



James B. Pearson on the campaign trail in the 1960s.

MAN IN THE MIDDLE: The Career of Senator James B. Pearson

by Frederick D. Seaton

On a warm afternoon in June 1969, Senator James B. Pearson retreated to his office in the New Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill, taking a stack of papers and books with him. When he emerged two hours later, he had made up his mind to oppose one of President Richard M. Nixon's most controversial national security programs, the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system. A Republican senator from Kansas might be expected to go along with his president on such a matter. A moderate conservative, Pearson had served on the Armed Services Committee and was friendly with some of the Senate's leading Cold War hawks. But Pearson was in the Senate because he had successfully challenged conventional thinking in his party back home. In the middle of his first full term he was about to step into a heated debate over President Nixon's strategic arms policies, a debate in which most of his allies would be Democrats or liberal Republicans. He would try to persuade his constituents to agree with him that opposition to the construction and deployment of Safeguard was justified on the basis of "the necessity, the cost, the effect upon both the arms race and arms limitation negotiations." He understood this would be difficult. The quiet, adopted Kansan did not rely on staff, consultants, or lobbyists to do his thinking for him, especially on an issue of this magnitude. He did it himself, weighing the political risks by his own lights.¹

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The author acknowledges with gratitude the participation of oral historian Professor Tom Lewin of the University of Kansas, Lawrence, in several interviews for this article.

1. James B. Pearson to Rev. Herman Johnson, North Newton, Kansas, August 28, 1969, General, 1969, box 69, folder 24, "Leg: Defense—ABM," James B. Pearson Collection, Senatorial Papers, 1962–1978, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence (hereafter cited as "Pearson Papers"); "The ABM," James B. Pearson United States Senator Reports to Kansas (senator's newsletter to constituents) 8 (June 1969), Column and Newsletter Series, Pearson Papers. The author worked with Senator Pearson on his June 1969 newsletter on the Safeguard issue.

James Blackwood Pearson was born May 7, 1920, in Nashville, Tennessee, the son and grandson of Methodist ministers. Both his father and mother came from prominent middle Tennessee families. The family followed his father's assignments to churches in Missouri, Alabama, Virginia, and elsewhere in the South. These frequent moves notwithstanding, Pearson was reared in traditional southern fashion. As a child he had a black nanny, Caroline, who called him "honey chile" and refused to cut his long locks. Pearson was an independent-minded, enterprising youth, saving money from his newspaper route to buy model airplanes. He loved electric trains and built a HAM radio set that fascinated his family, according to his sister, Virginia.²

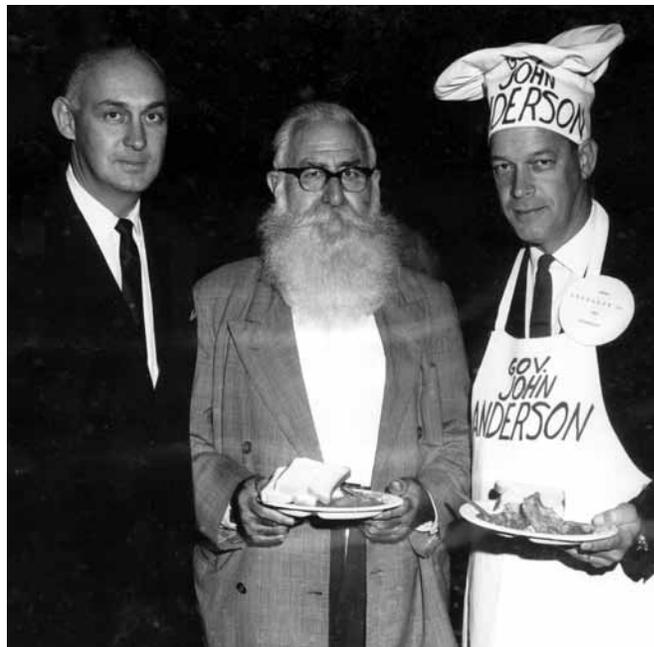
The family finally settled into a home of its own on a rural property near Lynchburg, Virginia. Later, as a United States Senator, Pearson recalled visits to his father's study in the Lynchburg house by Virginia politicians, including Senator Carter Glass, who became secretary of the treasury under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Pearson attended Duke University but dropped out and joined the Navy. During World War II he flew transport aircraft, mostly DC-3s, from coast to coast, landing frequently at the Olathe Naval Air Station near Kansas City. He was discharged from the Naval Air Transport Service with the rank of lieutenant commander.³

Pearson was attracted to the openness of mid-westerners, according to his son, Bill. The Navy flier met Martha Mitchell, the daughter of a prosperous Kansas City family, at a dance on the base. James Mitchell, Martha's father, owned a string of grain elevators across the state. The young couple married and Pearson, after earning a bachelor's degree at the College of Lynchburg and a law degree at the University of Virginia, settled down with his new family in suburban Johnson County, Kansas, where he opened a law practice in the growing town of Mission. Pearson was uncomfortable with his rather stiff and formal father-in-law, who tried to persuade Pearson to join the grain business. He refused and instead invested in property in Mission and pursued his law career.⁴

2. Virginia Green to author, July 24, 2004, author's personal collection.

3. "Biography," online guide to the Pearson Papers; "James Blackwood Pearson," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-2005* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), available online at http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_item/Biographical_Directory.htm.

4. William Pearson, interview by author, Overland Park, Kansas, January 16, 2010, author's personal collection; Green to the author, July 24, 2004.



Perhaps no two men were more central to Senator Pearson's meteoric rise in Kansas politics than Richard Rogers (left) and John Anderson, Jr. (right), captured together here at a 1962 campaign picnic. Pearson managed Anderson's 1960 gubernatorial campaign, and the governor appointed his friend and ally to a vacant U.S. Senate seat a year after taking office. To Anderson's chagrin, Pearson was never able to get the former governor his dream job, a federal judgeship. After his final failed attempt to put Anderson forward, Pearson got together with Kansas's junior senator, Bob Dole, and agreed on Manhattan attorney Richard Rogers, who had previously served as Pearson's campaign manager, a state senator, and chairman of the Kansas Republican Party. Rogers was nominated for the U.S. District Court of Kansas and confirmed during the summer of 1975.

Pearson was thoughtful, enjoyed serious conversation, and had a quick sense of humor that helped make him popular among his colleagues. He was more interested in issues than party politics, but found he had a knack for the details of political campaigning. After serving as city attorney for three Johnson County towns, Westwood, Fairway, and Lenexa, and as a probate judge, Pearson was elected to the Kansas Senate in 1956, filling the seat left open by John Anderson, Jr., of Olathe, who had been appointed attorney general. As a state senator Pearson involved himself in issues related to cities and towns. He also followed his personal interests and took a seat on the Industrial Development and Aeronautics Committee. He served on the Judiciary and Municipalities committees and chaired the Savings and Loan Committee. Pearson supported reform of the process for selecting state supreme court justices and sponsored a bill to create a juvenile justice code. "Pearson was always a reformer,"

said Glee Smith, former Kansas Senate president who served with Pearson. Clifford Hope, Jr., of Garden City also served with Pearson and became a lifelong friend. "While the others went to the Jayhawk [Hotel] to drink," Hope said, "we would go to the movies. Of course, we drank some, too." When Anderson, a former Johnson County attorney, ran for Kansas attorney general in 1958, Pearson managed his campaign. When Anderson ran for governor in 1960, Pearson again managed his campaign, and personally flew the candidate in a private plane to events across the state.⁵

The two "young Turks" successfully challenged leaders of a Republican Party dominated by a generation of older, mostly rural political princes. Frederick Lee "Fred" Hall, an unorthodox progressive from Dodge City, had won the governor's office in 1954 with support from Democrats, opening the way for change in the Grand Old Party. Among the long-time leaders challenged by Anderson and Pearson were former Governor Edward F. "Ed" Arn of Wichita, senator and former Speaker of the House Paul R. Wunsch of Kingman, state Senator Steadman Ball of Atchison, and newspaper publisher McDill "Huck" Boyd of Phillipsburg. Harry Darby, the GOP kingmaker in Kansas City, Kansas, was among them. Anderson and Pearson built a network of young, progressive activists such as state Representative John V. Glades of Yates Center, Senator Hope, and Donald P. Schnacke of Topeka. By winning the governorship in 1960 from two-term Democrat George Docking, Anderson became a "giant killer" and Pearson got some of the credit. The traditional Republican Party was temporarily shaken by the success of the two young Turks; but it remained intact, providing both a political home and plenty of anxiety for Pearson during his career.⁶

5. *Kansas Senate and House Journals*, January 8 to April 8, 1957, 387, 442; Glee Smith, interview by author, Winfield, Kansas, April 12, 2011, author's personal collection; Clifford Hope, Jr., interview by author, Garden City, Kansas, May 25, 2009, author's personal collection; see also Robert H. Clark, "Topeka Kickoff is Made by Anderson," *Kansas City Times*, June 2, 1960; and Alvin S. McCoy, "Gold Dust Twins of Kansas Politics," *Kansas City Times*, August 4, 1960.

6. Anderson described himself and his allies in the Kansas State Senate as "young Turks" who challenged "patronage and political deal making and cronyism." Bob Beatty, ed., "'For the Benefit of the People': A Conversation with Former Governor John Anderson, Jr.," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 30 (Winter 2007–2008): 256. Pearson's friend and campaign manager Richard D. Rogers did not think Pearson had the idea of seeking high office when he came to Kansas. Pearson's son, Bill, concurred. Marjorie Day, who worked for Pearson in his Mission law office, called him "a very political person." Richard D. Rogers, interview by author, Topeka, Kansas, November 3, 2009, author's personal collection; William Pearson interview; Marjorie Day, interview with author, Winfield, Kansas, January 5, 2010, author's personal collection.

In 1960 a new generation of political leadership emerged in America. John F. Kennedy won the presidency and youth was suddenly a strength in politics. Pearson, then forty, showed a tendency to distance himself from the old guard that would characterize his later career in the Senate. *Kansas City Star* reporter Alvin S. McCoy described Pearson as "a friendly, gregarious type, who seldom irritates anyone." McCoy went on to say "the older Republicans regarded him with affection, something in the manner of a wayward son who may vote against them on occasion when they become too conservative, but who is to be forgiven his aberrations as due to the impetuosity of youth." This kind of tolerance on the part of the old guard was less evident when it came to Anderson, whose aggressive prosecutions and refusal to support powerful interests made him some enemies in Kansas City, Kansas, during his time as Johnson County attorney and later as attorney general. Along with his image as a courageous crime fighter, Anderson had a reputation for being unguarded and sometimes dilatory. These characteristics apparently showed themselves during his 1960 campaign. In a hint of the future relationship between the two allies, McCoy reported that Pearson said of Anderson, "If John Anderson wins this nomination, he won't owe anything to anybody—not even himself."⁷

Among the candidates Anderson defeated in the Republican primary that year was Huck Boyd, the politically active publisher of the *Phillipsburg Review*, a weekly newspaper in north central Kansas. Anderson and his "detail man" Pearson conducted a campaign that, according to McCoy, "confounded the old-line politicians with the refreshing naiveté of babes in the jungles of government."⁸ The outcome put Anderson and Pearson in the lead of the progressive wing of the Kansas Republican Party, which included people such as former Governor Alfred M. "Alf" Landon and former Congressman Clifford R. Hope, Sr., of Garden City, who retired in 1957 after thirty years of service in the U.S. House of Representatives. Anderson and Pearson won the admiration of progressive Kansas newspaper editors and publishers. The newspaper people especially liked

7. McCoy, "Gold Dust Twins of Kansas Politics," *Kansas City Times*, August 4, 1960; McCoy, "Pearson Learned of His Selection in a Feedlot," *Kansas City Star*, January 31, 1962.

8. McCoy, "Gold Dust Twins of Kansas Politics," *Kansas City Times*, August 4, 1960; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1960, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1960]), 24. Anderson won with 48.7 percent of the vote; Boyd polled 44.4 percent; and William H. Addington, 6.9 percent.



A Garden City attorney and son of a long-time Republican congressman, Clifford Hope, Jr., was first elected to the Kansas Senate in 1956, the year his father chose not to seek a sixteenth term in the U.S. House of Representatives. After an unsuccessful 1958 bid for his father's old southwest Kansas seat in the U.S. Congress, Cliff Hope, Jr., continued his service in the state senate and easily won a second four-year term in 1960. Hope, a friend and former legislative colleague of Pearson's, managed the senator's successful primary and general election campaigns in 1962. In December of that year, Hope resigned from the state senate after accepting a position as manager of Senator Pearson's Wichita office.

Pearson's droll, self-deprecating humor. He liked to tell the story, for example, of meeting a farmer in Bourbon County after a speech he had given on foreign policy. "I don't know nothing about foreign policy," said the farmer. "I don't know anything about farming," Pearson replied. "We got along fine." An avid newspaper reader, Pearson courted the editors' favor by taking their editorials seriously and calling them occasionally to discuss issues. Throughout his political career, Pearson enjoyed the support of most of the Kansas press. Ray Morgan of the *Kansas City Star* often wrote favorably about Pearson,

whom he described as a politician "increasing in stature" who won "overwhelming" victories.⁹ Clyde M. Reed, Jr., publisher of the *Parsons Sun*, was Pearson's political alter ego in southeast Kansas for two decades. Stuart Awbrey of the *Hutchinson News* and Whitley Austin of the *Salina Journal* were also strong Pearson supporters.

Following Anderson's victory in 1960, Pearson was elected chairman of the state Republican Party. He relinquished the position within a few months, but used it to solidify his relationships with county GOP activists. When U.S. Senator Andrew Schoepel died in late 1961, Anderson appointed Pearson to fill the seat. Rumors of a "barnyard deal," in which Pearson would step aside later in 1962 to let Anderson seek election to the office, were false according to both men. Pearson was appointed "without any type of condition," Anderson insisted. He told McCoy that he wanted to seek a second term as governor to carry out his programs and that his family did not want to move to Washington, DC. "There was no barnyard deal," said Pearson.¹⁰

When he was sworn in as a United States senator on February 5, 1962, Pearson was still a new face in the Kansas Republican Party. In August of that year he had to run for his seat in the Republican primary. Assigned as a freshman to lesser committees, Interior and Government Operations, Pearson voted as a midwestern conservative, following the leadership of his own minority party. Indeed, Pearson spent his whole Senate career in the minority. The young Kansan opposed much of President John F. Kennedy's New Frontier legislation and President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. Pearson voted for legislation supported by Democratic presidents less frequently than did Kansas's senior Republican senator, Frank Carlson. When Soviet missiles were discovered in Cuba, Pearson criticized Kennedy for having let U.S. policy towards Cuba "wither on the vine." Pearson voted against Medicare and said he would do it again.¹¹ In addition to his floor duties, Pearson kept

9. See, for example, Ray Morgan, "Pearson Says He is in Race," *Kansas City Star*, January 27, 1966; Morgan, "GOP Cheers Pearson," *Kansas City Star*, January 30, 1972; see also Bob Woody and other former members of Pearson's Washington staff, interview by author, Washington, DC, April 10, 2005, author's personal collection. Woody, a Pearson appointee to the staff of the Senate Commerce Committee, told the Bourbon County farmer story.

10. Alvin S. McCoy, "Senate Job to Pearson," *Kansas City Star*, January 31, 1962; Beatty, "For the Benefit of the People," 266-67; Senator James B. Pearson, personal communication with author, Washington, DC, January 1969, author's personal collection.

11. In 1962 both Pearson and Carlson voted with President Kennedy 42 percent of the time. In 1963 Pearson voted with Kennedy and President Lyndon Johnson 36 percent of the time, while Carlson voted with them 46 percent of the time. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, 1962, Volume 18* (Washington, DC: Congressional

busy gathering a staff, making telephone calls to county chairmen, writing correspondence, and building mailing lists for his weekly column and news releases.

Pearson had keen political instincts but was not himself a natural politician. Richard D. Rogers, a Manhattan attorney who later became a federal district judge, told the story of driving Pearson to a small, north central Kansas town and letting him out to walk the business district. "You walk," Pearson said, "I'll drive." Pearson liked to discuss issues with small groups, but when it came to door-to-door campaigning, he "would rather have a root canal," said John Conard, his first administrative assistant. As a southerner Pearson "thought walking up to a stranger and shaking his hand was rude," Conard said. Both Conard and Rogers believed Pearson was basically shy.¹²

With Cliff Hope, Jr., managing his campaign, Pearson won the Republican nomination in August 1962, defeating former Governor Arn, a conservative of the old guard, with 62.3 percent of the vote. Pearson's decisive victory sent a signal to Kansas voters that a new generation of moderate, pragmatic Republicans had taken charge. In the general election Pearson defeated Democrat Paul Aylward of Ellsworth with 56.9 percent of the vote.¹³ Defeating Arn put Pearson in a strong position to deal with any dissatisfaction that might arise within the Kansas GOP as he sought his first full term in 1966. It also gave him confidence to assert himself as a United State senator.

As Pearson was establishing his position in Kansas, Republican politics were moving to the right nationally. Rogers, Pearson's close ally and state party chairman, attended the 1964 Republican National Convention as a Kansas delegate and ultimately supported Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton, a liberal who stepped up after

Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York dropped out. The nomination eventually went to Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who had emerged at the head of the conservative movement that was already winning over many party activists in Kansas. After Goldwater lost to the incumbent president, Lyndon Johnson, Pearson went on the offensive for his vision of a balanced political party reminiscent of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "middle way." In a speech in Mission, Kansas, Pearson said the Republican Party "cannot fly on one wing. Our party must have the breadth and tolerance to encompass both a left and a right arm."¹⁴

This declaration of independence by a junior Republican senator in a conservative state was less dramatic than it might seem today. Rockefeller, with whom Pearson had become identified, was a respected figure in the national Republican leadership. That leadership included voices ranging from Goldwater and California Governor Ronald Reagan on the right to Rockefeller, Scranton, and Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon on the left. Although he started his Senate career voting as a partisan conservative, Pearson by the end of 1964 had moved to a more moderate position. Pearson's call for tolerance was in tune with the demand for unity in the Kansas GOP. Such unity was needed to respond to the rising strength of the Democrats at the polls, strength evidenced by the election of Democratic Governor George Docking in both 1956 and 1958 and his son Robert Docking in 1966.¹⁵

Following the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, civil rights became the overriding issue in the Senate. Pearson voted in favor of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—as did every member of the Kansas House delegation and the state's senior senator, Frank Carlson. In correspondence with his constituents, Pearson defended Title VII of the bill, which expanded the powers of the attorney general to intervene in alleged cases of

Quarterly Service, 1962), 714; see also *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, Volume 19* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1963), 42–45, 716–17; Robert H. Clark, "Kansans Back Stand on Cuba," *Kansas City Star*, October 28, 1962.

12. Richard D. Rogers, interview by author, Topeka, Kansas, June 30, 2006, author's personal collection; John Conard, interview by author, Lawrence, Kansas, April 20, 2007, author's personal collection; see also Conard, interview by Ramon Powers, November 10, 2004, copy in author's personal collection; Pearson himself called campaigning "an exercise in extrovertism." He hated making "the typical political speech full of clichés." Joe Lastelic, "Pearson Finds New Respect in Job," *Kansas City Star*, April 23, 1967.

13. Alvin S. McCoy, "Pearson by a Landslide," *Kansas City Times*, August 8, 1962; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1962, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, [1962]), 17, 55.

14. "Pearson Cites Party's Needs," *Kansas City Star*, January 12, 1965; "The Future of the Republican Party," speech by Senator Pearson, Lawrence (also delivered at Mission, Kansas), January 12, 1965, box 356, folder 4, Schedules and Speeches, Pearson Papers; "Kansas Delegates on Way Tomorrow," *Kansas City Star*, July 9, 1964; "Kansans Hoist 'Neutral' Flag," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 13, 1964; "Barry Claiming 15 Kansas Delegates," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 14, 1964; "Kansas Hearts with Barry," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 15, 1964; Rogers interview, November 3, 2009.

15. Pearson still voted with President Johnson only 37 percent of the time in 1964. Carlson voted with Johnson 52 percent of the time. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964, Volume 20* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1964), 731; Joel Paddock, "The Gubernatorial Campaigns of Robert Docking, 1966–1972," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 31 (Summer 2008): 86–103.



Among the long-time leaders of the "old guard" to be challenged by Anderson, Pearson, Hope, and the rest of the "young Turks" was former Governor Ed Arn of Wichita. Arn, a lawyer and World War II veteran, served the state of Kansas as attorney general, justice of the Kansas State Supreme Court, and as governor from 1951 until 1955. In 1962 Arn ran for a U.S. Senate seat against Pearson, who had held the seat for a few months after he was appointed to it upon the death of Kansas Senator Andrew F. Schoeppel. Pearson defeated Arn in the primary and then bested the Democratic candidate in the general election. Pearson's decisive victory sent a signal to Kansas voters that a new generation of moderate, pragmatic Republicans had taken charge.

racial discrimination. Pearson stood firm in favor of the final bill, voting to end debate on it after fifty-seven days. "I believe the principles embodied in this bill are morally right," he wrote to constituents. "We are confronted with a national problem and Federal action is justified because we are dealing with rights guaranteed under the Federal Constitution." Later, in a column headlined "Civil Rights Tests Senate Procedures," Pearson expressed to readers of weekly newspapers in Kansas his reservations about the rules that allowed extended filibusters such as the one led by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia against the Civil Rights Act. The act passed June 19, 1964, and became law.¹⁶

16. Senator James B. Pearson to William K. Walker, June 25, 1964, General Series, 1964, box 19, folder 20, Civil Rights, Pearson Papers; see also Dennis W. Johnson, *The Laws that Shaped America: Fifteen Acts of Congress and their Lasting Impact* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 293–331;

Pearson was guarded in his public comments on equal rights for black Americans and apparently made no major speech on the subject in Kansas or in the Senate. But he was outspoken against the influence of racial prejudice in the policy-making process. "It would be a sad commentary on American politics," he wrote in a weekly newspaper column, "if the decisive votes were cast out of fear, bigotry, or ignorance rather than based upon the capabilities of the candidates and the issues involved."¹⁷ The Kansan who grew up in the South may have understood that actions spoke louder than words when it came to race. Pearson later joined a bipartisan civil rights caucus that backed fair housing legislation. He remained part of that informal group into the 1970s.¹⁸

In 1966 Pearson was up for election to his first full term, with the prospect of establishing himself in the Senate for years. Somewhat surprisingly, three-term Congressman Robert F. Ellsworth of Lawrence decided to challenge Pearson in the Republican primary. Although he and Pearson shared positions on many issues, Ellsworth had the backing of some of the old guard in the Kansas GOP. Cliff Hope, Jr., who had been Pearson's close companion in the Kansas Senate, saw the influence of what he called "the Goldwater people" in Ellsworth's decision.¹⁹ Ellsworth was a member of the liberal Wednesday Club in the House but kept close ties with conservatives at home; he had always resisted any "moderate" label. While the conservative movement may have prompted the Ellsworth challenge, it was driven as well by Ellsworth's own ambition to move up and a desire for payback on the part of the old guard for the progressive sweep of 1960 that Pearson and Anderson had led in Kansas.²⁰

According to Hope, Huck Boyd's protégé, Congressman Robert J. "Bob" Dole of Russell, encouraged Ellsworth to run. But Dole did not campaign for Ellsworth. In the end Pearson defeated Ellsworth by 54 to 45

"Civil Rights Tests Senate Procedures," March 16, 1964, Column and Newsletter Series, box 385, folder 6, Weekly Columns, 1964, Pearson Papers.

17. "Does One Vote Matter?," October 12, 1964, Column and Newsletter Series, box 385, folder 6, Weekly Columns, 1964, Pearson Papers.

18. Other Republican members of the caucus included Jacob Javits of New York, Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, and Clifford Case of New Jersey. Democrat Phil Hart of Michigan chaired the caucus. Democrat Walter Mondale carried the fair housing bill on the Senate floor; it became law in 1968. See Walter F. Mondale with David Hage, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 55–68.

19. Hope, Jr., interview.

20. "For the Record: Political Notes," *Ripon Forum* 13 (March 1967); Richard D. Rogers, interview by author, Topeka, Kansas, March 30, 2006.



When Senator Pearson stood for reelection in 1966, he faced a somewhat surprising challenge in the Republican primary from three-term Congressman Robert Ellsworth of Lawrence, drawn at left in a campaign brochure. The Ellsworth campaign emphasized the senator's poor 1965 attendance rating, despite the fact that it was largely the result of family illness, and ran "Missing Pearson Bureau" ads on the radio. The overriding issue of the campaign would be "activism versus absenteeism," and Ellsworth asserted that Pearson had "the worst attendance record of any Republican in the United States Senate." Pearson handily won the primary, nevertheless, and went on to defeat former Democratic Congressman J. Floyd Breeding of Rolla in November by 52 to 45 percent of the vote.

percent of the vote. Pearson won every county outside of the eight in Ellsworth's district, which included Pearson's own Johnson County, where the residue of Anderson's troubles in nearby Kansas City, Kansas, may have hurt Pearson, who at that time was still identified with his former ally. "I lost Johnson County," Pearson told the *Kansas City Star's* Washington Bureau reporter Joe Lastelic. "I lost my home county and that just is a tremendous disappointment to me."²¹ In western Kansas, where he had campaigned in three previous elections and Ellsworth was little known, Pearson piled up large margins. A timely endorsement by former Congressman Clifford Hope, Sr., also helped. In the general election,

21. Joe Lastelic, "Pearson Sad Over Home County Loss," *Kansas City Times*, August 6, 1966; Hope, Jr., interview; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1966, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, [1966]), 15-17, 73.

Pearson defeated former Democratic Congressman J. Floyd Breeding of Rolla in southwest Kansas by 52 to 45 percent of the vote.²²

The contest with Ellsworth became personal for Pearson, who was hurt by radio ads Ellsworth launched in which a search for the senator was put out by a

22. In Goodland, in northwest Kansas, 25 percent of voters knew Ellsworth while 75 percent knew Pearson, according to William Brooks's May 1966 study. Cliff Hope, Sr., who represented southwest Kansas in Congress for thirty years, from 1927 to 1957, remained a strong voice in Republican politics in western Kansas and urged voters to support Pearson because of his experience. Congressman Breeding succeeded Hope in 1957 and won reelection in 1958 and 1960; but he lost the general election to Bob Dole in 1962, when both incumbents were forced to compete in the newly created "Big First" district. See William Brooks, "A Study of the Images of Congressman Robert Ellsworth and Senator James Pearson in Five Selected Counties in Kansas" (paper, Communications Research Center, University of Kansas, Lawrence, May 24, 1966); Clifford Hope, "Cliff's Comments," *Hutchinson News*, July 3, 1966; *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1962* and *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1966*.

“Missing Pearson Bureau” after he had missed a number of votes. Senator Pearson had missed roll calls in 1965 when he returned to Kansas to help with his teenage son, Thomas, who had suffered an emotional disturbance and was treated at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka. According to John Conard, Ellsworth had been helpful to Pearson when he first came to the Senate. Now Ellsworth knew about “Tommy,” Pearson told his staff, but aired the ads anyway. The overriding issue of the campaign would be “activism versus absenteeism,” Ellsworth’s ads asserted, and Pearson had “the worst attendance record of any Republican in the United States Senate.” Pearson believed there were some lines that should not be crossed even in the heat of a political campaign. Despite a prolonged public attempt at reconciliation, the once-cordial relationship between Pearson and Ellsworth was lost.²³

Pearson’s relationship with another Kansas politician, Bob Dole, developed into a carefully veiled, but intense rivalry. The styles of the two Republicans were altogether different. Pearson disliked campaigning. Dole loved and was very good at it. Dole was intensely loyal to the Republican Party, while Pearson seemed at times only to tolerate its demands. When Pearson went to the Senate, Dole was finishing his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives. The two got along well enough, according to Conard, but when Dole won a seat in the Senate in 1968, following Senator Frank Carlson’s retirement, the press spotlight shifted to the colorful, badly wounded veteran of the Allied invasion of Italy in World War II.²⁴ Pearson, the senior senator, was shaded further by Dole’s loyalty to President Nixon, a loyalty Pearson had rarely demonstrated.

In March 1968 Pearson dramatically displayed his distance from the rising conservatism in the Republican Party in Kansas when he introduced his classmate from the University of Virginia Law School, Democratic Senator Robert F. Kennedy, to a crowd of cheering students at a



Pearson’s relationship with Bob Dole of Russell developed into a carefully veiled but intense rivalry. The styles of these two Kansas Republicans were altogether different: Dole was intensely partisan, while Pearson seemed only to tolerate his party’s demands for loyalty. When Pearson went to the Senate, Dole was finishing his first term in the U.S. House of Representatives. The two got along well enough, but when Dole moved into the Senate in 1968, having won the open seat of retiring Senator Frank Carlson, the press spotlight shifted to the colorful veteran of the Allied invasion of Italy in World War II. Pearson, the senior senator, was shaded further by Dole’s loyalty to President Nixon, a loyalty Pearson had rarely demonstrated.

Landon Lecture at Kansas State University in Manhattan, only two days after Kennedy’s announcement that he was running for president. Kennedy went on to the University of Kansas at Lawrence, where he called for negotiations on Vietnam. “I don’t accept the idea that this is just [an American] military effort,” he told students.²⁵

23. Pearson cast recorded votes 65 percent of the time. Ellsworth’s claim was true with regard to Senate Republicans, but it is useful to note that four Democratic senators scored lower: Gale McGee of Wyoming at 62 percent, Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota at 59 percent, Richard Russell, Jr., of Georgia at 52 percent, and Harry Byrd, Sr., of Virginia at 49 percent. “1966 Election Outlook,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 24 (February 18, 1966): 395; *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 1965, Volume 21* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1965), 1119–21; for Ellsworth campaign materials, see for example “Let’s Get Things Done for Kansas,” and “On the Job for You,” in Republican Party Campaign Literature, 1966, State Library and Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka; on attempted reconciliation, see Joe Lastelic, “Pearson a Host to Ellsworth,” *Kansas City Star*, August 6, 1967.

24. Conard interview, April 20, 2007.

25. “Crowd Nears 20,000 At Fieldhouse During Robert Kennedy Visit,” *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 18, 1968; Remarks of Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, March 18, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy Speeches, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Mass.; “Pearson in Odd Situation During Monday’s Activity,” *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, March 19, 1968; Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 39–50; Paddock, “The Gubernatorial Campaigns of Robert Dockett,” 93–95; Pearson introduction of Robert F. Kennedy, March 18, 1968, Kansas State University, Administrative Series, box 358, folder 52, Schedules & Speeches, Pearson Papers; Robert F. Kennedy, “Conflict in Vietnam and at Home,” in *The Landon Lectures: Perspectives from the First Twenty Years*, ed. William L. Richter and Charles E. Reagan (Manhattan: Friends of the Libraries of Kansas State University [1988]), 33–45.



Although Pearson opposed much of President Kennedy's New Frontier and President Johnson's Great Society, when his law school classmate and friend Bobby Kennedy, a Democratic senator from New York State, visited Kansas in March 1968 Pearson was at his side. Pearson introduced Senator Kennedy, who had thrown his hat into the presidential ring only two days before, to a crowd of cheering students at a Landon Lecture at Kansas State University in Manhattan where this photograph was made. Kennedy's wife, Ethel (far left), and Pearson, who are seated here behind the candidate, accompanied him on to the University of Kansas at Lawrence, where he called for "meaningful negotiations" aimed at ending the war in Vietnam. "I am concerned about the course of action we are following in South Vietnam," reasoned Kennedy. "I am concerned that this has been made America's war. . . . I think that's unacceptable. I don't accept the idea that this is just [an American] military effort."

Many Republicans in the state were stunned by Pearson's boldness, but this courtesy to the charismatic Kennedy gave Pearson new credibility among young voters.

During the period of Nixon's first term, from 1969 to 1973, Pearson's independence as a legislator became fully apparent. Early in the Nixon years Pearson joined the Wednesday Club in the Senate, a group of some sixteen moderate and liberal Republicans who met each Wednesday to discuss issues. Senator Jacob Javits of New York was the informal leader. While they occasionally invited representatives of the Nixon administration to join them, the group, which had no official standing within the GOP caucus, often brought in outside experts. The Wednesday Club focused on foreign policy, a subject of genuine interest to Pearson. During his campaign against Ellsworth, Pearson had

voiced his concern about rapidly changing conditions in the world. "Failure to adjust our policy," he said, "will destine us to indecision and reflex reactions to new challenges," as he believed had happened in Cuba and was happening in Vietnam.²⁶ Pearson joined many of his Wednesday Club colleagues in seeking to restrain the president's expansion of the Vietnam War. This effort peaked with an amendment offered by Democrat Frank Church of Idaho and Republican John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky to stop the bombing of Laos and Cambodia.

26. John R. Cauley, "Urges Updated Foreign Policy," *Kansas City Star*, October 6, 1966; Jacob K. Javits, with Rafael Steinberg, *Javits: The Autobiography of a Public Man* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 262, 263. Javits called Pearson "an enlightened conservative who played a very useful role in reviewing policy matters from a Middle Western point of view."



During the early years of Richard Nixon's administration, Pearson joined the Wednesday Club in the Senate, a group of some sixteen moderate and liberal Republicans who met each Wednesday to discuss various issues. Senator Jacob Javits, a New York Republican first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1956 and pictured serving with Pearson on the Foreign Relations Committee in May 1973, was the informal leader. Over the years Pearson pursued many opportunities to work "across the aisle" and with his more liberal Republican colleagues, such as Senator Javits, who once called Pearson "an enlightened conservative who played a very useful role in reviewing policy matters from a Middle Western point of view." After nearly a quarter-century in the Senate and with his Republican Party moving further and further to the political right, Javits was denied renomination in 1980, two years after his Kansas colleague took voluntary retirement. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. James B. Pearson.

Pearson cosponsored the amendment and voted for it. He also questioned the Supersonic Transport System proposed by the administration, and voted against authorizing several new weapons systems, including the Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system. He showed his independence on domestic issues by cosponsoring legislation on transportation, campaign finance, and consumer rights with liberal Democrats. In August 1970 Pearson voiced his opposition to the Vietnam War, even as Dole was becoming the Nixon administration's leading spokesman on the Senate floor for its war policies.²⁷ The

two Kansas senators differed sharply on foreign policy issues, and on some key domestic issues, such as the nomination by President Nixon of Earl Butz as secretary of agriculture (Pearson voted against the confirmation; Dole voted in favor). But the two Kansans nearly always voted in tandem on matters directly affecting their state, such as maintaining farm support programs, building

of the Vietnam War. He had campaigned in support of the war in 1966 and continued to support it, with some reservations. "Address by Senator James B. Pearson," Cooperative Urban Teacher Education Banquet, Wichita, Kansas, August 30, 1970, Administrative Series, box 360, folder 46, Schedules and Speeches, Pearson Papers. The Cooper-Church amendment passed the Senate by a vote of 58 to 37. "The 92nd Congress," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 29 (January 15, 1971): 116-17.

27. In a speech to a teachers' banquet in Wichita, Pearson said the United States "should continue the Nixon policy of disengagement and withdrawal from the war in Indochina at the earliest possible time." This was Pearson's first public statement urging an early end

flood control reservoirs, and bringing urban renewal to small cities.²⁸

One of the most politically costly of Pearson's legislative stands was his opposition to Nixon's Safeguard anti-ballistic missile system (ABM) in the summer of 1969. The president proposed a system of defensive missiles and radar to protect the nation's long-range, offensive Minuteman nuclear missiles. After studying Safeguard, Pearson found it technically unsound and feared it would provoke a Soviet offensive buildup; he decided to oppose its deployment. "For one in the Senate to make a contribution to the solution to the difficult problems affecting our national security . . . each Senator must exercise his own best judgment in accordance with the quiet turning of his conscience," Pearson reasoned on the Senate floor. "Not only is this the responsible role for a Senator but it is also the one by which public policy can be defined and understood in our democratic process."²⁹ In explaining his stance against Safeguard, Pearson had stated his fundamental idea of what it meant to be a United State senator.

His position on the ABM was well received by the Wednesday Club, if not altogether in the Republican cloakroom. Along with Pearson's other stands against Nixon's national security policies, this one caused Pearson problems with Republican Party regulars in Kansas. "How can you know more about this than the president does?," one constituent asked.³⁰ In the end deployment of Safeguard was authorized and Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, took it to Moscow and used it as diplomatic leverage to negotiate the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I). This followed an agreement with the Soviets limiting anti-ballistic missile systems to one per nation. After consultation with the White House, Pearson determined the president's purpose was sensible and changed his position, voting in 1970 to oppose efforts to limit funding for Safeguard. Certainly there were political considerations in Pearson's reversal. Although a run for reelection was two years away, he was concerned about "stretching the rubber band too far" between his legislative record and pro-Nixon Republicans back home. Pearson was said to be in trouble by some in



Senator Pearson's independence as a legislator became fully apparent as early as 1970, when he made his first public statement urging an early end to the Vietnam War. He told a group of Wichita teachers that the United States should withdraw "from the war in Indochina at the earliest possible time" and joined many of his Wednesday Club colleagues in seeking to restrain the president's expansion of the war. This effort peaked during the latter half of 1970 with a bipartisan amendment offered by Democrat Frank Church of Idaho, pictured here with Pearson in 1974, and Republican John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky to stop the bombing of Laos and Cambodia. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. James B. Pearson.

Kansas; but he continued to be, in the words of Tom Korlogos, Senate liaison for the Nixon White House, "a tough vote to get."³¹

It was during this period that Pearson began to be looked at by his Republican Senate colleagues as a leader. His humor was celebrated in the GOP cloakroom. When a young staffer with two children said his wife was pregnant, Pearson's quick response was, "Still, or again?" When the Republican Party caucus reorganized in the fall of 1969 in preparation for the opening of the second session of the Ninety-first Congress, Pearson was persuaded to offer himself for the whip position. He received some national press attention and at one point thought he had enough votes to win. But when the closed-door balloting was over on September 7, 1969, Pearson had lost by one vote to Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan. Griffin had made a name for himself in 1968

28. Robert J. Dole, interview by author, Washington, DC, May 22, 2006, author's personal collection.

29. 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115 (July 25, 1969), pt. 15, 20798–99.

30. Pearson, personal communication with author, June 1969; 91st Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 115 (July 25, 1969), pt. 15, 20798.

31. Tom Korlogos, interview by author, Washington, DC, August 17, 2008; for more on Safeguard, see Alton Frye, *A Responsible Congress: The Politics of National Security* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 35–43; Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 415–18, 523–24; see also "The ABM," in Column and Newsletter Series, Pearson Papers.

during the battle to defeat the confirmation of Associate Justice Abe Fortas, President Johnson's nominee for chief justice of the Supreme Court.³² This was the first and last time Pearson would try for a leadership position in his party. In a sense his defeat by Griffin was the high-water mark of his influence and that of the Wednesday Club within the Senate Republican caucus.

It was almost as if Pearson's qualities were best appreciated in the Democratic caucus. His bipartisan voting record was the second highest among Senate Republicans. Pearson had made allies among Democrats, principally through his work on the Commerce Committee. Russell Long of Louisiana, son of the legendary Governor Huey Long, was one of them. Affable and powerful, Russell Long chaired the Finance Committee, the real insiders' panel in the Senate. Long once offered Pearson a seat on his committee, suggesting it would be good for Pearson at reelection time. "On Finance, you can make people happy," Long said. When Pearson replied he was thinking of a seat on the Foreign Relations Committee, Long was appalled. Determined to pursue his interest in foreign policy and to try to deal with "the great issues of the day," Pearson took a seat on Foreign Relations, the committee chaired by J. William Fulbright, the Democrat from Arkansas who split with President Johnson on Vietnam. Interestingly, Dole later took a seat on the Finance Committee and used it as the platform for his successful bid to become minority leader.³³

As Pearson asserted his independence in the Senate, disaster hit Wichita, Kansas. On October 2, 1970, a plane crash in the Rocky Mountains killed thirty members of the Wichita State University football team along with some of their fans, coaches, and school administrators. As an ally of Wichita aviation manufacturers and the ranking Republican on the aviation subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee, Pearson felt responsible

32. Pearson, who had also voted against Fortas, believed Dole had not voted for him for whip at the critical moment, but since the balloting was secret, this could not be confirmed. Senator James B. Pearson, personal communication with author, Washington, DC, September 7, 1969, author's personal collection; *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 90th Congress, 2nd Session, 1968, Volume 24* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Service, 1968), 54-S.

33. Pearson voted with bipartisan majorities 83 percent of the time in 1969; among Republican senators only Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania had a higher bipartisan voting percentage (85 percent). *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 91st Congress, 1st Session, 1969, Volume 25* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), 1064; H. Edward Flentje, "A Loophole Closing Commission," *Hutchinson News*, February 21, 2010, available online at <http://www.hutchnews.com/Print/insight-2-22--1>.

for bringing to bear the full authority of the federal government to determine the cause of the crash. He sent Joe Dennis, his administrative assistant in Kansas, to the crash site near the base of Loveland Pass, which stood at 11,990 feet. Pearson also sent Bob Woody, his Commerce Committee staff aide, to hearings in Wichita held by the National Transportation Safety Board. Pearson himself did not go to Wichita, perhaps out of concern about appearing to exploit the tragedy. He was also engaged at that time in final negotiations on financing for the Airport and Airways Development Act, his principal legislative achievement to that time. His junior colleague, Bob Dole, did attend the hearings, underlining Pearson's absence.³⁴

On another front Pearson was having trouble with the Nixon administration, trouble that came from back home. When U.S. Chief District Judge Arthur Stanley, Jr., of Kansas City, Kansas, announced he would retire in 1971, John Anderson sought to succeed Stanley and was on the short list of candidates. However, Anderson had alienated Stanley and his allies in the 1950s by supporting efforts by the city of Kansas City, Kansas, to annex the Fairfax Industrial District. Stanley and his family had sold land for the district to the Union Pacific Railroad. Stanley himself was for a time the lead attorney representing the forty-one industries in the district, companies that included General Motors, the National Biscuit Company, and North American Aviation, which manufactured the B-25 bomber. At one point twenty-five thousand people were employed in the district. When Stanley's clients lost their bid to reverse the annexation in the state supreme court, Anderson as attorney general refused to appeal the court's decision. The case eventually went to the U.S. Supreme Court and was decided in favor of the city. Anderson had stood up to powerful interests and burnished his reputation for courage and independence—but made lifelong enemies of Stanley and his allies.³⁵

A renowned veteran of two world wars and a powerful former state senator, Stanley swore Anderson would never get a federal judgeship.³⁶ Stanley had a

34. *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, October 3, 1970, and subsequent issues; Bob Woody, interview by author, Winfield, Kansas, March 21, 2011.

35. For more on the Fairfax Industrial District see, *Kansas City Star*, March 6–19, 1949; July 5, 1953; and July 22, 1959; on Anderson's support for annexation see, *Kansas City Star*, July 22, 1959; see also Roxi Taylor, "History of Fairfax Industrial Park," in "Focus on Fairfax," *Kansas City Star*, supplement, April 16, 1989.

36. Rogers interviews, September 3, 2006, and November 3, 2009. Large law firms in Kansas City, Kansas, and Olathe, as well as the Wyandotte County Bar Association, backed Justice Earl O'Connor rather than Anderson. The executive committee of the Johnson County Bar Association compromised and endorsed both O'Connor

friend, Harold Tyler, in the Justice Department, where candidates for judgeships were vetted. Anderson had high expectations from early on that Pearson could help him get a judgeship, but Pearson understood it would be difficult for him, then a freshman in the minority, to be much help. Pearson plainly felt an obligation to Anderson but had mixed feelings about Anderson's qualifications and his chances of success. The senator was concerned about getting into a fight with the Stanley forces, who included Harry Darby and Dole's mentor Huck Boyd. He was also bothered by the appearance of cronyism. "If he [Anderson] becomes a federal judge then I can see everything we worked for in the Republican Party of Kansas just going right down the drain," Pearson told Charles McAtee, an aide to then-Governor Anderson who called on Pearson in Washington. In 1971 Pearson put Anderson's name forward, but faced with active opposition from fellow Kansas attorneys, especially in Kansas City, Kansas, and neighboring Johnson County, Anderson was not expected to win a recommendation from the American Bar Association. With his colleague Bob Dole backing state Supreme Court Justice Earl O'Connor, Pearson persisted for a time on behalf of Anderson, but to no avail. Anderson finally withdrew his name and Pearson and Dole sent O'Connor's name to the White House. O'Connor was nominated and confirmed. Anderson never forgave Pearson for failing to secure a judgeship for him. "He got out to D.C. and forgot about where he had received his help along the way and who his friends were," Anderson said. "I never heard from him and he didn't end up recommending me. I was very disappointed by that."³⁷

and Anderson. See, Charles E. Wetzler, president, Johnson County Bar Association, Olathe, to Pearson, January 12, 1971, Subject/Issues Series, Federal Jobs, box 352, folder 1, "Judgeships, 1970-1971," Pearson Papers.

37. Beatty, "For the Benefit of the People," 266-67; Harold Tyler, a U.S. district judge, had served on a committee on the federal judiciary with Stanley Rogers interview, November 3, 2009; Conard interview, April 20, 2007. See also John W. Breyfogle, Jr., Olathe, to Pearson, January 15, 1971; Pearson to John W. Breyfogle, Jr., January 20, 1971; and Willard L. Phillips to Pearson, February 4, 1971, box 352, folder 1, "Judgeships, 1970-1971," Pearson Papers. See also John J. Jurcyk, president, Wyandotte County Bar Association, to Pearson, October 15, 1971; and Eugene T. Hackler, Olathe, to Pearson, August 26, 1971, and Hackler to Pearson, September 15, 1971, box 352, folder 2, "Judgeships, 1970-1971," Pearson Papers. Hackler defended Anderson and wrote "opposition to John's appointment is coming basically from three sources, all good sized law firms in this area, who have expressed some bitterness arising from previous litigation."

Pearson navigated his way through the Anderson affair with a minimum of political damage, but his distance from Nixon and differences with Dole left him looking vulnerable as his reelection approached in 1972. Some members of his party thought Pearson "was not Republican enough."³⁸ There were rumors that Kansas Governor Robert Docking, a popular, pro-business Democrat, would challenge Pearson. For over a year Pearson traveled home nearly every weekend to mend fences. When it came time for him to announce his intentions, Pearson and several of his Washington staff braved snow, ice, and congested airports to arrive just in time at the annual Kansas Day Celebration in Topeka on January 29. "I want to go on because I believe in Kansas; I believe in the Republican Party; [and] I believe in myself," Pearson told an anxious audience of Republican stalwarts. By the end of his brief announcement, the crowd was applauding loudly. The Docking threat did not materialize, and Dole agreed to chair Pearson's campaign. Pearson went on to defeat Harlan Dale House, a farmer from Goodland, in the primary with 82 percent of the vote, and the Democratic nominee Arch Tetzlaff, a former German Luftwaffe pilot, in the general election. Pearson won that election with 73 percent of the vote.³⁹ These victories served to enhance Pearson's stature as a serious, bipartisan lawmaker. A *Kansas City Star* editorial was highly complimentary: "Pearson is not a rubber stamp. He takes time to think issues through. When he speaks or acts, you can be sure he knows the subject."⁴⁰ The "man in the middle" had earned a second full term.

Not really comfortable as a politician, Pearson devoted himself to legislating. Among his most notable legislative achievements was passage of the Airport and Airways Development Act of 1970. Pearson had earned the respect of his majority Democratic colleagues on the Commerce Committee by supporting, and sticking with, a number of their initiatives including nationwide unit pricing for groceries.⁴¹ As the ranking minority member

38. Jerry Waters, Pearson's administrative assistant, personal communication with author and other former members of Pearson's Washington staff, Washington, DC, April 10, 2005, author's personal collection.

39. "Statement by Senator James B. Pearson," January 29, 1972, Administrative Series, box 362, folder 73, Schedules and Speeches, Pearson Papers; Ray Morgan, "G.O.P. Cheers Pearson On," *Kansas City Star*, January 30, 1972; Secretary of State, *State of Kansas, Election Statistics, 1971 Special Election, 1972 Primary and Special Elections, 1972 General Elections* (Topeka: State Printing Plant, 1973), 16, 84.

40. "Kansas Has an Outstanding Man in Senator Pearson," *Kansas City Star*, October 25, 1972.

41. John Kirtland to the author, July 5, 2010, author's personal collection. Kirtland was also Pearson's appointee to the Commerce Committee staff.



As support continued to grow for modifying Rule XXII, the cloture rule, Democrats in the Senate turned to Pearson to help carry a resolution on the floor. In January 1975 Pearson cosponsored with Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota a resolution that reduced to three-fifths the number of votes required to end debate. Mondale, who later served as vice president in the Carter administration, was frustrated by the use of the filibuster to block bills he had introduced on housing and to aid desegregating school districts. As Mondale put it, he and Pearson respected the right of individual senators “to debate—to speak, to ventilate, to delay, to be heard,” but both saw the high bar of the cloture rule as an impediment to reasoned decision making. Photograph of Pearson and Mondale courtesy of Mrs. James B. Pearson.

of the aviation subcommittee, Pearson played a major role in drafting the bill to upgrade the nation’s aviation system. He worked with chairman Warren Magnuson, Democrat of Washington, subcommittee chairman Howard Cannon, Democrat of Nevada, and others to produce a bill that authorized the collection of taxes and fees from airports, airlines, and private aviation to create a trust fund—akin to the highway trust fund—for long-term improvement of the system. The bill passed the Senate on May 12, 1970, and has become a basic building block of the expanded air travel system we have today.⁴²

42. John Kirtland to the author, April 19, 2010, author’s personal collection; Woody personal communication, April 10, 2005; “Airports and Airways,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 27 (May 15, 1970): 1275–76.

An important piece of legislation championed by Pearson, in collaboration with Democrats, was a bill to deregulate the wellhead price of “new” natural gas. Louisiana was the leading producer of natural gas and that state’s low-level price controls stymied the growth of a national market. Pearson teamed with fellow Commerce Committee member Lloyd Bentsen of Texas to carve out a compromise that lifted price controls from newly drilled wells, while leaving controls on existing wells. Again, it was Long, Pearson’s frequent ally, who suggested the compromise. The Pearson-Bentsen bill was introduced in 1974 and passed the Senate but failed in the House. In late December 1977 a conference report in which the Pearson-Bentsen bill had been incorporated was adopted and sent to President Jimmy Carter, who

avored deregulation and signed it. With modifications in subsequent years, the act made natural gas available as a relatively clean and inexpensive fuel nationwide.⁴³

Pearson also devoted much time and effort to rural development. His concern for the overcrowding of America's cities and the depletion of the rural population was real, and it led Pearson to become the principal Republican contributor to federal agricultural policies aimed at trying to balance economic growth. In July 1967 Pearson teamed with Robert Kennedy to back a bill creating incentives for industry to bring jobs to inner cities. Later that year Pearson joined Democratic Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma to introduce the Rural Jobs Development Act, which created incentives for the location of industry in rural communities. This bill was introduced in revised form many times. In addition Pearson sponsored bills to create a Rural Development Bank and a Rural Development Center. Along with his speeches, articles, and statements on the Senate floor, Pearson's legislative initiatives in this area helped bring about the Rural Development program that today is an integral part of the mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The program's loans and grants for housing, infrastructure, and business start-ups owe their origin to the ideas put forward by Pearson and his colleagues.⁴⁴

Pearson's other notable legislative initiatives included several bills to limit campaign spending and legislation to establish a newsman's privilege for protecting confidential sources. Few of these bills became law, but each contributed to further consideration of policy changes. In the mid-1970s Pearson took a strong interest in the deregulation of major transportation industries. During the Carter administration, Pearson joined his colleagues on the Commerce Committee, Democrats and Republicans, to fashion the Air Transportation Regulatory Reform Act of 1978, which the president signed into law. That legislation opened the way, for better or worse, for the hub-and-spoke airline system we have today, with its relatively low airfares and huge passenger numbers. Pearson also led a successful legislative effort to speed the Interstate Commerce Commission's handling of railroad track abandonments. Always a believer in the benefits to the nation of private enterprise, Pearson

43. Kirtland to the author, July 5, 2010. Senator Bentsen was the Democratic nominee for vice president in 1988 on the Michael Dukakis ticket.

44. John R. Cauley, "Job Push in Slums," *Kansas City Star*, July 9, 1967; Lauren K. Soth, "To Revitalize Rural America," *Des Moines Register*, July 11, 1971; Jerry Waters, personal communication with the author and former members of Pearson's Washington staff, April 10, 2005, author's personal collection.

still showed his willingness to intervene in the private sector by supporting expanded service by Amtrak, the government-backed rail passenger corporation.⁴⁵

As he demonstrated during the civil rights debate, Pearson took an interest from early in his Senate career in modifying the rules surrounding the filibuster. Political science professor H. Edward Flentje, who worked on Pearson's Washington, DC, staff in 1968, recalled one of his first research assignments was on Rule XXII, the cloture rule, which can be used to end a filibuster. Pearson loved to debate issues, but understood the importance of modifying the cloture rule so a Senate majority could act on the people's business. He lent his name to several efforts to reduce the requirement that a two-thirds majority, or sixty-six votes, was needed to end debate. One effort in particular, led by Senator Javits in 1969, came close to succeeding, but did not. At that time Pearson was the principal Republican cosponsor, with Senator Church, of the modification resolution that failed on the Senate floor.⁴⁶

As support continued to grow for modifying Rule XXII, the Democrats in 1975 turned to Pearson to help carry a resolution on the floor. In January of that year Pearson cosponsored with Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota a resolution that reduced to three-fifths, or sixty, the number of votes required to end debate. Mondale was frustrated by the use of the filibuster to block bills he had introduced on housing and to aid desegregating school districts. As Mondale put it, he and Pearson respected the right of individual senators "to debate—to speak, to ventilate, to delay, to be heard," but both saw the high bar of the cloture rule as an impediment to reasoned decision making. "There is a time for debate," Pearson said, "and there is a time to act."⁴⁷

45. For the Air Transportation Regulatory Act of 1978, see "Senate Approves Measure on Airline Deregulation," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 36 (April 22, 1978): 1022–23; S. 2493–Air Transportation Regulatory Act of 1978, box 287, folder 5, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series, Pearson Papers; and for more on track abandonment and deregulation see S. 863, Abandonment of Railroads, Box 284, folder 38, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series, Pearson Papers; and Amend Regional Railroad Act, Box 285, folders 1, 3, and 10, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series, Pearson Papers.

46. H. Edward Flentje was Pearson's staff appointee to the Commerce Committee from 1968 to 1970. The resolution to reduce the number of votes needed for cloture to two-thirds (sixty-six) won a test vote, 51–47, but Vice President Hubert Humphrey's ruling that the Senate could change its rules at the beginning of a new Congress by a simple majority was immediately overturned. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1969, 2–5.

47. Pearson offered the motion that a simple majority could end debate on the resolution he and Mondale had introduced. The parliamentarian advised Rockefeller to rule in favor of Pearson's motion. Sarah A. Truel, "Walter F. Mondale and the Filibuster: The Evolution of Agenda Control in the U.S. Senate," paper prepared

Despite resistance led by “rules wizard” James B. Allen, Democrat of Alabama, the Mondale-Pearson resolution passed. Allen managed to soften it, however. In search of a compromise, Russell Long suggested sixty votes be required to end debate regardless how many senators were present and voting. Mondale and Pearson had wanted three-fifths of senators present and voting, a number that might not always have amounted to sixty. Rockefeller, then vice president, was presiding. On the advice of the parliamentarian, Rockefeller ruled that the Senate could, as it organized in a new session of Congress, change its rules, including Rule XXII, by a simple majority. On February 24, 1975, the Senate acted to modify Rule XXII and require sixty votes for cloture. This was the most significant change in the cloture rule since it was first invoked under President Woodrow Wilson. Unfortunately, the Mondale-Pearson modification of the rule has not helped in the long run. The battle lines on Rule XXII are drawn almost entirely along party lines today, and the filibuster is used not to protect a region’s customs but to stymie the majority’s legislative agenda. With the bar for cloture at sixty votes, regardless how many senators are present and voting, the number of threatened filibusters has grown exponentially, especially in recent years.⁴⁸

When in 1975 it was time to seek a successor for U.S. District Judge George Templar, Anderson again entered the fray. The situation unfolded in much the same way it did in 1971. Anderson could not muster enough support among members of the Kansas bar. Even after state District Judge Albert B. Fletcher of Junction City, a leading candidate, took an appointment to the U.S. Military Court of Appeals, Anderson remained only one of a number of candidates. Pearson again held out for a time for Anderson, but he did not make much headway. Pearson and Dole finally got together and agreed on Richard Rogers, who had previously served as Pearson’s campaign manager, a state senator, and chairman of the Kansas Republican Party. Anderson continued to blame Pearson for not trying hard enough to obtain a federal judgeship for him.⁴⁹

for a seminar at the Hubert Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, May 2, 2007; see also Sarah A. Binder and Stephen S. Smith, *Politics or Principle? Filibustering in the United States Senate* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 181; Johnson, *The Laws that Shaped America*; for a firsthand account of floor action on cloture modification, see Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 111–34.

48. Truel, “Walter F. Mondale and the Filibuster.”

49. John Anderson, Jr., interview with author, Overland Park, Kansas, June 14, 2006; see also Rogers interviews, September 3, 2006, and November 3, 2009; Beatty, “For the Benefit of the People.”

From an early stage of his Senate career, Pearson took an interest in what was going on in the world. He made many official trips abroad to Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. He agreed with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana that the number of U.S. troops in Europe should be drawn down, and pursued this policy as a member of the Armed Services Committee. Pearson twice served as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly, first in 1973 as a representative of the Nixon administration and again in 1978 as a representative of the Senate.

Pearson had an abiding interest in institutional reform. In 1962, following a visit to former President Herbert Hoover at his home in Iowa, Pearson joined Senator Abraham Ribicoff, Democrat of Connecticut, to propose a new Hoover Commission to reorganize the federal bureaucracy. Early in his Senate career Pearson proposed a study of the way foreign policy was made. As an early proponent of campaign finance reform, Pearson sponsored a bill in 1970 with Senator John Pastore, Democrat of Rhode Island, to limit spending on broadcast campaign ads. The legislation was passed by Congress but vetoed by President Nixon. Pearson’s several bipartisan efforts to reform campaign finance were very much part of the process that led to later initiatives such as the McCain-Feingold bill of 2007. As is the case with his efforts to reform Rule XXII, Pearson’s campaign finance reform efforts have been pushed aside by subsequent changes, including the shift to the right in our political system and the rise of partisanship.⁵⁰

As a man in the middle, James B. Pearson made a difference in the fields of transportation, rural development, and foreign policy. The success of his efforts such as the one with Mondale to modify Rule XXII would not have come if Pearson had not been willing to lend his name, and his hand, to enterprises championed by the most liberal

50. Joe Lastelic, “Pearson Dines with Hoover,” *Kansas City Times*, June 13, 1962; on campaign finance reform, see 91st Congress, 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 116 (April 14, 1970), pt. 9, 11592–611; “Campaign Broadcast Reform Act” and Pastore amendment, S. 3637, March 25, 1970, box 280, folder 9, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series, Pearson Papers; see also, among other items on this subject in the Pearson Papers, S. 1794, Campaign Finance Act, May 17, 1967, box 276, folder 36, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series; Campaign Finance Reform, S. 1692, March 26, 1969, box 279, folder 31, Pearson Legislation, Legislation Series; and correspondence relating to campaign reform (Federal Election Campaign Act and Federal Election Commission), box 127, folders 1 and 9, Pearson Legislation, General Series, 1972.



From an early stage of his Senate career, Pearson took an interest in what was going on in the world. The Kansas senator made many official trips abroad to Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, and he twice served as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. Pearson agreed with long-time Senate Democratic Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana that the number of U.S. troops in Europe should be drawn down and he pursued this policy as a member of the Armed Services Committee. Photograph of the senators pictured together in October 1975 courtesy of Mrs. James B. Pearson.

members of the Senate. Even before his own Republican Party began to divide between “Goldwater” and “Rockefeller” factions in 1964, Pearson found he could be most effective working across the political aisle. But sixteen years later the Senate had changed, and bipartisan collaboration was more difficult to achieve. By November 1977 Pearson had decided he would not seek reelection. He announced this early so candidates for his seat would have time to raise money and campaign the following year.

Much had changed in the Senate that was not to Pearson’s liking. After the Watergate scandal of 1973 and 1974, Pearson’s son, Bill, observed, “My father didn’t like the atmosphere. It wasn’t fun anymore.”⁵¹ There were too many committees and subcommittees to serve

on. The comity Pearson so much valued had faded. Sharp attacks against individual senators were more frequent on the Senate floor. Former Republican Senate leader Howard Baker of Tennessee, a friend and ally of Pearson’s, thought Pearson, independent minded as he was, simply decided to quit. Pearson’s successor, Nancy Landon Kassebaum Baker, recalled Pearson’s frequent comments about mowing the grass at his rural home near Baldwin City, Kansas. “When I’m finished mowing I can see what I have done,” Pearson would say. “In the Senate you work and work and you don’t see you have accomplished much.” Kassebaum, who worked for Pearson on his Washington staff from 1975 to 1976, said she could relate to Pearson’s frustration. She thought he “just got tired.”

On his return from a conference in Europe in 1973, Pearson told the author he thought a global shift to

51. William Pearson interview.

the right was coming, and that it would be profound.⁵² Always prescient about political trends, Pearson seemed to doubt there would be a place for him in the future. He was well aware of himself as a man in the middle. In the run-up to the 1978 elections a young conservative Republican, Howard Wilkins, Jr., was surfacing in Kansas with backing from some oil and gas moguls in Wichita. This insurgency may have hoped to scare Pearson into not running for reelection. But it had the opposite effect. Pearson made it clear to allies such as Bob Williams, a long-time supporter among Wichita oilmen, that he would not leave the field under fire. Relying on relationships he had forged in seeking the deregulation of natural gas, Pearson succeeded in isolating the would-be challengers. It was they who withdrew from the field, leaving Pearson to decide his future on his own terms, according to Pearson's long-time administrative assistant in Washington, Jerry Waters.⁵³

As his son Bill recalled, Pearson was the kind of person who would remain deeply engaged in his professional life, whether it was law or politics. The senator's preoccupation with his work may have contributed to the decision made in 1966 by his wife Martha, who did not like the political life in Washington, to move back to the family's suburban home in Prairie Village, Kansas. Her concern was with raising the Pearson's four children. With half a continent between them, the couple grew apart and, after Pearson retired from the Senate, they divorced. Pearson remarried in December 1980 to Margaret Lynch, a long-time Capitol Hill staffer. She had worked for Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the successor in the role of Republican minority leader to Everett Dirksen of Illinois, and then later for Pearson. The couple lived in a house in Georgetown and at Pearson's rural home near Baldwin City, where both Margaret and James Pearson served as trustees of Baker University, a small liberal arts college with historical ties to the Methodist Church.⁵⁴

After his retirement from the Senate, Pearson practiced law with the Washington, DC, office of LeBoeuf, Lamb, Lieby and MacRae. He and former Democratic Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut cochaired a commission to study the structure and procedures of the

Senate. Their recommendations included reducing the number of committees on which senators served, and that recommendation was acted upon.⁵⁵ Pearson and his wife traveled several times to Japan and Southeast Asia, and he served as a director of the East-West Center based in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 2004 the U.S. Post Office in Prairie Village, Kansas, was named the James B. Pearson Post Office. Representative Dennis Moore, a Democrat from Johnson County, was instrumental in securing the designation.

In failing health, Pearson retired to Margaret's family home in Gloucester, Massachusetts, keeping in touch with former Senate colleagues, mostly by telephone. Among those colleagues were Edward Brooke, Howard Baker, and Walter Mondale. In his later years Pearson used a wheelchair and was reluctant to appear in public. His contact with former Senate colleagues diminished over time, according to several sources. Democratic Senator John Culver of Iowa, a favorite traveling companion of Pearson's, observed this in an interview, and traveled to Gloucester for one last meeting with his old friend. Culver reported that he and Pearson "shared many memorable moments and previous times together." Baker, who was best man in Pearson's 1980 wedding and called him his "best friend in the Senate," eventually lost contact with Pearson. Daryl Schuster, an aide who spent many hours driving Pearson to events in Kansas, said he thought Pearson did not want to be dependent on anyone and was inclined to distance himself from those who had helped him. "Jim Pearson was harder on his friends than his enemies," Schuster said. Many members of Pearson's staff shared the sense that the senator could turn on and off of those who worked for him.⁵⁶ This inclination toward independence may have played a part in Pearson's handling of John Anderson's ambition for a federal judgeship. It certainly showed itself in Pearson's on-again, off-again relationship with the Kansas Republican Party, and in his response to many of the Cold War policies of President Richard Nixon. Independence seemed to suit Pearson, personally and politically.

After several years of kidney dialysis in Gloucester, Pearson died on January 13, 2009, at the age of eighty-eight; he was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington, DC. A memorial service for him was held at the First

52. Nancy Landon Kassebaum Baker and Howard Baker, interview by author, Huntsville, Tennessee, January 10, 2009, author's personal collection; Senator James B. Pearson, personal communication with author, Washington, DC, March 1973, author's personal collection.

53. Jerry Waters, personal communication with author, January 15, 2009, author's personal collection.

54. Senator James B. Pearson, interview by author, Washington, DC, April 11, 2010, author's personal collection; William Pearson interview.

55. Secretary of the Senate, Historical Office, personal communication with the author, April 2008, author's personal collection.

56. John Culver, interview by author, Washington, DC, April 15, 2008, author's personal collection; John Culver to the author, April 29, 2008, author's personal collection; Deryl Schuster, interview by author, Wichita, Kansas, June 21, 2007, author's personal collection.



Toward the end of Pearson's time in the Senate, much had changed that was not to his liking. The comity Pearson so much valued had faded. Sharp attacks against individual senators were more frequent on the Senate floor. Pearson's successor, Nancy Landon Kassebaum Baker, recalled Pearson's frequent comments about mowing the grass at his rural home near Baldwin City, Kansas. "When I'm finished mowing I can see what I have done," Pearson would say. "In the Senate you work and work and you don't see you have accomplished much." He retired from the Senate in 1978 and, along with returning to the law, took up the work pictured here, mowing the grass back in Baldwin. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. James B. Pearson.

United Methodist Church in Baldwin City on April 3, 2009.⁵⁷ His legacy is carried on by the James B. Pearson Fellowship for graduates of Kansas colleges and universities to study abroad. The fellowship was created in 1978 with an endowment of \$100,000 from Pearson's unused campaign fund. It is administered by the Kansas Board of Regents. Over one hundred Kansas students have benefited from the fellowship. In addition Pearson's name is on a fellowship in Washington to allow foreign service officers to spend time working in state and local government. Pearson believed U.S. diplomats needed to learn more about what was going on at home. "What this country needs," Pearson often said, "is a Secretary of State named Smith."⁵⁸

57. Joe Holley, "Progressive Republican was a Kansas Senator," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2009; Jeff Myrick, "Former Senator Lauded for His Talents," *Lawrence Journal-World*, April 4, 2009.

58. Woody personal communication, April 10, 2005; for information on the James B. Pearson Fellowship, see Kansas Board of Regents, "Scholarships and Grants," http://www.kansasregents.org/scholarships_and_grants.

This adopted son of Kansas made his mark quietly. He analyzed issues himself. He worked in his deliberate way with people of very different persuasions to reach his goals. As a United States senator from Kansas, Pearson was an effective educator of his constituents, constantly encouraging them to consider complex issues on their merits. He stood for his principles, even when a political price had to be paid. Never the grandstanding politician, he was nonetheless a formidable campaign organizer and one of the most astute politicians Kansas has seen. He knew how to use issues to his benefit and make himself the "man in the white hat." He won his seat in three elections by substantial margins. He was a man for his times, who likely would not have done well today. He was a man in the middle when the middle was where you could get things done. His example is available to young people who are interested in pursuing political leadership that puts governing ahead of ideology or partisan advantage. [KH]