



Having just won an unprecedented third term, Governor Robert Docking celebrates on election night, November 3, 1970.

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The Gubernatorial Campaigns of Robert Docking, 1966–1972

by Joel Paddock

Between 1966 and 1972 Democrat Robert B. Docking won an unprecedented four terms to the Kansas governorship. Docking's success ran counter not only to trends at the national level, where the New Deal Democratic coalition was being fractured, but also to Kansas political tradition in which only six Democratic governors were elected in the state's first century. Of the state's six previous Democratic governors, five were elected at a time when the Republicans were badly split, and one was elected in Franklin Roosevelt's 1936 landslide. The 1960s, however, were the early stages of what one scholar of Kansas elections called a new period in Kansas politics. The state's first century was characterized by Republican dominance, the result of the partisan cleavages forged during the Civil War. Republican factionalism made occasional Democratic victories possible "and so kept alive a semblance of a two party system." Beginning in the 1950s, however, weakening party organizations along with emerging television coverage contributed to an electoral environment in which "issues and candidate image began to rival party identification as influences on voting behavior."¹

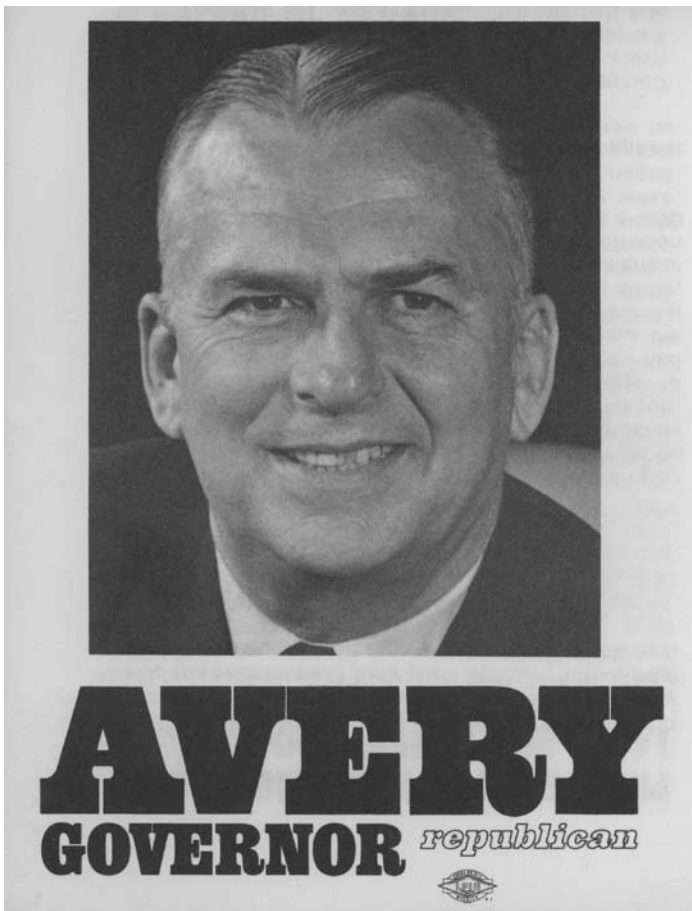
In this environment Robert Docking emerged as a successful statewide politician by fashioning an electoral strategy based on several themes: fiscal conservatism, law and order, and a distinct movement away from the national Democratic Party. The son of two-term Democratic Governor George Docking, Bob Docking's governmental experience was limited to service on the Arkansas City city commission in the early 1960s and a one-year stint as the city's mayor. Docking was active in local Democratic organizations during the 1950s, but most of his experience was in business, first as a bank vice president in Lawrence, then as a bank president in Arkansas City beginning in 1956.²

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1. Marvin A. Harder, *Electoral Politics in Kansas: A Historical Perspective* (Topeka: University of Kansas, Capitol Complex Center, 1983), 2, 51–54. George Docking was the first Democratic governor to win election to a second term. The Populists also elected governors in 1892 and 1896.

2. Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 215–16.



Despite his lack of political experience, Docking effectively appealed to the Kansas electorate of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was a time when the heterogeneous lower-class coalition constructed by the Democrats in the New Deal era was being fractured by the emerging array of divisive social issues and a growing conservative backlash against rapid cultural change and various equalitarian extensions of the New Deal.³ Docking avoided the national party's reputation for social and cultural liberalism, and he successfully put forth policy alternatives responsive to specific constituency demands. During a period when candidate-centered electoral politics were weakening traditional partisan divisions, Docking contributed to the erosion of

3. See, for example, James Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1973); Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Everett C. Ladd, Jr., and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions From the New Deal to the 1970s* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978).

Republican dominance in Kansas by successfully running to the right of state Republicans on taxes and the social issue. As such, Docking's four successful gubernatorial campaigns provide an instructive case study in the changing nature of American, and Kansas, electoral politics in the 1960s and 1970s.

Incumbent Republican Governor William H. Avery had reason to be concerned about his reelection chances in 1966. He was closely linked to a 1965 state tax increase, and, with the benefit of hindsight, some scholars have concluded that no issue between 1960 and 1980 had as great an impact on defeating incumbent governors as the tax issue. Of the sitting governors defeated during that period, 23.8 percent lost on the single issue of taxes.⁴ In 1966 Ronald Reagan won a surprising victory over an incumbent governor in California, primarily on the issue of opposition to tax increases. Still, as the year began, Avery's campaign showed little indication of being in serious trouble. In early January a *Wichita Beacon* columnist summarized the prevailing view of the governor's race: "Barring any major setbacks within the next 10 months Gov. William Avery should win a second term."⁵

Sensing Avery's vulnerability on the tax issue, Democratic operatives successfully placed taxes at the top of the state's political agenda in early 1966. Although court-ordered reapportionment was the principal issue of the 1966 special legislative session, taxes dominated political debate. At issue was the school foundation program enacted by the 1965 legislature, which provided broader state support for elementary and high schools through increases in the sales, liquor, cigarette, and income taxes. The income tax fostered the greatest public outcry, particularly because the state had instituted the income withholding tax at precisely the same time the federal government began collecting higher social security taxes.⁶ Perhaps realizing the volatility of the issue, Governor Avery proposed deferring the withholding system until April, prompting state Democratic chairman Tom Corcoran to label the governor's proposal "blatantly political" and to claim that Democrats opposed the "multimillion dollar Avery tax increase."⁷ State Democrats and members of the Docking team frequently repeated this claim throughout the 1966 campaign.

4. See Larry Sabato, *Goodbye to Good-Time Charlie: The American Governorship Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1983), 108–9.

5. *Wichita Beacon*, January 3, 1966.

6. *Kansas City Times*, October 21, 1966.

7. *Wichita Beacon*, January 2, 3, 1966; *Wichita Eagle*, January 10, 1966.

Docking faced little opposition for the Democratic nomination, allowing him to consolidate his support among party activists and continue his criticism of the Avery administration. He named Hays attorney Norbert Dreiling as his campaign manager. He also enlisted the support of Junction City publisher John Montgomery, an unsuccessful United States House candidate in 1964 and former state party chairman and highway commission member during George Docking's administration. Although most Democratic activists publicly remained uncommitted during the pre-primary period, Docking was commonly known to be favored by the party organization, and he was considered a "safe bet" for the nomination throughout the campaign.⁸ His primary opponent, former State Treasurer George Hart, alleged that money raised from a dinner for Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey the previous fall was used by the Docking campaign, and that the executive director of the Kansas Democratic State Committee Paul Pendergast supported Docking. Voters could be certain, Hart asserted, that he (Hart) was "not hand-picked by any political boss."⁹ Despite the rhetoric, the Democratic primary was not particularly divisive; Hart enjoyed little statewide support, and Docking largely ignored the challenge, focusing instead on Avery and tax issues.

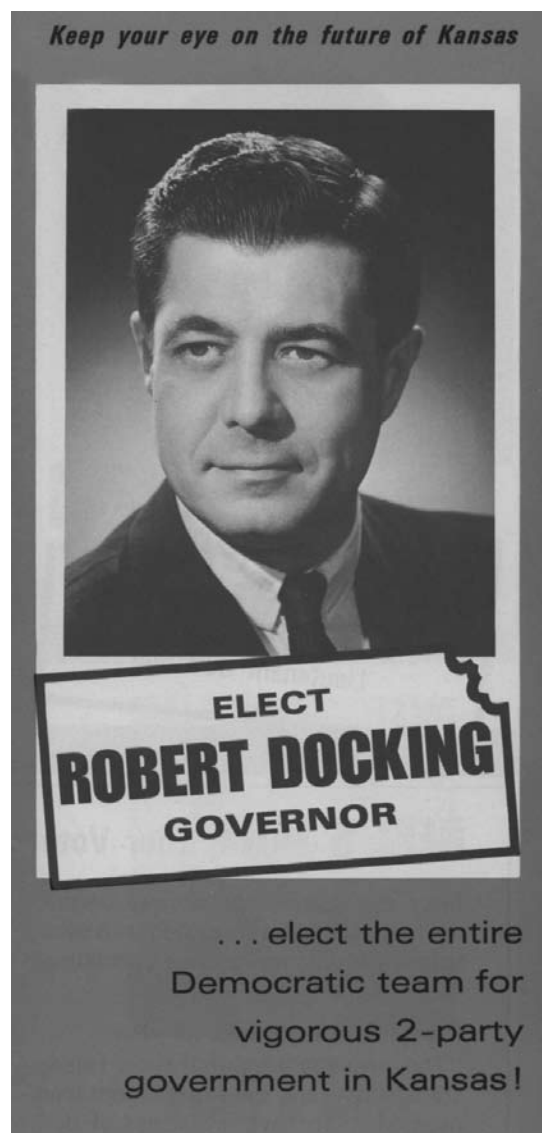
Although taxes dominated debate, candidates addressed other issues during the primaries. Docking publicly supported a statewide vote on the liquor-by-the-drink question, objected to parimutuel wagering, and opposed a right-to-work law. He called on Avery to lobby the New York Stock Exchange Board of Governors to locate their new fifty-million-dollar headquarters in Kansas, a proposal Avery dismissed as "dreaming."¹⁰ Docking avoided controversial national issues. As a candidate pledged to fiscal responsibility and tax relief he could not be perceived as identifying too strongly with the national Democratic administration, especially at the height of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. Docking's polls suggested that Kansans generally supported some aspects of Johnson's program, namely Medicare and federal aid to education. Johnson was not overly popular in the state, however, and Docking's pollster advised him to avoid being closely linked with the president.¹¹

8. *Wichita Eagle*, February 22, 1966; *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, July 24, 1966.

9. *Wichita Eagle*, March 8, July 21, 1966.

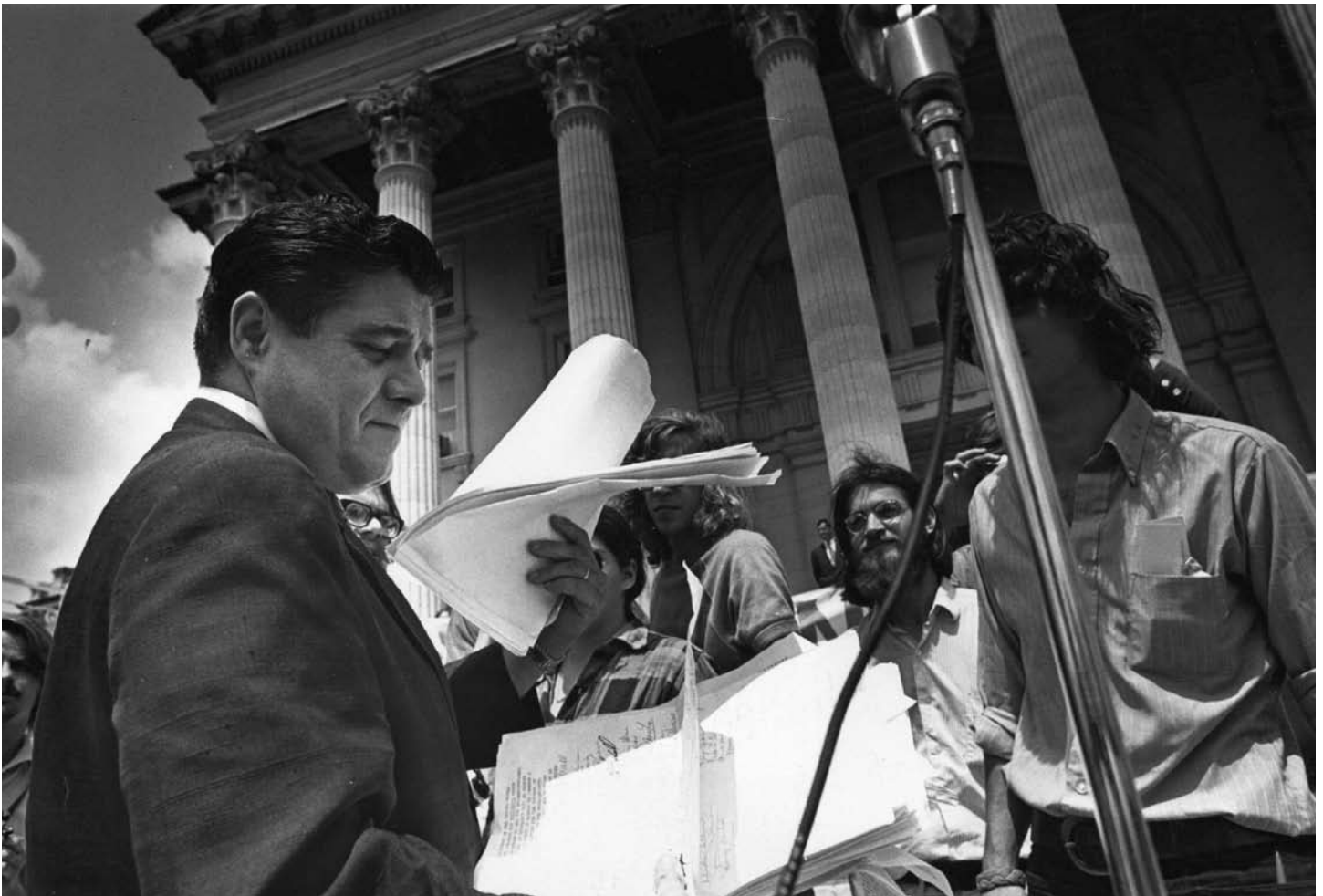
10. *Wichita Eagle*, April 3, 5, 13, 1966.

11. "A Survey of the Political Climate in Kansas," Study 541, August 1966 (Bronxville, N.Y.: Oliver Quayle and Co., 1966), 9 in Robert Docking Papers, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter cited as "Docking Papers").



The Vietnam War was a major national issue in 1966, but it was rarely addressed in the gubernatorial campaign. The state Democratic platform pledged to support the administration's efforts "to bring peace to Vietnam under the rule of law and international order," while Docking called the war a federal question that "should be left to military experts and those who have the facts, beginning with the Commander-in-Chief."¹² Although Vietnam had little impact on the 1966 gubernatorial race, the domestic unrest associated with opposition to the war significantly affected Docking's later campaigns.

12. *Wichita Eagle*, August 31, 1966; Docking to Betty Ruth Thomas, August 29, 1966, Docking Papers.



The Vietnam War was a major national issue in 1966, but it was rarely addressed in the gubernatorial campaign. The domestic unrest associated with opposition to the war significantly affected Docking's later campaigns, however. The governor is pictured here, May 13, 1970, accepting petitions against the Cambodian incursion from student protesters on the steps of the capitol in Topeka. Specifically, students asked the governor to call a special session of the legislature for the purpose of passing a law making it illegal for the men and women of Kansas to fight outside of the United States if Congress had not passed a declaration of war. Image courtesy of the Lawrence Journal-World and the University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence.

As the summer primaries approached, opinion polls indicated with increasingly clarity that Avery was in trouble, primarily over the tax issue. Before his June announcement for reelection, Avery ignored the Democratic criticisms of his administration. After officially announcing his candidacy, however, he took the offensive stating that “it’s time for the Democrats to stand up and say how they would help support these programs they helped enact.” Shortly before the primary Avery charged that the Democrats had employed two professional campaign organizers—Matt Reese and Tom Williams—who held close ties to Robert F. Kennedy. The implicit assumption was that the opposition had struck a deal in which Kennedy would

help Docking get elected in exchange for support at the 1968 presidential nominating convention. Avery asked a Hutchinson audience, “Can Bobby Kennedy buy Kansas like he bought New York?”¹³

The Democratic primary provided no surprises. As expected, Docking soundly defeated Hart. In the Republican primary, however, perennial candidate Del Crozier, whom Frank Garofalo of the *Wichita Beacon* called “the Wichita character who provides comic relief in political campaigns,” polled more than 44,000 votes. Since Crozier

13. *Wichita Eagle*, July 15, 1966; *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 23, 1966.



Hays attorney Norbert Dreiling (left) served as Docking's campaign manager for the governor's "permanent campaign" during his eight years in the office. Soon after his death in August 2005, Dreiling, a real Democratic "kingmaker" in Kansas well into the 1980s, was declared by Don O. Concannon, former Republican state chairman, as "one of the greatest political minds in the history of Kansas."

admittedly had not campaigned, his votes were interpreted as a protest; some claimed they were registered against the governor's tax policies. Others, such as Clyde Reed of the *Parsons Sun*, cited poor relations between Governor Avery and Republican legislative leaders on patronage matters and the perception that the state party was in disarray.¹⁴ Whatever the reason, the primary contest confirmed the suspicion that Avery was in trouble.

Docking's post-primary polls further demonstrated Avery's weakness. A statewide poll taken during the second week of August gave the governor a 54 percent negative rating, almost as low as President Johnson's standing in the state. Although voters tended to like Avery's "friendly personality," many cited the fact that he "raised taxes unnecessarily." Of all the negative attributes listed in the survey, voters most frequently mentioned the tax issue. Docking's pollsters stated: "William Avery is in poor condition. This is the first indication we have that he may not repeat his victory of two years ago. A rule of thumb in political opinion research is that an incumbent with a job rating below 60 percent favorable has a fight on his hands. . . . Governor Avery is 14 points below that magic figure." In contrast, four

out of five Kansans polled gave Docking a favorable rating.¹⁵

Despite Republican charges that he had no program, Docking continued to criticize Avery on taxes. In response to Republican criticism of the Johnson administration's handling of inflation, Docking told audiences that the most dramatic example of inflation in Kansas was the inflation of state taxes. Docking also used the tax issue to consciously distance himself from Johnson and the national Democrats, a strategy he openly acknowledged.¹⁶ Responding to Docking's fiscal conservatism, Avery seized the education issue, attempting to

associate his administration with progressive reforms in Kansas schools.¹⁷ United Press International writer William R. Brinton aptly described this somewhat unique policy divergence: "In Kansas, you can't tell the Democrats from the Republicans without a program. Robert Docking . . . sounds more like a Republican or a southern Democrat. And Republican Gov. William Avery sounds more like the national Democrats defending their spending programs."¹⁸

A poll commissioned by the Democrats in late October indicated the tax issue was cutting both ways. Avery was perceived to have done a good job on education, whereas Docking was strongest on taxes. The question of "outside influence" in the Docking campaign—Republican charges that Robert Kennedy and the AFL-CIO were working to elect Docking—was not, the pollsters asserted, a major factor. However, the poll revealed that Docking's six-point lead in August had evaporated to one point.¹⁹ With less than two

14. *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, August 7, 1966.

15. *A Survey of the Political Climate in Kansas*, August 1966, 8, 9, 90–97, Docking Papers.

16. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 29, 1966; Charles A. Koch to Docking, August 10, 1966; Docking to Koch, September 14, 1966; Docking to Mrs. J. M. Detienne, September 20, 1966, Docking Papers.

17. *Wichita Eagle*, September 30, 1966.

18. *Wichita Beacon*, November 4, 1966.

19. *A Survey of the Political Climate in Kansas*, Study 461, October, 1966, 10–12, 18, Docking Papers.

weeks remaining, it appeared that some of the disaffected Republicans were coming back into line rather than “go to the grave with a Democratic vote on their conscience.”²⁰ But 11 percent of the electorate was still undecided.

While Docking criticized Avery on taxes, the governor continued to accuse Docking of lacking a program. Early in the campaign Avery refused to debate Docking and stated, “if they don’t have a program of their own, I see nothing to debate.” He contended that Docking could not be “identified with anything, except the fact that he’s running for office.”²¹ Avery tried to portray Docking as an opportunist: a candidate supported by Kennedy and organized labor who was being packaged by professional advertising men, had no program of his own, and was capitalizing on his father’s name. He emphasized this theme almost as frequently as Docking emphasized taxes. Avery later admitted that he underestimated the political impact of the tax issue. Because he had won the governorship in spite of Lyndon Johnson’s 1964 landslide, Avery mistakenly believed he could take responsible action to fund education and enforce the collection of income taxes and still survive at the polls in 1966.²²

Election day saw Docking defeat Avery by a margin of almost 76,000 votes (54.8 percent to 43.9 percent) despite substantial Republican gains nationally. Republicans won all five Kansas congressional districts, the open U.S. Senate seat, and a 76 to 49 majority in the state house of representatives. The Kansas Senate remained Republican by a 27 to 13 margin. Nationwide the Republicans gained forty-seven seats in the House and three in the Senate, as President Johnson’s approval rating dropped from 66 percent in November 1965 to 44 percent in October 1966. The Republicans claimed that the electorate had repudiated the Great Society. Pollster George Gallup asserted that the Vietnam War was “probably the prime reason why the GOP did so well.” Urban riots and the resulting backlash were also significant factors, as some Republicans effectively exploited the newly emerging “law-and-order” issue.²³

The most frequently cited and credible explanation for Docking’s victory was the tax issue; national issues such as law and order, Vietnam, and the Great Society had little impact on the voters’ decisions. At a time when inflation

was beginning to seriously erode the disposable income of many Kansans, state tax increases were taboo. Politically, Docking was on the right side of this issue. Avery simply became another casualty in the long list of tax-loss governors in the 1960s.²⁴

Another credible explanation relates to the two candidates’ organizations. According to most accounts, Docking had the superior campaign organization. At a time when candidates relied less on precinct captains and ward leaders to mobilize the party faithful, Docking made effective use of pollsters (the polling firm Oliver Quayle and Company), political consultants (Matt Reese and Associates), and a professional advertiser (Tom Downing). In contrast to Docking’s campaign machinery, the Avery campaign was, by several accounts, overly optimistic and unorganized. According to the *Wichita Eagle*, the Republicans “spent a great deal of money on television advertising so tasteless that it hurt more than it helped.” Republican editor Clyde Reed of the *Parsons Sun* wrote that taxes “were only part of the story.” He placed much of the blame on an ineffective Republican organization, which he said had “become somewhat flabby in recent years.”²⁵

Docking successfully kept national issues off the state’s political agenda, and Avery was unable to link the policies of the Johnson administration with the Kansas Democracy. However, it was only a matter of time before such volatile national issues as Vietnam, the black and youth rebellions, and law and order made their way into the relatively tranquil Kansas political environment. That became evident as the tragic and unpredictable year 1968 approached.

Docking entered the 1968 campaign after a 1967 legislative session in which he was unable to convince the Republican-controlled legislature to pass a significant part of his program. The governor’s proposed increase in interest rates on the state’s idle funds was diluted, he was forced to veto a bill reducing the rate of income tax withholding below what he proposed, his plan to eliminate fees for using state parks was killed in committee, a conflict of interest bill he supported was defeated in a house committee, and his proposal to build new turnpikes in the state was rejected. However, Docking had one major vic-

20. Bill Krause, *Peabody Gazette-Herald*, quoted in the *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, September 11, 1966.

21. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 31, 1966; *Wichita Beacon*, August 31, 1966; *Wichita Eagle*, October 24, 1966.

22. William H. Avery, letter to author, December 15, 1992.

23. Jim F. Heath, *Decade of Disillusionment: The Kennedy-Johnson Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 237.

24. Sabato, *Goodbye to Good-Time Charlie*, 105–10. Governor Avery later stated that an issue not addressed in the campaign—a school unification statute that closed many rural schools—also played a role in his defeat. Avery, letter to author, December 15, 1992.

25. *Wichita Beacon*, November 9, 1966; *Wichita Eagle*, November 10, 1966.

tory: his recommended one-half-of-one-percent reduction in income tax was included in a tax bill sponsored by the Republicans.²⁶

Although 1967 was not an election year, the governor was already engaged in a permanent campaign. He persisted in advocating lower taxes and was advised to continue building on his urban base before the next election.²⁷ He also continued his contact with Matt Reese concerning “building the Kansas party,” while George Hart threatened party harmony by warning the governor that he would challenge him in 1968 if Docking appointed either Vincent Bogart or Jack Graves—Hart’s enemies—to the Kansas Corporation Commission.²⁸ Docking even engaged in a form of pork barrel politics, claiming credit for releasing a federal water project—Round Mound Dam—that had been detained in Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall’s office. In an obvious reference to Republican Congressman Robert Dole, Norbert Dreiling urged Docking to announce the project from the governor’s office rather than the office “of some damned midwest congressman who fights all appropriations except when there is a vote to be made in the big First District.”²⁹

In considering his own reelection prospects for 1968, Docking faced the potentially risky decision of whom to support in the presidential race. Since Kansas was not a presidential primary state, the importance of the state party convention scheduled for March 30 was enhanced, and the governor played an influential role in selecting delegates to the national nominating convention. Early in the year, it appeared Docking’s choice for president would be easy; President Johnson was the clear front-runner for the Democratic nomination. His prime challenger was Minnesota’s Senator Eugene McCarthy, who opposed the president’s Vietnam policy. Discontent with the president had appeared within the party as early as 1966 when a “Citizens for Kennedy–Fulbright group” had formed.³⁰ Johnson, however, appeared to have the nomination secured if he chose to run. Events changed rapidly. In January 1968 the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launched the Tet

offensive, which undermined public support for the war, and in February McCarthy stunned the president by carrying 42.4 percent of the vote against Johnson’s 49.5 percent in the New Hampshire primary. Robert Kennedy, probably underestimating the president’s weakness on the Vietnam issue, announced his candidacy on March 16.³¹

Kennedy previously had agreed to deliver the Landon lecture at Kansas State University and thereby made an early campaign appearance in Kansas. Accompanied by Docking, the New York senator gave speeches at Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Haskell Institute, declaring Johnson’s domestic and foreign policies equally wrong and in need of correction.³² Despite the wildly cheering crowds Kennedy drew in the state, his gain in delegate strength was questionable. Docking supported Johnson, and four out of five district conventions had chosen delegates to the national convention. Although uncommitted, they were expected to follow Docking’s lead at the state convention. Most of the party regulars remained loyal to the president, but as Wayne Lee of the *Hutchinson News* wrote, “State Democratic party members—trained to rigid loyalty—admit they may faint under the strain of having a solid, attractive, moneyed and intelligent contender shoot at the seat of a president who shows no inclination of giving it up.” Or as one Kansas Democrat told Lee during a reception for Kennedy: “He [Kennedy] has about as much chance as a snowball in hell, but he’ll . . . hurt the party.”³³ Docking was placed in the unenviable position of attempting to prevent factional warfare from tearing apart a weak state party. He already was under pressure from McCarthy supporters to oppose the unit rule and to take an uninstructed delegation to the national convention. Publicly the governor supported such a move, but he admitted that “history has shown that other delegations have usually supported an incumbent president.”³⁴

At the state convention Docking declared himself a friend of both Johnson and Kennedy, and urged the delegates not to split the party. The convention adopted a resolution that required the delegates to vote as a unit at the national convention by following Docking’s lead. This clearly indicated that the convention supported Johnson;

26. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 12, 16, 29, 31, 1967; *Wichita Eagle*, March 16, 22, 23, 1967; *Kansas City Star*, March 26, 1967.

27. Herman D. Lujan to Terry Watson, January 13, 1967, Docking Papers.

28. Matt Reese to Paul Pendergast, March 6, 1967; George Hart to Docking, March 26, 1967, Docking Papers.

29. Hugh C. Hull to Docking, September 22, 1967; Norbert Dreiling to Docking, September 25, 1967; Dreiling to Stewart Udall, September 26, 1967, Docking Papers.

30. *New York Times*, September 11, 1966.

31. Heath, *Decade of Disillusionment*, 276.

32. Docking to Robert F. Kennedy, November 6, 1967, Docking Papers. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 19, 1968; *Kansas State Collegian* (Manhattan), March 19, 1968; *University Daily Kansan* (Lawrence), March, 19, 1968; *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 19, 1968.

33. *Hutchinson News*, March 22, 1968.

34. Louis H. Douglas to Docking, February 16, 1968; Docking to Don R. Hess, n.d., Docking Papers.

Robert Kennedy, pictured here with Docking, made early campaign appearances at Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Haskell Institute after announcing his bid for the presidency in 1968. Docking had not yet publicly declared his support for a presidential candidate when Kennedy, having just won the California primary, was assassinated on June 5.



Docking supported the president, as did most delegates. However, in keeping with the unpredictable nature of 1968, the situation dramatically changed the next day. In a March 31 television address, Johnson told a stunned nation that he would not seek reelection. Docking was, by most accounts, surprised by the announcement, and he did not immediately comment on how it would influence the Kansas delegation. Speculation arose that Docking would follow the lead of his chief advisor, Paul Pendergast, and support Kennedy.³⁵ Docking, however, remained uncommitted until summer.

Meanwhile, a more pressing political decision faced the governor. For months political analysts speculated that Docking would seek the vacated U.S. Senate seat of retiring Republican Frank Carlson. In mid-April Docking sent letters to state party officials and Democratic legislators requesting their advice. Most favored a reelection attempt; they considered it a safer bet, and as governor Docking was viewed to be in a better position to build the state

party machinery. A few, however, urged a Senate try, fearing that First District Congressman Robert Dole might win the seat and be entrenched in it for years.³⁶ Docking's private polls indicated that he could win either race. In early May the governor made the decision to seek reelection.³⁷

Although Docking had decided on his political future, he still had not committed himself to a presidential candidate. Immediately after his reelection announcement, two of the major Democratic presidential contenders—Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Senator Robert Kennedy—telegraphed their support to the governor. Docking cordially responded, but refused to make a commitment to either.³⁸ Docking clearly did not support McCarthy, but he apparently was undecided between Humphrey and Kennedy. Two of his top advisors—Pendergast and Mike Harder—were split on the issue; Pendergast had for quite some time supported Kennedy, while Harder announced

35. *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 31, April 1, 1968.

36. *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 21, 1968; Bert Chaney to Docking, April 22, 1968, Docking Papers.

37. *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 21, 1968; *Kansas City Star*, May 8, 1968.

38. Hubert H. Humphrey to Docking, May 11, 1968; Kennedy to Docking, May 11, 1968; Fred Harris to Docking, May 13, 1968; Docking to Humphrey, May 20, 1968; Docking to Kennedy, May 20, 1968; Docking to Harris, May 22, 1968, Docking Papers.



Docking supported President Lyndon B. Johnson in his bid for reelection in 1968, as did most Kansas delegates. However, in keeping with the unpredictable nature of 1968, the situation dramatically changed when in a March 31 television address, pictured here, Johnson told a stunned nation that he would not seek reelection. Image courtesy of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, Austin, Texas.

his support for Humphrey on May 2. State party activist Robert Brock, an influential Topeka businessman, was Kennedy's state chairman, and he urged Docking to support Kennedy. However, a poll of officers of the Kansas AFL-CIO, a group supporting Docking, showed Humphrey overwhelmingly ahead of Kennedy 193 to 25, and a *Wichita Beacon* poll of the thirty-eight-member Kansas delegation to the Democratic National Convention indicated Humphrey was a three-to-one choice over Kennedy.³⁹ Docking never had to choose between Humphrey and Kennedy; on June 5 Kennedy was assassinated after winning the California primary.

Docking did not officially announce his support for a presidential candidate until the convention, but it became clear after Kennedy's death on June 6 that Humphrey would receive the governor's support. McCarthy's supporters in the state attempted to reverse the move toward Humphrey; some threatened to withhold support for Docking's gubernatorial bid if he instructed the delegation to vote for the

39. *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 3, 5, 1968; Robert L. Brock to Docking, n.d.; F. E. Black to Docking, May 21, 1968, Docking Papers; *Wichita Beacon*, May 22, 1968.

vice president.⁴⁰ Others attempted to gain control of local party organizations, much to the chagrin of some party regulars. The chair of the Riley County party complained to Docking, "We are in a hell of a mess over here. . . . They [the McCarthy supporters] had never contributed any work or money but were quite insistent. They ate our free cookies and coffee with gusto, but no contributions. . . . They are going to try to control the election of a county chairman."⁴¹ Docking received numerous petitions supporting McCarthy and urging abolition of the unit rule.⁴²

At the national convention in Chicago the Kansas delegation voted overwhelmingly for Humphrey, giving the vice president thirty votes to George McGovern's three and McCarthy's one. Humphrey immediately quelled speculation that Docking, who reportedly had been on Robert Kennedy's list of prospective running mates, was under consideration for the vice presidential nomination by choosing Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine.⁴³

40. *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 27, 1968.

41. Mrs. J. O. Faulkner to Docking, July 4, 1968, Docking Papers.

42. Blair Clark to Docking, August 1, 1968; Docking to Sam Shapiro, August 22, 1968, Docking Papers; *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 13, 1968.

43. *Chicago Tribune*, July 22, 1968; *Christian Science Monitor*, July 27, 29, 1968.

**Remember
in November**



**RE-ELECT
ROBERT DOCKING
GOVERNOR**

Beware: the High-Tax boys are hitting the campaign trails again this year. Don't fall for their old Avery-ian "tax more spend more" routine.

**RE-ELECT GOVERNOR DOCKING . . .
A GOOD ADMINISTRATOR WHO HAS PROVED
KANSAS NEEDS TAX REFORM—
NOT A TAX INCREASE!**

The legacy of the Democrats' Chicago convention of 1968 was not easily forgotten. The riots that marred it focused public attention on the extremely volatile social issue and contributed to a growing public perception that the national Democrats were "soft" on the law-and-order issue.⁴⁴ Although Kansas did not experience widespread urban and campus unrest until two years later, the memory of the Chicago convention affected Docking's political strategy for the remainder of his career.

In the August gubernatorial primary Kansas Republicans nominated Rick Harman, a thirty-nine-year-old businessman, while Docking ran unopposed for the Democratic nomination. Harman emphasized that property taxes were too high and that state aid to local schools must be increased. He criticized Docking's veto of a bill that would have provided \$11.5 million in state aid to local schools, but Harman's pledge to shift the tax burden backfired. Initially he advocated higher income and sales taxes; later he modified this proposal to include tax increases only on cigarettes and liquor.⁴⁵ The damage, however, had been done. Harman's pre-primary pledge of income and sales tax increases, like Avery's income tax increase of three years before, gave Docking the political high ground on the tax issue. As in 1966, he repeatedly stressed the issue throughout the campaign.

Despite the volatile national climate in 1968, Docking limited his agenda to, in the words of one advisor, "tax reform, fiscal responsibility, and executive reorganization."⁴⁶ Docking justified his education bill veto stating that the bill was an act of "fiscal irresponsibility" on the part of the Republican legislature and that only half of the revenue in the bill would be used for property tax reduction. The Docking campaign portrayed the Republicans as big spenders, stressing that the choice was between "tax reform without unnecessary tax increases under Governor Docking as opposed to tax increases under Harman." On a few occasions he emphasized his record of maintaining peace in Kansas City and Wichita after the Martin Luther King assassination, and he pledged to use "whatever force is necessary to maintain law and order." For the most part, however, he avoided the volatile social issue that divided his party at the national level.⁴⁷

44. See Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 20-21; Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, 324-27.

45. *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 30, 1968; *Sherman County Herald* (Goodland), September 12, 1968; *Kansas City Times*, October 24, 1968.

46. Lujan to Watson, September 25, 1968, Docking Papers.

47. *Kansas City Times*, October 24, 1968; *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, November 3, 1968.

Docking defeated Harman in the November election by 37,000 votes (51.9 percent to 47.6 percent) following a campaign that was overshadowed by the national election. Richard M. Nixon easily carried the state as did Republican senate candidate Robert Dole. Republicans again won all five U.S. House seats, gained five seats in the Kansas Senate to take a 32 to 8 majority, and picked up eleven additional seats in the statehouse to forge an 87 to 38 margin. The Democrats no longer had the support in the house to sustain a Docking veto. In a repeat of 1966, the gubernatorial race was substantially out of line with other races in the state; the most common explanation was Docking's stand on taxes. Republican state chairman Don Conannon admitted that the "overriding factor was the tax issue" and that the Republicans "allowed Docking to build up a psychological effect of no increase and let it become the overriding issue of the campaign."⁴⁸

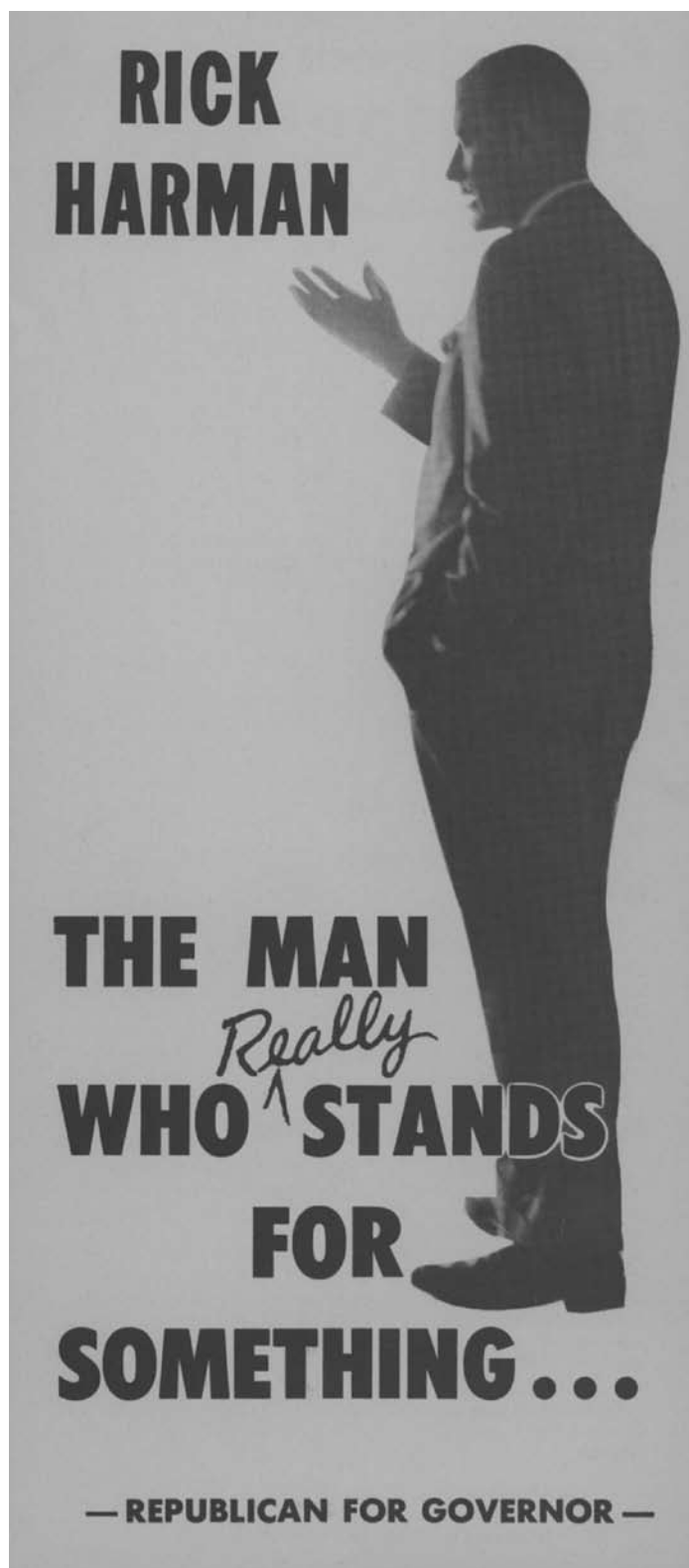
Inevitably Docking's conservatism brought him into conflict with his party's liberal wing. Late in 1968 an organization calling themselves the New Democratic Coalition of Kansas (New Deck) arose as part of a national movement to maximize minority participation and move the party to the left.⁴⁹ Although the group apparently had little grass roots support in Kansas, their central demand—more open and participatory party processes—received considerable support among insurgent elements in the national party. Charges that the 1968 convention was "brokered" by party bosses prompted the national party to appoint a Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection (the McGovern–Fraser Commission) to adopt guidelines to ensure a more open and democratic convention. The issue pitted the party's traditional elements against issue-oriented, left-of-center activists, many of whom had supported McCarthy in 1968.⁵⁰ Docking sided with the traditional elements, and he believed the McGovern–Fraser Commission and groups such as New Deck were "embracing the New Left" and precipitating "dissension and polarization in Democratic ranks."⁵¹ He worked with other Democratic governors

48. *Kansas City Times*, November 8, 1968; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 8, 1968; *Wichita Beacon*, November 8, 1968; *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, November 10, 1968.

49. Sherry A. McGowan to Docking, January 11, 1969; New Democratic Coalition of Kansas to Democratic National Committee, n.d., Docking Papers.

50. See Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*, 340–48.

51. John Ivan, Darold Main, and Mike Lennen to Docking and Dreiling, n.d.; George McGovern to Docking, May 7, 1969; Woody Duncan to William E. Giles, October 8, 1969, Docking Papers; Kenneth Crawford, "Party Predicament," *Newsweek* 73 (May 26, 1969): 45.





throughout 1969 to moderate the party's steps toward reform.⁵²

Meanwhile Docking assessed his political future. A poll commissioned by the governor in October 1969 revealed that Docking's job rating remained high and that a substantial majority of the public had no reservations about electing a three-term governor. The poll, however, indicated that Docking increasingly was viewed as a moderate liberal, a potential problem in a state in which 86 percent of those polled considered themselves either moderate or conservative. As the national Democrats appeared to drift to the left, Docking's partisan label became a liability. The poll also noted that Attorney General Kent Frizzell would be a "dangerous challenger" for the governorship in 1970, and that President Nixon and Republican Senator James Pearson, whom Docking considered challenging in 1972, had very high approval ratings.⁵³

Two factors significantly contributed to setting the course of debate for the 1970 election: the results of the 1970 legislative session and the urban violence in the state,

52. J. Marshall Brown to Harris, May 13, 1969; Docking to Brown, May 22, 1969; Dreiling to Docking, May 22, 1969; Docking to McGovern, May 21, 1969; Robert E. McNair to Docking, October 1, 15, 1969; John Dempsey to Docking, September 15, 1969; Docking to Dempsey, September 29, 1969, Docking Papers.

53. *A Survey of the Political Climate in Kansas*, Study 1254, October 1969, 15–16, 19–20, Docking Papers.

especially at the University of Kansas. After a divisive 1969 legislative session in which Docking vetoed a Republican-sponsored education bill and in which the legislature failed to act on the governor's tax reform measures, the 1970 session was relatively harmonious. The session's accomplishments included passing homestead exemption legislation to provide tax relief for the elderly, increased state aid to education, establishing the Council of Ecology, new conflict of interest laws, a state fair housing law, and a property tax lid. Predictably Docking hailed the property tax lid as the most significant accomplishment of the session, and it became one of the major themes of his campaign.⁵⁴

Meanwhile urban violence, which had plagued the country for several years, flared in Kansas during the spring of 1970. In April racial violence closed several public school districts and the University of Kansas became a focal point of campus unrest.⁵⁵ Engaging in a bit of hyperbole, a *Time* magazine reporter compared the situation in Lawrence with the pre-Civil War violence in the town: "Flames lit the sky over the town, gunshots cracked in the night air. Police and National Guardsmen patrolled the streets, and nervous citizens, fearful of the new outlaws in their midst, could only watch and wonder why 'Bleeding Kansas' was being bled again."⁵⁶

54. *Wichita Beacon*, March 25, 1970; *Wichita Eagle*, March 26, 1970.

55. *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 17, 21, 1970.

56. "Protest: Bleeding Kansas," *Time* 95 (May 4, 1970): 25.



The social issue, which for several years hovered just beneath the surface of political debate in Kansas, moved near the top of the state's political agenda.

Kent Frizzell, nominated by the Republicans in what was described as a "dull" gubernatorial primary, took a tough law-and-order stance on campus unrest but otherwise ran an unfocused campaign. For example, during the primaries he called the property tax lid a "sham," but by October he supported the limitation. The Frizzell campaign never developed a clear theme; it used, in the words of the *Topeka Daily Capital*, a "shotgun approach . . . skipping over a myriad of issues without fixing any firmly in the minds of voters."⁵⁷

In contrast, Docking, who announced his bid for a third term in early May, emphasized three major issues: the property tax lid, a budget freeze, and his actions to keep the University of Kansas open in the aftermath of the campus unrest. He echoed his fiscally conservative themes of 1966 and 1968

57. *Wichita Beacon*, July 8, 1970; *Hutchinson News*, July 27, 1970; *Manhattan Mercury*, September 21, 1970; *Garden City Telegram*, October 27, 1970; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 4, 1970; *Hays Daily News*, September 7, 1970.

and stressed the law-and-order issue that President Nixon and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew used with some success in the 1970 congressional campaigns. He told audiences that "we're just simply not going to allow a minority of 1 or 2 percent of the students and some 'street people' to deny the vast majority of students their rights to an education."⁵⁸ In taking this stand, Docking followed the advice of his pollsters who recommended that the governor "should make it clear that his stand against violence and disorder is almost identical to the President's." Docking's polls indicated that he had a distinct advantage over Frizzell on the issue. In an October survey, 63 percent of those with an opinion thought Attorney General Frizzell should have responded more aggressively to student disorder. In contrast, 78 percent respected Docking's firm stand on campus demonstrations.⁵⁹ Docking successfully overcame the growing public image that Democrats were soft on the law-and-order issue.

58. *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 1, 4, 1970; *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, October 18, 1970; *Leawood Squire*, October 22, 1970.

59. *A Study of the Political Climate in Kansas*, Study 835, October 1970, 26, 28, Docking Papers.

The Democratic presidential front-runner in 1972 was Senator George McGovern (right), whose liberal image was not conducive to the Kansas governor's attempts to portray himself as a moderate conservative. Docking refused to commit his support for the South Dakota senator or any other Democrat throughout late 1971 and early 1972. Docking further distanced himself from McGovern and the national party in May when he turned down an invitation to act as chairman of a regional hearing on the national platform.

Docking defeated Frizzell by more than 72,000 votes (54.3 percent to 44.7 percent). The Democrats picked up three seats in the Kansas House, cutting the Republican advantage to 84 to 41 and one U.S. House seat (Bill Roy's upset victory over incumbent Chester Mize), ending the Republican monopoly of the Kansas congressional delegation. Unlike Docking's previous elections, no post-election consensus explained his victory. The *Garden City Telegram* saw taxes as the crucial issue. The *Lawrence Journal-World* viewed Docking's stand against disorder and against closing state schools as the key factor. Others viewed the Frizzell campaign's inability to develop a cohesive theme as crucial to the outcome. Once again, as the *Parsons Sun* noted, Docking developed "a fixed image of himself in the citizen's mind as a tight-fisted man with the public dollar," a theme, the *Garden City Telegram* stated, that "Frizzell couldn't touch . . . without taking a me-too stance."⁶⁰

After being elected to an unprecedented third term as governor, speculation immediately emerged that Docking might challenge incumbent U.S. Senator James Pearson in 1972. Despite reports of the moderate Pearson's vulnerability to a challenge from the right, Docking's polls showed the Republican senator's support strong throughout 1971. In June 1971 pollsters wrote that it would be "much easier for the Governor to win a fourth term than . . . to unhorse Pearson."⁶¹ Docking ended the speculation on April 3, 1972, when he announced his candidacy for a fourth term as governor. Citing the refusal of the 1972 legislature to make the tax lid permanent, Docking stated, "this token extension [of the tax lid] only can be interpreted as a gamble that I will not be in the governor's office in January 1973."⁶² For the



fourth and final time, taxes were the major theme of Docking's campaign.

As in 1968, the 1972 Docking campaign unfolded against the backdrop of a presidential election that highlighted Democratic intraparty divisions. Party reforms had weakened the role of professionals and had enhanced the power of liberal, issue-oriented activists.⁶³ The Democratic presidential front-runner was Senator George McGovern whose liberal image was not conducive to Docking's attempts to portray himself as a moderate conservative. Docking met with McGovern's campaign manager in November 1971, but the governor refused to commit his support for the South Dakota senator or

60. *Garden City Telegram*, November 4, 1970; *Lawrence Journal-World*, November 4, 1970; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 4, 1970; *Parsons Sun*, November 4, 1970.

61. *A Study of the Political Climate in Kansas*, Study 1396, June 1971, 34–35, Docking Papers; *Topeka State Journal*, August 29, 1971; *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 18, 1971.

62. *Kansas City Star*, April 3, 1972.

63. See Byron Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*, 333–48.



Docking distanced himself from McGovern in 1972, and Republicans in the state formed the “Republicans for Docking” organization, which held that the governor’s philosophy of government was compatible within that of the Kansas GOP. It printed and distributed “Nixon–Docking” bumper stickers, an action Docking tacitly approved and appreciated. The two men are pictured together above, flanked by Pat Nixon (left) and Meredith Docking, just before the president delivered a Landon Lecture on September 16, 1970, at Kansas State University. In the center are former Governor Alf Landon and his wife Theo Cobb.

any other Democrat throughout late 1971 and early 1972.⁶⁴ By the spring of 1972 Docking clearly had no intention of supporting McGovern, but despite news stories to the contrary, his correspondence with McGovern supporters, some of whom were active in Democratic registration drives in the state, remained cordial.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Docking further distanced himself from McGovern and the national party in May when he turned down an invitation to act as chairman of a regional hearing on the national platform.⁶⁶

64. Gary Hart to Docking, November 29, 1971; McGovern to Docking, December 22, 1971; Docking to Patrick J. Lucey, May 9, 1972, Docking Papers.

65. Betty Jo Charlton to Docking, April 18, 1972; Docking to Charlton, April 27, 1972; Docking to Lynn Knox, April 27, 1972, Docking Papers.

66. James Exon to Docking, May 1, 1972; Docking to Exon, May 9, 1972, Docking Papers.

In a letter advising Docking to avoid the platform hearing, Norbert Dreiling wrote, “With national party developments being what they are, I would recommend all options be kept open and that you anticipate the probability of not appearing personally. . . . Until the situation changes, I see no advantage in your appearances before the national committee meetings.”⁶⁷

While a split developed between McGovern and anti-McGovern forces in the Kansas Democratic Party, a worse factional division emerged in the state Republican Party over the gubernatorial nomination. In a four-way race, the Republican leader in the Kansas

67. Dreiling to Docking, May 11, 1972, Docking Papers.

- No increase in sales or individual income tax rates for 6 years
- Property tax lid—Proposed spending lid on state legislature
- Tax reform—to eliminate loopholes and inequities
- Original and expanded homestead property tax relief (for senior and disabled citizens)
- Streamlining of state government—Open meetings
- 18 year old vote—Before it became popular

...KANSANS KNOW!

- Massive accelerated highway construction program
- Improved law enforcement
- Education—Always a top priority
- Major attack on drug traffic
- All time 5-year record of industrial growth and expansion
- All time 5-year growth in new jobs for Kansans
- Kansas per capita income the highest ever



House of Representatives, Morris Kay, defeated former Governor John Anderson, Ray E. Frisbie, and Reynolds Schultz. Despite Kay's comfortable fifty-thousand-vote victory over Anderson, a considerable amount of intraparty animosity developed. Kay entered the campaign late, filing on June 19, one day before the deadline. He began an ambitious television and radio campaign that led to charges from fellow Republicans that he tried to buy the nomination. The Republican *Parsons Sun* stated, "Kay won the nomination in August after a costly, say-nothing campaign which relied solely on an electronic blitz," and that "He was sold as soap or coffee." The Republicans also split over an allegation that national GOP chairman Robert Dole, a longtime political enemy of Anderson, worked to help Kay's campaign.⁶⁸ The Republican animosities seriously damaged Kay's chances in the general election, particularly when the Democrats offered such an attractive alternative for Republican voters.

Docking, who was unopposed in the Democratic primary, exploited the general impression that Kay had bought the nomination. Norbert Dreiling repeatedly stated that Kay received considerable financial support from corporate interest groups outside the state. He charged that Kay assured the groups that if elected he would support repeal of the

federal income tax deduction elimination on state corporate tax returns. Docking emphasized similar themes stating that Kay was "merchandized like breakfast cereal." Ironically these same charges were frequently leveled against Docking. Wayne Lee of the *Hutchinson News* described Kay's St. Louis public relations specialist as a "calmer version" of Docking's public relations man Tom Downing, and he wrote, "One of Docking's aides labeled Kay 'Brand X,' almost six years to the day from the time Whitley Austin of the *Salina Journal* . . . labeled Docking with it."⁶⁹

The governor focused his campaign on his accomplishments: income tax reductions, homestead property tax relief, the tax lid on property taxes, disallowance of federal income taxes on corporate tax returns, voting rights for eighteen-year-olds, welfare reform, anti-drug trafficking laws, and an open meetings law. Of these he stressed the familiar issue of tax reform. He promised to make homestead property tax relief for both urban and rural homeowners his top priority in the next legislative session, and proposed what he called a "tax breaker" law to limit property taxes based on adjusted gross income. Kay also emphasized the tax issue, repeatedly advocating an exemption of food and drugs from state sales tax and a constitutional amendment allowing local units of

68. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 2, 1972; *Salina Journal*, August 16, 1972.

69. *Kansas City Times*, September 13, 1972; *Wichita Eagle*, September 29, 1972; *Hutchinson News*, September 10, 1972.

government “to determine the proper tax mix to solve their problems.”⁷⁰

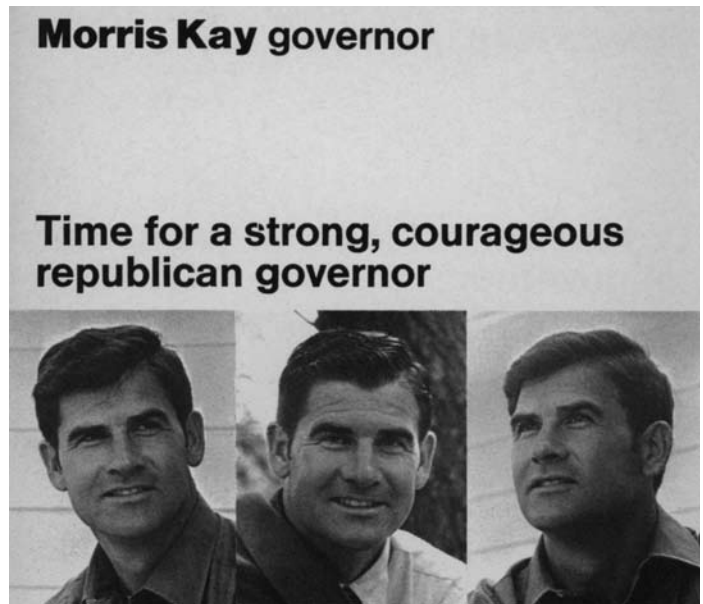
While Docking distanced himself from the McGovern–Shriver ticket, Republicans in the state formed the “Republicans for Docking” organization. Two prominent Kansas Republicans—Dana K. Anderson and William L. White—were instrumental in its formation. The group believed that Docking’s philosophy of government was compatible with that of the Kansas GOP and emphasized his conservative stand on tax issues. It also printed and distributed “Nixon–Docking” bumper stickers, an action Docking tacitly approved and appreciated.⁷¹ The link with Nixon and the Republicans caused considerable discontent among, in the *Wall Street Journal’s* words, “the beleaguered band of liberals” in the state, but it undoubtedly helped Docking’s reelection chances.⁷²

As expected, Docking handily defeated Kay, capturing almost 230,000 more votes than his Republican opponent (62 percent to 37.1 percent), by far his widest victory margin. Meanwhile, Nixon carried the state by almost 350,000 votes over McGovern, and Senator James Pearson defeated Democrat Arch Tetzlaff by more than 421,000 votes. The Democrats did, however, make minor gains in the state legislature, adding five seats in the senate and four in the house. As in his previous elections, Docking rode his record and promises of tax reform and his generally moderate to conservative image to victory. He had the additional advantage of a major split in the state Republican Party. The division among Kansas Democrats was not as serious; McGovern supporters, while never numerically dominant in the party, had little alternative in the governor’s race. Although Kay was more effective than Frizzell in focusing on the tax issue, his party was badly split and his image was tainted. More important, however, was Docking’s image, developed over six years, as a tight-fisted, tax-cutting governor.

70. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 26, November 7, 1972; *Topeka State Journal*, October 9, 1972; *Kansas City Star*, October 9, 1972; *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, August 27, 1972.

71. “Statement by Dana K. Anderson, Coordinator of the Republicans for Docking,” Topeka, September 1, 1972; Sharon Shaw to Docking, November 4, 1972; Docking to Shaw, November 22, 1972, Docking Papers; *Leavenworth Times*, September 3, 1972.

72. Jeanne McKenna to Docking, November 3, 1972, Docking Papers; *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 1972.



Between 1966 and 1972 Kansas experienced many of the broader changes occurring in American electoral politics. The state’s electoral politics, like those nationally, were in flux. Nationally, the sectional and class-based partisan divisions forged during the Civil War and New Deal eras were eroded by weakening partisan ties in the electorate and growing split-ticket voting.⁷³ In Kansas, the historical dominance of the Republican Party was slowly replaced by more competitive two-party politics in which individual political entrepreneurs ran candidate-centered campaigns. Robert Docking epitomized this new style of electoral politics. Like many Democratic officeholders who survived and even flourished during a period of growing Republican dominance of presidential politics, Docking fashioned an electoral strategy that appealed to an increasingly independent electorate. Ironically, this increasingly independent electorate contributed to greater two-party competition in Kansas during the 1970s and beyond.⁷⁴ [KH]

73. See, for example, Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter*; Ladd and Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System*.

74. Democrats made so many gains at the state level that by the early 1980s Kansas was classified as a competitive two-party state. See John F. Bibby et al., “Parties in State Politics,” in *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, ed. Virginia Gray, Herbert Jacob, and Kenneth N. Vines (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1990), 92.