it in a friendly sort of way. It was alright because people laughed at it and no one could criticize you for taking that perception.

18. The 1964 Republican gubernatorial primary is considered the most power-packed contest in state history. There were eight candidates on the ballot, and six of them were well-established political heavyweights. These six included: Avery, a former state legislator and congressman; Paul Wunsch, a twenty-eight-year veteran of the state legislature; Harold Chase, lieutenant governor; McDill "Huck" Boyd, well-known newspaper publisher; William Ferguson, state attorney general; and Grant Dohm, three-term state legislator. See "GOP Battle-Royal Brews As Big-Wigs Enter Fray," *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 15, 1964; and "GOP Race May Outstrip '28's," *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 19, 1964. *Election Statistics, 1964*, 17-20, 63-64.

19. Clifford R. Hope, Sr., was indeed, as Governor Avery also said, "an important legislator from Kansas." A Garden City lawyer and Republican, who began his political career in the Kansas legislature in 1921, Hope was first elected to the U.S. Congress in 1926 where he worked tirelessly on behalf of the region's farmers. When his party gained control of the Eightieth Congress as a result of the 1946 election, Congressman Hope became chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, a leadership position he held from 1947 to 1949, and again from 1953 to 1955. Hope chose not to seek his party's nomination in 1956 but remained active, serving as president of the Great Plains Wheat, Inc., of Garden City, from 1959 to 1963. "Essay on Kansans in Congress," www.kshs.org/research/topics/politics/essay_congress.htm; Cliff Hope, Jr., *Quiet Courage: Kansas Congressman Clifford R. Hope* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1997).

20. Avery's 1966 newspaper advertisements for reelection argued that his job promotion campaign had worked, saying that "234 new industries creating more than 9,400 new jobs have been established during his first term, and employment has reached the highest in history." See "He did what had to be done . . . and he did it well!" *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 4, 1966.

Avery wanted to be “the number one salesman for Kansas,” a qualification he touted on this campaign door tag from 1964. He recollected that there were those who made fun of the slogan “in a friendly sort of way. It was alright and peopled laughed at it and no one could criticize you for taking that perception.”

STATE AID TO EDUCATION

I had the decision to make on state aid to education. A program had been proposed, they called it the School Foundation Program. Nobody quite understood what it was all about, except it was for statutory state aid to elementary and to high schools. And my campaign group, we considered this quite a while and decided we better be for it because *ad valorem* taxes had gone up every year since World War II, so they were the sole source of finance for elementary and secondary schools. When I was a legislator, if there was a lot of money left over, somebody came up with a bill to make maybe ten million dollars available, and they came up with kind of a hypothetical schedule for distributing the money. But that did not give the school boards any basis to calculate their budget for the next school year because they didn't know if this money was coming or not. So it seemed to me to be a logical thing that state aid was needed in order to put some cap on *ad valorem* taxes. So I came out for the School Foundation Program. I don't remember any other of my opponents—and I had quite a few—even took a side on the issue. I think I probably talked about that during the campaign more than any other one thing.²¹

21. Other issues Avery mentioned in the primary campaign included the lowering of property taxes, increased research programs in agricultural technologies, and a three point plan to improve the Kansas mental health program and improve services to the handicapped and seniors. Avery also promoted a “different viewpoint” on state government, saying, “If they want someone who has some different ideas and will promote progressive legislation, then they will vote for me” (“Kansas GOP Brass Fearful Of Party Split,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 18, 1964; “Campaign Trails,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 1 and 2, 1964). Avery did not hide the fact that he would be asking for a tax increase to pay for school funding, saying, “Of all apparent sources a tax increase appears to be the most equitable and feasible” (“State GOP Sweep Now Avery's Goal,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 4, 1964). Avery ended up winning the primary with 30 percent of the vote, as compared to 27 percent for Boyd, 25.4 percent for Wunsch, and 13 percent for Ferguson. On the night of the primary, after Avery's victory was clear, Governor John Anderson said to Avery, “Have you ever seen more big dogs killed in a dogfight?” In the general election Avery went on to defeat Democrat Harry Wiles, despite Kansas going for Lyndon Johnson in the presidential race, the last time the state has voted to send a Democrat to the White House. “Behind the Scenes In the Victory Camp,” *Topeka State Journal*, August 5, 1964; *Election Statistics, 1964*, 17–20, 63–64.

DO NOT DISTURB!

WE DID NOT WANT TO DISTURB YOU, BUT WE DID WANT TO REMIND YOU THAT **BILL AVERY** IS THE BEST QUALIFIED CANDIDATE TO BE GOVERNOR OF KANSAS

AVERY
REPUBLICAN
GOVERNOR



Avery lost reelection in 1966 to Robert Blackwell Docking, pictured above. Of the loss he stated, "I didn't lose by that many votes, so obviously I wasn't defeated by my opponent, I was defeated by the withholding tax." The defeat deeply affected Avery, who saw not being reelected as "kind of like taking out a bankruptcy in a different form."

I proposed a state aid to elementary and secondary schools and the institutions of higher learning and the taxes to support that additional assistance. And that made me a one-term Governor. It was a disappointment at the time, of course, because I got about everything I asked for and asked for quite a bit. The one mistake I made was the withholding tax. It's not a mistake to

have proposed it, but it was a mistake [as to the timing]. It was suggested that I suggest it to become effective at the beginning of the next calendar year, which would be 1967. And the Department of Administration, I give them credit. They suggested putting it off until after next calendar year, which was after the next election. It was good advice.

I visited with the wrong people in the legislature, I guess. They said, "You were successful in getting your program adopted, all your proposals were adopted under the tax consequences of it. If you go monkeying with that everybody else will say they want to change it. You better just be comfortable with the way things are." I said something like, "Oh, that doesn't amount to anything, nobody will ever see it." Well, I have to think they were giving the best of their advice, but some of those people didn't advise me well. I'm not sure their advice was in my interest. I remember very definitely reading—after the end of the first fiscal year after withholding tax went in—that we picked up ten thousand new taxpayers with the withholding tax. I distinctly remember reading that at the time. Well, the Department of Administration was a little embarrassed to find there was that many taxpayers they weren't collecting tax from in the first place. I didn't lose by that many votes, so obviously I wasn't defeated by my opponent, I was defeated by the withholding tax.

Having been defeated not by an individual but by a program that's still there, the disappointment of [not] being reelected at the time was critical. I never lost an election before. And everybody was congratulating me on things, there seemed to be general support for the programs that I had proposed, the state aid to elementary and secondary schools and to junior colleges. I put them in before I delivered my message, and that was well received. I have those things to pleasantly remember. Everything I proposed was accepted by the legislature and is still there. You know, you aren't going to have any public satisfaction out of that, but a lot of personal satisfaction that you must have proposed what Kansas needed or could usefully administer. Besides the aid to schools and the withholding tax, I made some other proposals that were new and they are still there.

I sort of insinuated this before, but I will say it more frankly now: Despite having been defeated for reelection, all of my proposals are still there. They didn't repeal any of them. They didn't repeal the withholding tax and didn't repeal the increase in the sales tax. That provided the support for the education programs. And I want to say again, we talked about the aid to elementary and secondary schools and later in the same proposal I included the community colleges. And this was certainly overdue. I want to give [Kansas State University president] Dr. James McCain some credit for that. I thought the presidents or principal officers of all Kansas institutions of higher learning would be opposed to giving state aid to junior colleges because

Recollections of Charles McAtee

Charles McAtee was a close aide to Governor John Anderson and also served in Governor Avery's cabinet as the Director of Penal Institutions and was interviewed as part of The Kansas Governor documentary project. The following excerpt from this September 10, 2004, interview gives further detail as to not only the leadership style of Governor Avery, but the devastating impact Avery's tax increases had on him in the 1966 election.

Governor Avery was a good governor. He was a strong governor. He was a strong man. I really grew to admire and respect him a great deal. Some folks thought that Governor Anderson had left the cupboard bare; that it was inevitable that there would have to be some kind of tax increase, just to sustain the government at the current levels in the next term, 1965–1967. Governor Anderson doesn't see it that way, and I understand that. Governor Avery sort of sees it that way.

I had just got out of the Marine Corps in 1953 and I was here for Governor Avery's first campaign for Congress in 1954—and he won that election by defeating Howard Miller, the Democrat, who had defeated Albert Cole in 1952—on the issue of the Tuttle Creek Dam. And I remember the campaign slogan for Bill Avery in 1954 was, "Stop Big Dam Foolishness!" I know that Governor Avery has come to realize the economic impact and the critical need for water and has now recognized that Tuttle Creek was inevitable, and Milford—which took his own personal farm—was inevitable. But at that time it was "stop big dam foolishness."

Now, he'd spent ten years in Congress and he comes back to a rough and tumble Republican primary in 1964, with Paul Wunsch and Harold Chase—mercy I forget who all, but it was rough and tumble. He comes out on top and had every reason to believe that he had a mandate to do what was right

for the state. Now, Dan Myers was the county attorney out in Clay County. Governor Avery brought him in as his executive assistant. Because of my acquaintanc with Dan, we used to bounce around what was the right thing to do. And it turned out that Governor Avery decided to do two things. One, he felt that we needed to start withholding on income taxes—which had not been done before, and increase the sales tax. And mercy, the sales tax was nominal compared to what it is today. But he did it in his first term. And I kept telling Dan: Just tough out this first term, don't do that in the first term, you can do it in the second term. Well, Governor Avery, being the leader that he was, implemented withholding and increased the sales tax to fund state government.

Then came Bob Docking. Nice guy. A lot of Bill Clinton in Bob Docking, personality wise, charismatic wise. He was charismatic. A very nice guy, a good man. His political genius was Paul Pendergast. And I'll never forget that campaign of 1966. Governor Avery's campaign [signs] had these beautiful sort of KU colors, sort of a crimson background with a navy-blue "AVERY" across it, about ten inches long. And back in those days we marred the beauty of the Kansas landscape, because you could put those political signs up on every fencepost, on every telephone pole, every utility pole across the state of Kansas, and they fluttered in the breeze long, long after the campaign. So, across this state on every utility pole and fencepost was this little sign—"AVERY"—some of them were horizontal and some of them were vertical. Paul Pendergast's genius was to print in the same colors a little four or five inch thing that said, "TAX." On every pole that had "AVERY" there would either be above it [or below it] stapled [a sign] saying "TAX." So on every pole, "TAX AVERY" or "AVERY TAX." They just beat that man about the head and bottom with "Avery Tax." And they beat him. It's that simple. And it's the tax increase that did it. He'd have been a great two-term governor, because he really hadn't even gotten off the ground. I do know that he was deeply hurt by it.

it would take away money that they might otherwise use. But Jim McCain and I had developed quite a close relationship. He was in my district so I always stopped by to see him when I was home and we always had a good long visit, not about politics, but the educational programs. When I talked to him about junior colleges he said, "Bill, we need state support for junior colleges. The war babies, they are just hitting the college level now. We're out of space, we're out of teachers. And some of these students are coming here before they are ready for a four-year college. And instead of opposing that I think you should support junior colleges so they can prepare some of these students for leaving home and adjusting to the curriculum that we have on the collegiate level in Kansas."²²

I think that was a program that doesn't get much attention from the state's perspective. Nevertheless, the state aid has been a lifesaver for them because they were strictly relying on an *ad valorem* tax and they had about reached their limit on that. Now they are providing an educational opportunity for lots of students that never would have had a chance to go to an institution of higher learning. I say that the principal decision I made [as governor] was state aid to education. It had just been kind of tossed around but it was getting to the point and it especially became critical because of the baby boomers, the children of the World War II veterans that were just entering the school age category.

As I say, this so-called foundation program they called it, nobody knew what that was until we got down to the fine print and said, "It will increase your taxes and the state aid to your local school." They thought they heard only about the state aid. I guess they didn't think about the taxes. Well, I shouldn't say that, they did understand it. But the ones that didn't understand it, they were the ones that were picked up by the withholding tax. That was not on my list at the time, that came along later, I don't think I brought that up in the primary. But I said that this will make necessary an increase in either or both of the income and the sales tax. And we went the both route.²³

22. James A. McCain served as the tenth president of Kansas State University from 1950 until 1975.

23. For more on the "Foundation Program," see "Message of Governor Wm. H. Avery to the Kansas Legislature, January 18, 1965," 4-5; "Kansas Solvency Bid," *Kansas City Star*, January 18, 1965, "To Tackle Tax Question Next," *Kansas City Star*, March 21, 1965; and "Avery's Tax Plans May Face Trouble," *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 28, 1965, in "Kansas, Legislative Clippings," 77-78, 104-7.22. James A. McCain served as the tenth president of Kansas State University from 1950 until 1975.



The primary skill required by a governor, according to Avery: "You have to like people." He considered himself "blessed with this genetic trend, that's enjoying being around people." The governor is pictured here with two young boys at a Shriner's event, one of whom holds a photo of the governor in his hand.

REELECTION CAMPAIGN

[Robert Docking, the Democratic Party's 1966 gubernatorial candidate,] ran for lowering taxes and the legislature followed him and lowered income taxes just a percent or something, I don't remember the figures. Then he ran out of money right away! To overcome embarrassment he proposed a tax on what he called "services." That's a tax on labor. He was a great supporter of the common man [editor's note: Avery was joking]. The common man didn't pay as much income tax as sales tax; he was shifting the

additional responsibility from the income taxpayers over to the average citizen on the sales tax.²⁴

[Losing the election was] just like losing your first football game I suppose. I say that facetiously, but [there's] a little something in common on that. You know, you're not

24. In his examination of the 1966 campaign, professor of political science Joel Paddock wrote that Docking's private polls showed that Avery had a 54 percent negative rating in the summer of 1966, with many citing that he had raised taxes unnecessarily. Most of Docking's campaign consisted of criticizing Avery on the income tax increase and withhold-

economically dependent on your outcome of your football season, but you are economically [impacted] if you're defeated in public office. It hurts. No use saying it didn't hurt because it did. It took quite a while to get over it. Now I can look back and laugh at it [editor's note: Avery was not laughing]. Anybody in public office obviously considers the consequence of not being reelected. Because that is kind of like taking out a bankruptcy in a different form. But I mean, it casts a shadow on the success of your decisions and your actions and everybody would prefer not to have that shadow cast over them. But losing an election does that. Well, I'll say this: I'm reminded frequently now of how nobody said they didn't vote for me, but the people that did vote for me say we're glad we did and you did the right thing.

NECESSARY SKILLS

[To be governor] you have to like people, number one. You can phrase that with a better academic definition, but if you don't like people they are not going to like you. It's just that simple. And I was blessed with this genetic trend, that's enjoying being around people. You can enjoy being around people and it doesn't mean you have to go out to dinner with them every Saturday night. And some people you go out to dinner with them once in a while, you'd just as soon not. That's exaggerating, but you don't always have a pleasure of a social gathering. But I always got along. I had neighbors up and down the road here before the reservoir went in. We had a threshing crew and I

ing tax, and complaining about government waste. Paddock also notes that the Avery campaign was "overly optimistic and unorganized" and he cites an "ineffective Republican organization." At the end of the campaign the incumbent governor was looking for anything to help, including doing two hours of "Ask Avery" TV five days before the election, where he took questions from viewers across the state. In a final rally to a small crowd the Saturday before election day, Avery poked a little fun at his elusive opponent, who had avoided concrete plans of his own, by saying, "On my way back from Salina tonight I heard a nasal voice I didn't recognize making a number of pauses, something like, 'Well, ah, no, ah, that is a very interesting question, ah, I mean a very good question. You know there are, ah, two sides to every question and I, ah, think thorough research should be conducted, ah, uh, before I decide which side of the question I will stand on.' I don't remember the man's name, but he is the candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket." On election night Avery blamed the tax issues for his loss, but also noted that voters were frustrated over national problems such as inflation, rising crime rates, the Vietnam War, and student protests. Avery also believed that Kansans continued to be frustrated by school district unification which occurred during Governor Anderson's term, but which Avery believed had a strong negative lingering effect on him. Paddock, "Democratic Politics in a Republican State," 113; "'Ask Avery' TV show Set Tonight," *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 3, 1966; "Tie Game, Says Avery," *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 6, 1966; "Early Margin Widens; Avery Gives Up Race," *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 9, 1966; *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1966, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, [1966]), 78; Avery, 304,325 votes; Docking, 380,030 votes.

filled their silos. Just kind of a fun neighborhood. But we were all compatible. And I think my ability to get along with my neighbors, I was able to transfer some of that to meeting strangers. One of my neighbors, he had been my neighbor for forty or fifty years and I was visiting with him not long before he died and he said, "Bill, you know, we were neighbors for so many years and we never had an argument." I thought about that since and it's true. And I think those are kind of intangibles.

You use the word skills. I don't like that word skills as [much as] I do "talents," to be able to communicate with people on their level. Sometimes that level is not very academically inspiring, I'll put it that way. But on the other hand, being a farm boy, I grew up with people like that. I could visit with them and understand what they were saying and hopefully say something back that they could understand.

[A governor also] has to be honest. Not all governors have been honest. But if you don't like people, they are going to have to learn to like you. And if you're not honest and they find that out, they may forgive you but they are not going to like you. I believe that's a rather simple expression of my philosophy and my retrospective evaluation of my experiences and experiences of other persons in public life.

BEING A GOOD GOVERNOR

Let me say it's a blend of both [political party and personality]. The present governor [Kathleen Sebelius] has a little of that blend. Her father-in-law [Keith Sebelius] was a congressman longstanding and friend of mine.²⁵ And her husband, Gary—when I found out he belonged to the same fraternity I belonged to, I didn't know that until later but that made another little line of communication. So I have nothing but pleasant relationships with the present governor. I didn't vote for her, of course, but I didn't complain about her. I thought she ran a fair campaign [in 2002]. Our candidate, I thought, made some mistakes. And so she went into office for me with an open mind and I think she has performed very well for a member of the minority party in a Republican state.

But all governors have the same problems, I mean, regardless who they are or what state they are governing. Sooner or later you read about their budget problems, or

25. Keith G. Sebelius, a Republican from Norton, represented western Kansas—the First Congressional District—in the U.S. Congress from 1969 until 1981. "Essay on Kansans in Congress," www.kshs.org/research/topics/politics/essay_congress.htm.

their rate problems, or other matters the public is divided on. The public makes up their mind after a while on these issues. But when they are in the decision stage it is kind of a challenge to the candidate. Abortion is on that list right now. No candidate wants to take a stand on that unless he's forced to. And I can understand that because you have very adamant factions, a little like prohibition. You have frozen sections of the public on both sides of the issue. And that is a challenge to a statewide candidate.

NO REGRETS

Here I am, I'm older than most other people and I work every day. I have a happy marriage and children and grandchildren and I have enough farm left over here to keep busy on. And I go there and work every day. I don't think I ever put a stick of wood in the fire that I didn't personally process, I'll put it that way. My land is all rented out, of course, but I'm busy all the time. I have cedar trees to cut at the pasture and fences to fix. It doesn't take a lot to keep me busy. But I feel exceptionally blessed with having outside work to do—what I enjoy doing rather than sitting around twiddling my thumbs watching some television program.

And at my age it's rather remarkable that I have the ability. I can't go out and do work like I could fifty years ago, but I can get quite a bit done and I enjoy doing it. I don't feel sorry for myself. I kind of look forward to it. And I'm exceptionally blessed in that regard because most people my age are in the arm chairs or on the golf course. And now when I write to my friends, I add a sentence: "I still haven't played my first game of golf." They write back and say, "You got to be lying. Nobody could be in politics as long as you were and not played the game of golf." So help me I haven't!

I don't have any regrets if I had to do it over again, I've told people. Even though withholding tax defeated me it was the right decision and I would still make it. I might have put it off until after the election, I won't deny that I had thought about that! But it was certainly—if we picked up, say ten thousand new taxpayers—in the best interest of Kansas because they were cheaters. They were cheaters if they were not paying their share of the income tax. So certainly that was good for Kansas. I have no apology to make for that.

[As governor] you are the Number One citizen. They all stand up when you come into a room. You can't help but think it is nice to be recognized and all of that, but the other side is you have these tough decisions you have to make. I will say frequently, tough decisions come. But on the other hand, your responsibility is to the state, not to a

private group that has a position that they are advocating. You can have an understanding but you don't have any obligation to them. And to the State of Kansas you have an obligation to render a decision that you feel is in the best interest of the state.

At age ninety-six, William Avery is the second oldest living former governor in the United States. He lives in Wakefield, not far from the large, red brick family homestead that had to be dismantled in 1964 to make way for Milford reservoir. The 1966 loss to Robert Docking effectively ended Avery's electoral career. He ran for the U.S. Senate in 1968 but lost in the GOP primary to an up-and-coming young congressman named Robert J. Dole.²⁶ Avery spent the next ten years in Wichita and Washington, D.C., working in the private sector for oil and petroleum companies and in the public sector as congressional liaison of the Department of the Interior for the Ford administration. In 1979 Avery moved back to Wakefield for good, saying, "There never was any doubt in my mind about where I would end up."

For the 2005 documentary, The Kansas Governor, Avery not only gave the longest interview of the six former governors (two and a half hours), but also was filmed chopping and carrying wood for use in his fireplace. Throughout the lengthy videotaping Avery's quick wit and sense of humor sparkled, and he clearly enjoyed the back and forth of the interview. At one point near the end of the session the interviewer asked Governor Avery what he wanted Kansans to remember about him, to which he responded, "Well, I've been talking about that for twenty minutes, you mean you don't know yet!" Later, and poignantly, when the interviewer said, "The last question," Avery said, "I hate to have it stop."

Avery returned to Topeka for the debut of The Kansas Governor in 2005 and appeared on the stage with former governors John Anderson, Jr., and Mike Hayden, and incumbent governor, Kathleen Sebelius. After chatting with Governor Sebelius, Avery stepped up to the microphone and said, "You probably wonder how I got to sit next to the present governor. Well, it was an honest arrangement—we all drew straws and I got the long one, so I got to sit next to Kathleen. And if I hadn't been having a good time otherwise, I've been having a good time since." Avery also said, "Most of us have pleasant memories and loyal friends—as well as some other kinds of friends. But on the other hand these are memories that all get wrapped together."

26. Then Congressman Bob Dole (R., Russell), who was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1960, defeated the former governor by a better than two to one margin in this statewide GOP contest (Dole, 190,782; Avery, 87,801). *Secretary of State, State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1968, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printer, 1969), 13–14.



"I have nothing but pleasant relationships with the present Governor[, Kathleen Sebelius]," Avery noted. "I didn't vote for her, of course, but I didn't complain about her. . . . I think she has performed very well for a member of the minority party in a Republican state." Avery is pictured here in 2005 with Governor Kathleen Sebelius and former governors John Anderson and Mike Hayden.