Fred Harris

Served as a United States Senator for Oklahoma.

Chapter 1 — 1:18
Introduction

Announcer: Fred Harris grew up in the small town of Walters, Oklahoma, where he was born in a two-room house. He was first elected to the Oklahoma State Senate where he was one of its youngest members. He made an unsuccessful race for governor of Oklahoma in 1962. In 1964, he entered the race to serve out the unexpired term of U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr who had died while in office. He was 33 years old when he successfully defeated former Governor J. Howard Edmonson, who had been appointed to succeed Kerr, in the Democratic primary, and narrowly upset Republican nominee and legendary Oklahoma football coach Bud Wilkinson. While in Washington, D.C. Senator Harris encountered such giants as Lyndon B. Johnson, Hubert H. Humphrey and Robert Kennedy. In this interview, Fred talks about the personalities of these figures—including the tension between Johnson and Kennedy. Harris accomplished much during his distinguished career, championing human rights at home and around the world. Twice elected to the U.S. Senate from Oklahoma, Fred Harris became Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. He is the author of numerous works of fiction and nonfiction. Voices of Oklahoma would like to thank its generous sponsors who believe in preserving Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time. Listen now to Fred Harris tell his story.

Chapter 2 — 9:22
Mother & Dad

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today's date is April 26, 2012. Fred, would you state your full name please?

Fred Harris: My name is Fred Harris. It may be Fred Roy or Fred Ray Harris. Actually on my birth certificate it's Fredie Ray Harris, I think.

JE: Why is there a question about Ray or Roy?

FH: (Laughter) My birth certificate, the first time I ever got one, I think, was to get a passport. The blanks for my name were filled in, in what I think is my dad's handwriting. It was spelled Fredie with one "d" and you can't tell if it says "Ray" or "Roy". So I asked my folks about this one time. My dad thought they named me after an uncle of his, whose name was Ray Lee Carey. My mother thought they had named me after her brother, Lee Roy Person. So about in junior high I decided that Fredie Ray, which is what I was called in my early life—I thought that sounded like a kid's name, and so I changed my name to Fred Roy Harris. I shortened it eventually to Fred R. Harris. I would use the R when I would run for office because my dad's name was Fred B. Harris.

JE: So was that an official change?

FH: No.

JE: So, technically, you are not Fred R. Harris?

FH: That's right. Technically I am Fredie Ray (probably) Harris.

JE: So we cut back to your days in Washington in the Senate—a Fred Harris was never there (laughter).

FH: That's right! (Laughter) I hope nobody ever questions my election to the Oklahoma State Senate or to the U.S. Senate on the basis that I was elected under a fake name. (Laughter).

JE: When were you born?

FH: November 13, 1930 in Walters, Oklahoma, which is in southwestern Oklahoma in Cotton County.

JE: Your present age today is?

FH: I am 81.

JE: Where are we recording this interview?

FH: At the home I share with my wife, Margaret Elliston in Corrales, New Mexico, which is in Sandoval County, New Mexico on the banks of the Rio Grande River, across the river from Albuquerque.

JE: We are a half hour or less from Albuquerque?

FH: That's right.

JE: So you were born in Walters in a beautiful, new hospital? (Chuckle) Or where were you born?

FH: (Laughter) No. My mother pointed the place out to me later on. I was born in a two-room frame house. The doctor was Dr. George Baker. He signed the birth certificate, but like I said earlier my dad filled out the birth certificate. My dad listed his own occupation as laborer and he listed my mother's occupation as housewife.

JE: Tell us where in Oklahoma Walters is.

FH: It's down in the southwest part of Oklahoma, 22 miles south of Lawton and 45 miles north of Wichita Falls, Texas.

JE: Which side of the tracks were you born on?

FH: I was born just on the right side of the tracks, but barely. Across the tracks to the west of where I was born is an area, which in my day people sort of derogatorily called snuff ridge. People kind of looked down on the people that lived over there because they were poor and so forth. It's interesting because certainly we weren't any better off economically than those people, (chuckle) but I was barely born on the right side of the tracks.

JE: Tell us about 1930.

FH: Well 1930 was in the depths of the Depression with the great crash that hit Wall Street in 1929. Soon after I was born we began to go into those terrible Dust Bowl days.

JE: Your mother's name and where she was from?

FH: Addie Alene Person Harris. She was born in East Texas. Her folks moved up to Oklahoma near Waurika. My dad was Fred Byron Harris. He was born in Mississippi. His folks moved to Oklahoma when he was 6 and they began to sharecrop a farm near Waurika. Later on, with the help of his brother, my uncle A.C. Harris, he wound up buying that farm and the adjoining farm and was farming on it when he died.

JE: Your mother's personality, can you describe her for us?

FH: I think it was laughing. She had green eyes that twinkled and she laughed all the time. There were two aunts of mine that were her very close friends and any time they got together it was just laughing. We weren't much on hugging in my family as far as I can remember, but she was a very loving person and she doted on us and me. She had had to work all of her life and she had been kind of an adult all of her life. Her dad whose name I think was Will Person together with my dad's dad whose name was Andrew Clifton Harris spent a lot of time fishing and hunting and drinking a little. My mother could write checks on her father's bank account from the time she was a teenager. She was always a hard worker and she was a good manager. In my early life she worked cleaning people's house. In those days there was a place called Help Yourself Laundry in Walters. She worked there and helped people do their laundry or did it for them. Later on, she somehow taught herself how to do bookkeeping. She began to do the books at cattle auction sales in Walters. She was always I think what we would call today a feminist. She didn't understand anything about politics and she was never involved in it, but she was always willing to do anything to help me. She would go to local fairs or whatever by herself to help campaign for me when I would run for office.

JE: What about brothers and sisters?

FH: I had three sisters. I had an older sister Catherine and then a sister just younger than me by two years, Sue and then a younger sister named Irene. All of them are dead now.

JE: Describe your father for us. What kind of a personality did he have?

FH: My father was a cowboy kind of a guy. My mother had an eighth grade education because that's as far as the country school went where she lived. My dad had only about a third

grade education or something like that. His father took him out of school early so he could work in the fields. Then later he drove his father, my grandfather and my mother's father a lot when he was just a kid. i think the reason why they needed driver was that they were drinking a little bit when they would go fishing or whatever. He was a really tough cowboy kind of a guy. He was wiry and tough and he could do anything. He was a mechanic and could work on his own cars and trucks. He was also a butcher and every year he would butcher a hog or a calf and cut it up and so forth. He would cure the ham and cure the sausage. He was a heck of a carpenter. A couple of the houses we lived in when I was a kid he built an extra room on the house for me to have my own bedroom. He was phenomenal at buying and selling cattle. He would go to an auction sale in our area every weekday and then on Saturday he would generally go out to some farmer's place that he had heard wanted to sell some cattle. I would go with him a lot. He would know from the morning radio reports what the various classes of cattle were selling for in hundred weight. He would have to estimate the weight of each individual animal and apply to it what he knew was that day's hundred weight price in Oklahoma City or in Forth Worth. A lot of times he would do this in his head, or use notes. Then he would come up with a group price for the whole bunch. There would be a great deal of bargaining back and forth. He called it chiseling. (Chuckle) Then he would load up generally in his own truck when he had a truckload of cattle and he would leave out in the early evening so he would get to the Oklahoma City Stockyards a little before dawn. He would consign his cattle to an agent that he always used whose name was Ralph O. Wright. He would write a check for the cattle and if he didn't have enough money in the bank to cover that the bank just treated it as a short-term loan. Then he brought his check back from the sale and would deposit that at the bank. If he had been right in his bargaining and at the auction, there would be a little left over for profit. (Chuckle) He made us a good living and he did that for most of my life.

Chapter 3 — 8:22
Picking Cotton

John Erling: So you were born in Walters, is that where you stayed and lived forever?

Fred Harris: I grew up there. I went to a little rural school in Lincoln Valley, which was in Cotton County near Walters for first grade, then my dad moved into town. It was really tough trying to farm and make a living, so he opened a grocery store in Walters. I think it was because he knew how to buy and butcher meat, but his grocery store had a little of everything. We lived in the back of the store. My mama hung quilts in the back of the store

on a wire line and that was our living quarters. That was when i was in the second grade. I lived in Walters from the second grade until I graduated from high school in 1948. We lived in 12 different houses in Walters.

JE: Did you own them?

FH: No, we rented.

JE: Why?

FH: Well, that was the funny thing. All of my life I hated to move and I didn't know why I hated it so much. One time I was taking my wife to Walters because I was thinking about writing a non-fiction book called Before The World Changed about life there in Walters pre-WWII. As we were driving around I said, "We used to live there and we used to live there." She counted them up and there were 12 of them and she said, "Why did you live so many places?" I had no idea. I asked my sister Sue and she didn't know. But there was a woman still alive who was living in a nursing home that had been my mother's close friend. Sue went and asked her and she said, "You all would move into a rented house and your mother would fix it up." My mother could do anything. She could paint, wallpaper and do carpentry stuff. She said, "The landlord would raise the rent and then you guys would move to another place and fix it up and so forth over and over." I wrote this in a book once, and this is the truth...I was telling some people back in New Mexico about me living in so many houses. One guy said, "Fred it looks like you would have finally got the message if you keep coming home from school and finding your folks had moved and leaving no forwarding address!" (Laughter) Another said, "It's a damn good thing Fred that you didn't get elected President, because the government would have gone broke putting plagues on all of these places saying: "Fred Harris Lived Here." (Laughter) The first house my dad ever owned, he bought my senior year at Walters. Later on I thought about it and I think he did it for me so I would have a nice place my senior year of high school.

JE: Did these houses that you lived in have indoor plumbing and electricity?

FH: We didn't have central plumbing until I think I was 12. We lived twice in the same house on the edge of Walters. It did not have indoor water. We had a hydrant out in the yard on city water and we had to carry it into the house. It did not have an indoor toilet. The first time we lived there it did not have electricity and of course there was no telephone. Then we moved into a house on Virginia Street and that was the first house with a phone, electricity and running water and indoor toilets.

JE: You talk about the work your mother and dad did, but didn't you do some things to earn some extra money with them?

FH: Yes. My folks had always worked hard, but when I was very little, four, five or six years old, every late fall and winter, we would go out on the Plains in west Texas when the cotton was ripe. In those days you didn't have mechanical cotton pickers, but humans did it. With my

mother's sister and her husband, and all of us kids, three of us and two cousins, we all went out there and camped out during the cotton-picking season. We didn't pick cotton actually, we pulled bowls, but we called it picking cotton. My folks worked mostly on their knees pulling their cotton sack taking two rows each. My sister would be ahead of one parent and I would be ahead of the other. We would pick cotton ahead of them and fill up our buckets and dump the cotton in the row so that when my folks came along they could pick it up. My folks, together just the two of them, could pick a bale of cotton a day. That's about 2,000 pounds of cotton between them—including the seeds and burrs and everything. Once it was ginned, that would make a bale of cotton, which weighs about 500 pounds. I started work in the summers primarily when I was about five. My grandfather on my dad's side had sort of a custom hay-baling operation. All of uncles at one time or another, who were like brothers to me, were the crew. In those days, hay balers were powered by a horse or a mule. That's what caused the bales to be tied with the baling wire. Somebody had to be on the horse in case people with the wire tying got behind. They didn't want to pay a grownup to be the person to be on the horse or mule. So I started out working daylight to dark riding that horse or mule all day long. I made a dime a day. I graduated on to wires, on one side somebody has to push the wire through and then on the other side somebody who's really good and fast ties the baling wire around the bale. Then I went on to running a buck rake, which is a two-horse or two-mule outfit with teeth in front of it that would pick up the hay and bring it back to the baler. I was too small and light to ride on that machine, so I walked all day. I did that until I was 12. When I was 12, my dad bought a used combine. Together with a neighbor friend of ours Jack Copeland and his boys, we started going to the wheat harvest which started in late May in Oklahoma. Then we would either go to West Texas or Kansas, depending on how the wheat was, and then from there on up to Nebraska and then finally to North Dakota in mid August. I did that for nine summers in a row. During the school year, when I was really little I helped a guy who had made his own power mower. He used a washing machine motor, but it was iron and so heavy that he couldn't push it. He made a harness, so I pulled this mower. I graduated from that eventually and then I was a paperboy like so many others were in those days, both for the *Morning Press* and for the *Wichita Falls Record*. Then I worked at the dry good store cleaning up and sweeping up and finally did a little bit of clerking there. When I was a senior in high school, I decided that I was going to learn a trade if I was going to go to law school, which I had decided I wanted to do. I got a job working for the local newspapers. I worked after school and in the evenings. I also learned how to be a job printer. I printed church bulletins and invitations and all sorts of things on Saturdays. I always worked and it was a wonderful thing. From the eighth grade on I had my own bank account and bought my own clothes and school supplies and that sort of thing. So did a lot of my friends, they were the same way.

Chapter 4 — 10:06
Student

John Erling: Let's go back to first grade. Where was that?

Fred Harris: That was in Lincoln Valley, about three miles east of the town of Walters. When I went there we lived in a farmhouse about · of a mile walk from where we lived to the two-room schoolhouse. I started the first grade there. The same lady taught grades one through four and we each had our own row. I can't imagine how she all four classes at once, but she did. In the other room of the school, her husband taught grades five through eight. I finished first grade there. My fondest memory of that year was that if you finished your work you could go to the back of the room and get a book. At the end of the year I won the prize, which was a quarter, for reading the most books. I was reminded of that when I was in the United States Senate and I visited the first grade class in Walters. My same teacher was teaching this first grade class. She introduced me to her class and she said, "There was a little boy in my class who just loved to read." She told them that was me. (Chuckle) I have wonderful memories of first grade and learning to read.

JE: So you had a natural interest in reading. Did your parents encourage reading?

FH: It came to me naturally. I can remember before I could read, before the first grade, we were over at my grandparents' house and my Uncle Bill, my dad's brother who was like a brother to me because he was closest to my age of all of my dad's brothers—he was tryjng to fool our cousin Margie into thinking I could read the comic strip page in the newspaper. He would tell me what it said and then he would say to Margie, "I'm a little afraid he can read." He would have me repeat what he told me. Well, she wasn't fooled, but maybe that got me interested in reading. I know I really wanted to read. I never stopped once I started.

JE: What type of vehicle was your dad driving back then?

FH: When he first started trading, he traded not only cattle but hogs too. He had an old Chevrolet coupe of some kind. He had taken out what had been a rumble seat in the back and built sideboards like a small pickup. He was able to haul a couple of calves and maybe three or four hogs in that. By the time I was in first grade and after, the only vehicle he ever had was a truck. He never bought a car until he bought a brand new car in 1948, a black, 4-door Plymouth. I didn't think about it at the time, but I later came to believe that he bought it for me to have a car during my senior year of high school.

JE: To add to your hay baling, weren't you known as the hay baling Harrises?

FH: Yes, all around Cotton County we were known as the Hay baling Harrises. We were a crew. My granddad started the crew. My dad was never a part of it because he had his own cattle trading operation that he was involved in, but all of his other brothers were at

one time or another. The next oldest brother of his, Dick, got his own hay baler and then one by one, these boys would take over the hay baling crew.

JE: We say the Dust Bowl was 1930 to 1936. You would have been 5 or six years old. Do you have any recollection of either people moving to California or of the dust itself?

FH: No, I don't. I have a memory of people going to California looking for jobs. I had uncles who went out to Long Beach to work in oilfields. At least two of my uncles at one time or another worked as roughnecks in the oilfield. Around Walters there were at various times oil developments—they were generally shallow wells in those days. I didn't, but some people my age grew up sort of knowing how to be roughnecks and roustabouts. My Uncle Jack went into the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Core. He had a uniform that was almost like a military uniform. He came out here to New Mexico. Among other things that he did, he planted trees. There must have been a lot of reforestation projects around here that people like him planted, because we have still got them. We also still have a lot of bridges and buildings and so forth that those CCCs built. Most of his money as I have since read, was held out of his check and sent home. My Harris grandparents would get a check that was most of Jack's pay while he was off in the CCC. I don't remember seeing the dust. The wind always blows in Oklahoma. In western Oklahoma, I think in the early days, women way out there on the plains used to go crazy with the incessant wind. There were always dust storms and so forth, but I don't recall the kind that you would see in documentaries and so forth.

JE: So your folks then moved into Walters and kind of gave up on farming because of the Dust Bowl and that kind of thing?

FH: Yes. They just couldn't make a living at it. There are about two or three things about those days that are unusual. It's not unusual for people my age, but we worked horses. I grew up not only having riding horses, but I worked horses as a kid and I remember their names of the horses that I worked.

JE: What were some of their names?

FH: Barney and Sam, who was injured in one eye from a barbed wire fence and Jenny who was faster than a racehorse. The other thing I was going to say was that when I was in the first grade and we lived in Lincoln Valley on the farm, I saw what must have been the last steam engines pulling a thrasher. My dad had a small field of oats and the thrashing crew came. They had to lay big timbers across a ditch so this steam engine tractor could pull the thrasher into the oat field. Surely that must have been about the last of the steam engines.

JE: If you were such a big reader and if so many of the houses you lived in didn't have electricity, there must have been some form of a lamp?

FH: Yes, we called it coal oil, but it was kerosene. One of my jobs was to carry it in and fill all of the lamps. In a few places we lived the cooking stove was also kerosene. My older sister's

job was to fill the lamps with coal oil and to clean the globes, because they would get black and sooty. So back then she and I studied by lamplight at the dining room table.

JE: So Abraham Lincoln probably didn't have a whole lot on you?

FH: (Laughter) Right.

JE: Were you a god student? Did you like school from the beginning?

FH: I loved school. I did. It's sort of the luck of the draw. Particularly later on, when I did so well in law school it never seemed quite fair that somehow I just wound up with the right skills and so forth that I could do well in law school. The same was true for studies in general. I never had to work that hard at making good grades they were just natural. The way things were back then, I was about half-ashamed of it because girls were the ones who made good grades. I wanted to be a football or basketball star, but it just happened that I made these good grades. I had a wonderful world history teacher and one time she was handing out tests after grading them. I think I had made a 92 or a low A on the paper and she said to me, "Young man, you ought to apply yourself because you could do a lot better." I was really very resentful. I said to her, "Well, I made a 92." She said, "You can do better than that. You've got too many irons in the fire." I did have. I was working as a printer at that time, but I had bought my own little printing press and cases of handset type. I was competing with my boss printing names on Christmas cards in my own bedroom. I was also farming a little bit. I had some wheat and I had some cattle—so she was right. She meant that I ought to concentrate and focus.

Chapter 5 — 13:07
Quanah Parker

John Erling: In high school, did you know that you wanted to be a lawyer?

Fred Harris: I did. In those days we had study hall, where you went to the library and worked on your lessons. I was bored one day and I found a book on occupations and professions—it described different ones. I was really interested in radio then. I had lied about my age. I was 16 and I had taken a correspondence course from a place called the National Radio Institute. My friends and I used to love drawing diagrams of radios and making radios ourselves. But I could see in Walters that the only guy making a living at radio was the guy that owned an old hole in the wall repair shop. He obviously wasn't making very much money. I decided I didn't want to be doing that the rest of my life. I came upon a chapter in that book about lawyers that sounded interesting. I was not quite sure what lawyers did, but from that moment I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. I must have connected

it with people in town that I saw were lawyers and they also were in politics, so surely that all must have been tied together in my mind.

JE: Were you interested in politics in high school?

FH: I wasn't interested in who was running for sheriff, or whatever and neither were my folks. But I was a candidate my senior year for president of the student council, and I was elected by a school-wide vote. And, the most wonderful thing, when the junior high and high school all met once a week for an assembly, I always presided. Often we would have an outside speaker to lecture on something. But these assemblies started with me walking to the lectern in the auditorium. When I did that, it got to be some crazy habit, but the students just cheered and cheered and I came to like that quite a bit.

JE: The Future Farmers of America played a role in your life?

FH: They required us in high school to either take shop or vocational agriculture, where you joined FFA. I decided to go that way. Part of it was to raise pigs and show them at the state fair, or raise a calf. A bunch of us raised chickens. (Laughter) I also became an expert chicken judge. For two years in a row, as a three-person team, we were the state champion chicken judging team at the state fair in OKC. My dad thought that was really silly that I had become an expert on chickens, but I was because my FFA instructor was somehow a chicken or poultry expert.

JE: Were there speech contests?

FH: Yes, I was in the wheat harvest after my junior year. I started out driving a tractor and then I graduated eventually to driving the truck that hauled the wheat to the elevator from the field. I started thinking about a classmate of mine, Dan Bigbee who had the preceding year been elected president of the student council. He had also won the state champion Future Farmers of America oratorical contest which was held at Oklahoma A&M (now OSU). I decided that I also wanted to do that and I was elected to both. I was president of the student council and I also did my own research and wrote a speech called "Can Our Earth Feed Its People?" about the population explosion and so forth. The answer was yes, but it was going to take better farming. So, I went to Stillwater to the state tournament to answer questions asked in front of three judges. I won. Then I went to the regional tournament which was held down at Texas A&M. Two speech professors at Oklahoma A&M sat down with me and had me practice my speech and they recorded it. They played it back for me and it had to be the most humiliating experience I had ever had, hearing this western, twangy, kid's voice. It was a great shock, but it helped me get better prepared. I went down to Texas A&M and won the regional tournament. Then I went to Atlanta, Georgia for the national tournament and a guy beat me because he had a better topic—which was how we can keep more doctors in the rural areas and small towns. But I placed second in the national tournament and that was a great experience

for me to think on my feet and think about social issues and so forth and to learn how to speak publicly.

JE: What year did you graduate from high school?

FH: 1948.

JE: Was it in there somewhere that you met your first wife LaDonna?

FH: Yes. I met her my senior year in high school. She had grown up south of Walters on a farm. Her mother was a Comanche Indian and her grandparents who raised her were Comanche Indians—very traditional. For example, her grandfather had long braids and he spoke very little English. Her grandmother had long braids and wore a traditional kind of Comanche dress. She was a Christian and a wonderful woman. Her grandfather was not a Christian. He practiced Eagle medicine and he could cure certain things. He also kept peyote there at the house. In those days, you still saw a lot of Indians with log braids who had felt wrapped in them. Sometimes Indians back them kept a teepee in their yard. Often at night we could hear the peyote people singing. LaDonna had been living with a sister in OKC. Then she came back down to Walters and she and her aunt who was like a sister to her rented an apartment in Walters above the post office and across the street from the high school. This was really a very unusual kind of thing, but there was no school right where they lived and they would have had to take the bus for a long way to get them back and forth to school. So I met her right away and we dated all that year. When I went off to school, at the end of my first year in college and her last year in high school, we got married.

JE: So you were about 19?

FH: I was 19 and she was 19 and in Oklahoma in those days a man had to be 21 and a girl had to be 18 to get married or you had to have your parents' consent. I went home practically every weekend. I would hitchhike home from Norman down to Walters to see LaDonna. At the end of the year my parents had moved down on the farm. We went to see them one night to tell them we were going to get married. My momma cried and LaDonna's momma later cried too. She thought LaDonna was marrying beneath her. (Chuckle) My dad, really the best way he could show his disapproval was he just got mad. He said, "Well, that's the end of your law school." I said, "No, it isn't because both of us can work and we'll be as well of or better." He had to take me in and get the license and he had to sign for me. We went to the county clerk's office in the courthouse in Lawton. We hardly said a word to each other. He was sullen and mad. About the time we got out of the pickup he said to me, "By God, don't you ever ask me for anything." I said, "When have I ever?" For both of us really that was an error, but he went up and signed for us and that's when we got married.

JE: Was LaDonna born in a teepee?

FH: No, but her grandmother was born in a teepee in the yard of Quanah Parker. By then those cattlemen had built him a big house up by the Wichita Mountains.

JE: Briefly tell us who Quanah Parker was.

FH: Quanah Parker was the son of a captive white woman, Cynthia Ann Parker, captured by the Comanches. His father was an Indian Comanche War Chief. His mother, Cynthia Ann Parker, was recaptured, but he stayed with the Comanches, they couldn't capture him. He became a War Chief and became a leader in the Comanche society. As a young man he took people on raids into Texas and so forth. By the time they were moved forcibly up to the reservation at Fort Sill, the federal government wanted somebody to be in charge, so they really chose him as a Chief. There was no one Chief of the Comanches ever—he was designated sort of as the Chief. He came in contact because he wanted to, with his white relatives down in Texas. LaDonna's great grandfather was a contemporary of Quanah Parker, although he was a little older, and he was still living in Oklahoma when people had cars. This old man remembered that he had been captured somewhere around San Antonio. He had a different name before he was captured and he had a cross that they gave him when he was captured as a boy. A great uncle of LaDonna's said to him, "Why don't we drive down there and see if we can find some of your folks?" He wouldn't do it. Quanah Parker did, and so there are a lot of white Parkers and Comanche Parkers and they have reunions now. LaDonna's grandmother liked Quanah Parker, but her grandfather did not. He thought Quanah parker was too much like a white man. That when they stole a bunch of horses or whatever, the leader ought to let everybody else choose first which ones they wanted, but his father had said that Quanah parker would choose the best horse for himself. There was a difference in the family about who likes Quanah Parker and who did not.

JE: Are you of any Native American descent?

FH: Not that I know of, but I was always fascinated with the Comanche language, history and culture. I couldn't get enough of it. So once I met LaDonna I spent a great deal of time with that. She and I decided that we would try to catalog wild plants that Comanches used for food or for making soap and various things. We went around and we interviewed some people and one of them was Quanah Parker's last wife. He actually had several wives at the same time. We took all of these notes, and I think we tried to write it up for the Oklahoma Historical Society magazine, but somehow we got sidetracked—maybe it's because I went to the Senate or something.

Chapter 6 — 8:42
OU & Luther Eubanks

John Erling: When you decided to go to college and to law school, did you know how to do this and what the process was?

Fred Harris: No, I had no idea. I went about my senior year to talk to the high school superintendent for advice about law school and how to go about it. He said to me, "I don't know. Luther Eubanks is the County Attorney and I know he went to OU Law School. Why don't you ask him for some advice?" So I went to see Luther at the courthouse to ask him for some advice. He was a wonderful, old country guy. He took a liking to me I guess. He said, "Not only will I advise you about how to get into law school, but I will take you up there." So we got into his old 1937 Plymouth. Luther was probably making about $200 a month as County Attorney. We started driving to Norman, but on the way he said, "Listen, I think we ought to go by Purcell and see Jim Nance. Do you know who he is?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, he's your boss really, because he owns the *Walters Herald*. He is the Editor of the *Purcell Register* and also was the Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives." I did not know any of that, but we went by to see him at the *Purcell Register* office. Luther said, "Here's a boy that works for you at the *Walters Herald*. He wants to go to school in Norman and he needs a job. Jim Nance, who had never set eyes on me, picked up the phone and he called the President of the University of Oklahoma George Cross and he called the head of the journalism school and he said, "I've got a boy who works for me down in Walters and he needs a job as a printer because he wants to go to school. I later met George Cross and he remembered me because of that powerful phone call from Jim Nance. George Cross would say to me "How's our old friend Jim Nance?" (Chuckle) Lord, I hadn't seen Jim Nance in a long time, but I would always say, "Oh yes, he's doing fine!" We also visited the man who was the head of the University of Oklahoma Press, but he did not have a job for me. We went to see Fayette Copeland, the dean of the journalism school, there were no openings for a printer, but he got a job for me in the journalism library during my first semester. He also took me into his home. I lived in his home for one week before the dorms opened. Eventually, a job at the print shop opened and I worked there for about five years or more. By the time I got to law school, I was the dean's administrative assistant. I had two or three scholarships, so I finally was able to quit printing the last two years I was in law school. Many years later, this is kind of an interesting thing, after I was long since out of the Senate and living here in New Mexico, this must have been 8 or 10 years ago, I got a letter from the OU journalism school and they wanted to award me the Alumnus of the Year. They wanted me to come and be the

speaker at their annual banquet and receive the award. I told them that I would, but I had never taken a journalism class and I had never been a journalism student, so that kid of worried me. A few days before the event, a woman called me for the journalism school to be sure I was coming. I decided that I had better tell her. So I said, "I am still coming, but I should tell you that I am not a graduate of the school. I never took a journalism class. I worked at the *Oklahoma Daily* as a printer and I knew all the journalism students from working in the journalism library, but I am not an alumnus of the school." There was a long pause and then she said, "That's all right, that doesn't matter." I am sure it did. (Chuckle) But they list me quite proudly on the website and at the school as a graduate of the journalism school.

JE: How long after you went and spoke to Luther Eubanks did he become a federal judge?

FH: I was elected to the Oklahoma State Senate about a year and half out of law school, representing Cotton County where Luther was from as well, and Comanche County where I was then practicing law in Lawton. In 1956, soon after I went to the Oklahoma State Senate, Toby Morris who had been the district judge, resigned and was re-elected to Congress, so there was a vacancy in the state district judge in Lawton. The way that worked was the governor would appoint someone to fill the vacancy and then you would run for it later. Luther and a friend of his from Walters asked me to see if I could get the governor, Raymond Gary to appoint him. I went to see the governor and he appointed him as state district judge. Then I was elected in 1964 to the U.S. Senate. The way that that works is a senator from the state where the office is located, so it's not where the person's from, the senator of the president's party from the state where the office is located actually makes the appointment. The mechanics of it is you say to the president and to the attorney general who you want if you're the senator of the president's party of that state, and unless there's some bad FBI report, or a bad ruling by the judicial selection committee of the American Bar Association, that's who they send to the Senate for confirmation. The mechanics of it is, if for example the president was to send some other name, the Senate judiciary committee will never ever take that name up for consideration—they will never be confirmed. It's a very narrow thing. The person has to be the same party as the president and so forth. If you have two senators from the same party, like we did then, then they rotated. So the first time it was Mike Monroney's turn to pick, then later there was a vacancy again for U.S. district judge on Oklahoma, located in OKC. So I chose Luther Eubanks. Of course he was appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

JE: What a nice thing. I mean, here you had that initial contact and then he drove you to OU and then to be able to have that happen for you.

FH: Right, and he made a very good judge. It's a funny thing. I have a relationship with the law faculty at the University of Grenada in Spain. I am fellow and associated with the college

there in Grenada. To become a judge in Spain is a very, very tough process. It's like becoming a doctor here. There's a big exam and you have to have a long record and be approved by a special commission. I have kids ask me, "How do you get to be a federal district judge?" What I say is, "If you are interested in that one of these days, pick out one young person that you think may become a U.S. Senator later on, and be really nice to them and help them like crazy." (Laughter) It worked for Luther Eubanks.

JE: Yes.

Chapter 7 — 7:32
Politics

John Erling: You first worked campaigning for Mike Monroney on his campaign, is that true?

Fred Harris: I did, yes when I was still a student at OU. I had a wonderful time at OU and did exceptionally well with my grades.

JE: You had the highest three-year GPA in the history of the law school.

FH: I did. I had excellent undergraduate grades as well. I got interested in politics during my freshman year. I got invited to join the oldest organization at OU called The Congress Literary & Debating Society—called The Congress Club for short. It was kind of an irreverent group of people, mostly law students. It turned out that they hadn't been recruiting anybody for a long time. They took in three of us that year but the club eventually died off. But it was a wonderful experience. Once a month you had to draw out of a hat some topic and give a five-minute, extemporaneous speech on it. Then we had set debates from time to time and then we would go to a local hangout and buy some pitchers of beer. I was kind of adopted by these law students. A lot of them were veterans and so they were from WWII and were a lot older than I was. They became great supporters of mine when I eventually ran for office. I got elected as the president of the young democrats organization in Norman and with them I got involved in Mike Monroney's campaign for the U.S. Senate.

JE: Should I say that most everybody was a Democrat in Oklahoma at that time?

FH: That's right. The young democrats organization in Norman, this is while I was still a freshman or sophomore in undergraduate school before I became president of it—it had an annual dinner where all of the members of the delegation, including Robert S. Kerr and Mike Monroney, Carl Albert, who was later Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Ed Edmondson who was a House member from Muskogee, Tom Steed who was a House member from Shawnee, Tobey Morris and others came to this annual banquet. I was

the program chair of the first banquet I ever attended. So it was at OU that I became interested in politics.

JE: When you were working for Monroney, was that the first time he was running for U.S. Senate or was that a re-election?

FH: No—that was when he first ran.

JE: What year was that?

FH: It was about 1950.

JE: When you were working on his campaign, did you think this was something that you might want to do yourself?

FH: I don't know that I was thinking about running for office at the time. It might have been in the back of my mind, but I was very impressed with him. It was the first time I ever heard much conversation about Joseph McCarthy. Monroney was an opponent of Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt against supposed communists. When I was president of the league of young democrats, as a result of meeting Monroney, I sat in on meetings in somebody's home—with 10-12 students that were working on his campaign, so I saw him up close. The young Democrats in Norman went on record against Joseph McCarthy. They ran an editorial against me in *The Daily Oklahoman* (chuckle) saying something like if Fred Harris is any indication of the youth in America we are in real trouble. They thought that Joseph McCarthy was a great patriot. Later on of course he was totally disgraced. He resigned, and was censured by the Senate. Monroney ran against a sitting senator from Lawton named Elmer Thomas. I was the third U.S. Senator elected from Lawton. Monroney beat Thomas. Later on, I got really involved in politics. By the time I graduated from law school in 1954 and passed the bar, I was getting ready to go to Lawton to practice law and to live, but one of my law school friends, and a lawyer, David Busby was very much involved in the campaign for the U.S. Senate of former governor Roy J. Turner. David Busby told me that I ought to go to work for Turner's campaign and that they would hire me. Roy J. Turner was running against the incumbent United States Senator, also the former governor, Robert S. Kerr. So because Busby was for Turner, and because when I was in the FFA, we used to visit Turner's Hereford ranch, I went up there and they hired me to run the youth campaign for Turner. I put together a statewide youth organization for Turner. They even set me up with a car to go speak on the streets for Turner. I worked under a wonderfully colorful campaign manager, a guy named H.W. "Coach" McNeill. Roy made the runoff with Kerr, but he ran behind by quite a bit. Finally Kerr was re-elected. Later, Kerr and I became friends in the last years of his life. He once mentioned that he knew about my having supported Roy J. Turner. (Chuckle)

JE: At that time, wasn't Mr. Kerr a formidable candidate and he became the great man that he became, but was that his beginning? I mean, you could tell that there was something special about this man.

FH: When I was a senior in high school, we had our Walters High School FFA Annual Father/Son Banquet. It was a big deal. The speaker at the banquet was our former governor just out of office, Robert S. Kerr, who had already announced he was a candidate for the United States Senate, so I first saw him then. Then nine years later here I was very much involved with him. At the time he mentioned about me having worked on Turner's campaign against him, he and I were flying out of OKC somewhere in his private plane with his son-in-law who was a pilot flying it. We started talking about Monroney. He said, "I supported Elmer Thomas who was my colleague over Monroney. Mike never forgave me for that. You've got to be loyal, and if you're not loyal Fred, you're not worth a sh$t." Bob Kerr was the president of the Oklahoma Baptist Convention, but he could use some language when he wanted to. He said, "Monroney never forgave me, and he supported Roy Turner against me when I ran for re-election to the Senate." I said, "Yes sir." We were sitting in the back seat of that plane, side-by-side and he said, "So did you." (Laughter) I said, "Well Senator, I've learned you are better since then." (Laughter)

Chapter 8 — 7:40
Senator Robert S. Kerr

John Erling: As long as we are talking about him now, describe him and his physical presence and being and how he could talk to people.

Fred Harris: He was a big, big man. He was heavy and tall. I didn't think about him being overweight, but he was of course. His brother who became a good friend of mine told me that once a year he would check himself into the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and lose weight. He would lose as much as 50 pounds of weight there in the hospital lying there in bed. Then he would leave the hospital and start eating again and gain it all back. He did that yo-yo business, which was terribly unhealthy. Robert S. Kerr was a fantastic orator. I've talked to old people who knew him when he was much younger—he was a district attorney and then a lawyer for a while and then he got into the oil business. They said back in those days it was just embarrassing because he couldn't speak, but he did it so long he got really good at it. He had just a riveting way of looking at you with just a gaze. He also had a philosophy, which he expressed to me, that the person that you are talking to right now is your only connection with anybody in the world. You got that feeling talking to him. Bill Clinton is a lot like that, with just industrial-strength attention on you right now. When I said I wanted to run for governor after I was in the State Senate, Kerr, people had begun to talk to him about me. One of them was my roommate when I was in OKC during

the State Senate sessions, Don Moore. He was kind of my mentor and was a close friend of Kerr's. So Kerr sent a U.S. Marshal for me. He said, "The Senator wants to see you. He wants to look you over." (Chuckle) So I went down to OKC to the top floor of the Kerr McGee Building into his very imposing office with dark wood and so forth. He stood up from this massive desk. He had a sign on the front of his desk like Harry Truman had that said: The Buck Stops Here. He didn't have a jacket on, but he wore a flowery tied. Some people thought he wore old-fashioned ties when he visited Oklahoma (chuckle) but I think he did it all the time. But he wore suspender and a shirt with short sleeves. He had massive hands. He came around the desk and shook hands with me. He sat back down at his desk and took off his black-rimmed glasses and looked at me intensely and said, "What do you have on your mind Fred?" All of a sudden I was supplicate and he had sent for me. I said, "I am running for governor and I want to talk to you about that." He listened and then he said, word-for-word, "Fred, are you humble?" One of his administrative assistants, who I later hired as mine, told me that that was a trick question that he asked everybody. He used to say that Kerr said, "Anybody that tells you that they are humble are certainly not humble." I felt that it must be a trick question. I said, "Well, I don't have any trouble remembering where I came from, but sometimes I don't show it, like when I am talking to you now." He didn't show any expression on his face at all. He said, "Fred, are you sober?" (Chuckle) I had a fleeting thought—does he mean right now? (Chuckle) I said, "I take a drink now and then but I've never found it be any personal problem." He said, "Did you know that I had the nerve to have the President of the United States in my home and did not serve him liquor?"

JE: Which president?

FH: President John Kennedy came to the mansion Kerr built near Poteau, and stayed the night. Kerr was a teetotaler. I answered him and said, "Yes sir." It had been in all of the papers. He said, "Can you think of anyway that hurt me?" I said, "No sir." He said, "Can you think of nay way it helped me?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Fred, if you were to say, I do not drink, neither does my wife, and we do not serve liquor at our home and we will not serve it at the governor's mansion, I could make a lot of hay with you from these Baptist preachers." This is word-for-word. I said, "Well, I am not going to tell you that I'll do that because I don't think I'll do it." He said, "Well, they tell me that you're honest. You are the only one that knows whether you are honest or not. Why did you oppose Edmondson's southwest turnpike deal?" I thought some of his friends were involved in that. I said, "Well, because I thought there was going to be too damn much corruption involved in it. There was the potential for it." He never said anything about what he thought. Finally at the end, when it was over, he got up and took a hold of my hand and looked me in the eye and said, "Fred, if I could do it without it hurting me or without it hurting you, I would like to see you

governor." I can remember leaving and exactly where I was walking on Main Street and I said to myself, my God, he's going to endorse me! Then I thought again about what he said to me: "Fred, if I could do it without it hurting me or without it hurting you, I would like to see you governor." And I realized, he hadn't said a damn thing! (Laughter) He actually wound up supporting the man who won the Democratic nomination that year, W.P. "Bill" Atkinson of Midwest City, but lost in the general election to Henry Bellmon.

JE: We should say thought that you became the youngest state senator at 25 years old.

FH: That's right. I was the youngest Oklahoma state senator.

JE: So, this talking about you running for governor was after you had served in the Senate for some time?

FH: That's right. I had seen governors up close. Jimmy Carter was asked one time when he was governor of Georgia, "How did you get the idea to run for President?" He said, "I saw these people come and go and I thought if that guy can do it, I could." When I was really interested in it what I knew best was state issues and how to be governor. My mentor in the Senate, my very close friend Don Baldwin didn't think it was a great idea. He always said, "I never decide to discourage somebody from running for office because half of the time it turns out that they get elected and they resent you. Or they don't run and they think it's all your fault that they didn't." So he would never say it directly to me, be he said to me, "Fred, if you get elected governor you'll probably be as good of a governor as we have ever had. Then after four years, you'll be a has-been." In those days you couldn't succeed yourself. (Chuckle) He said, "Think about this. Uncle Bob (which is what he called Bob Kerr) and old Macaroni, they are not going to be in the Senate forever. One of these days, that's what you ought to be thinking about." I was thinking about governor. (Chuckle) I ran for governor, but I didn't get elected.

Chapter 9 — 5:26
J. Howard Edmondson

John Erling: When you were in the State Senate, J. Howard Edmondson was governor?

Fred Harris: Not at first—I had been in the Senate for two years when he was elected governor.

JE: He was quite young wasn't he?

FH: He may have been the youngest governor we've had. I'm not sure. I was a little younger than he was. I supported him. He was just a sensation. It was the first statewide television campaign we 'd ever had and he was just a natural for television. He had a wonderful voice

and presence. He had been a reform-minded, crusading prosecuting attorney up in Tulsa. His campaign was called Prairie Fire and it really was. It was a sensation in the state. I supported him because he was for all sorts of reforms that people had been talking about forever. He was the first really modern, urban candidate for governor that we've ever had and he was elected. We collaborated for quite a while.

JE: He was 33 years old when he was elected, so he was the youngest governor Oklahoma had ever seen.

FH: I am sure that's true.

JE: Let me say that others were running for office like George Nigh running for Lieutenant Governor?

FH: Yes.

JE: J. Howard Edmondson, when he started out as governor, didn't he start out poorly because he wouldn't live in the mansion and…?

FH: Yes, he got off to a bad start. Edmondson, in the general election, there was no question he was going to win against a Republican. He came to Lawton when he was campaigning and he had me up to his hotel room in Lawton—just the two of us. He was about to be elected, so he was asking for my advice, which was quite flattering. But I said, "First of all, I want to plant a seed with you, J.C. Kennedy and Ned Shepler." J.C. Kennedy was a great friend and a supporter of mine and Ned Shepler was a publisher at the *Lawton Constitution* and part of the Press. Both of them had supported Edmondson and were my very close friends. I said, "You don't have to say anything now, but I hope you'll appoint J.C. Kennedy to the state highway commission and appoint Ned Shepler to the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority," which he later did. I said, "The other thing is this—you are smart enough to be elected governor and you should be smart enough to be governor. There are a lot of people in the State Senate that I served with, people like Don Baldwin my roommate and closest friend in the Senate, and they will help you if you ask them. If I were I'd go to their hometowns and see them, even now. I think you can get a lot of those people that you think they are not for these reforms and they are, and they will help you." Well, he never did that. There were two things. First of all he said, "The mansion is so rundown and poorly furnished and so forth. We're not going to move into it until it can be refurbished and renovated." That left a bad taste in people's mouths. He said the same thing about the governor's office. They spent what seemed like an outlandish sum of money for a new entrance to the governor's office and that didn't go off well. He had run against the old guard, so it made it easier for some of these old guard people to begin to carp at him. They thought he was a kid who was coming in there spending too much money and thinking he was too good for the mansion, etc. So he got off to a really bad start. But he pushed quite successfully for really important reforms in state government, which I supported very strongly.

JE: Was there an ego that showed about him? Was he an egotistical kind of person?

FH: I don't know about that. People say that you've got to have a very strong ego to run for governor or president or whatever. That came naturally to him I think. But somehow, he just didn't do the little things that would have been easy to do. For example, much later, after it was too late, he sent a guy named Whit Pate, one of his staff people who had a really bad reputation as being a bagman to see Don Baldwin, who was the most powerful member of the state senate. Pate told him the governor wanted him to visit and see what he could do to start over with people like hike him and other legislators. Don Baldwin said, "Well, he must not be too interested in what I think because I am pretty available. He could come and see me himself or I could go and see him." Pate said, "Well, he is very busy and so he sent me and I will tell him whatever you say." Don Baldwin was a funny guy. If he was drinking he spoke in a W.C. Fields voice, but even when he wasn't drinking he kind of sounded like W.C. Fields and spoke in riddled. He said, "All right, I'll tell you what that boy must do. Like it says in the Bible, he must be born again." (Chuckle) It was too late. He just could not repair those relationships.

JE: Right.

Chapter 10 — 9:02
H.E. Bailey Turnpike

John Erling: But your friendship with J. Howard Edmondson went away?

Fred Harris: We fell out over two or three things, but the man thing we fell out over was the southwest turnpike.

JE: The H.E. Bailey Turnpike?

FH: Yes. Harry Bailey was a manipulator influence and peddler and he, through the building of that turnpike and others, gave out engineering contracts that had a lot of money in them. The first thing you'd know is you would see a member of the legislature who had always been against turnpikes, all of a sudden there are for this thing. My predecessor in the Senate was a really great state senator named Bill Logan. He developed brain cancer, which created the vacancy to which I was elected to the state senate. One of the things he had been pushing for, for years was to build a turnpike between OKC and Lawton. Back then there was just a little narrow ribbon of highway with little deathtrap bridges. It was just a terrible highway and there was no chance of ever getting a free public road and even when the interstate system came in, it was not on the interstate system, which is why I wanted to put Ned Shepler on the Turnpike Authority. That was a big thing in

Lawton, was to get that turnpike built. I had said that if I got elected to the Senate that I would try to do that. Well, Edmondson and Harry Bailey came up with a bill that did all sorts of things to build not only that turnpike, but to do some others whether they were feasible or not by putting all of the revenues from the turnpikes into a central pot. It became clear, very early I learned that a number of people were already very much involved in it with bonds at the local bank, etc. The bond underwriters and the lawyers and so forth, I mean there was a hell of a group and I thought that they were going to wind up making unconscionable money out of it. So I decided I was not going to support it. I went home and I met with Ned Shepler and I said, "I just can't do this. There's just too much chance for graft and corruption." He said, "But Fred, don't you think in any big project that there's always going to be some graft and corruption?" I said, "Well, that's probably true, but I just ought not to have found out about it." So I blocked it. I went up to the Governor's mansion to see Governor Edmondson. I threatened him with a Grand Jury. I didn't say it directly like that, but I said, "I wouldn't be surprised if you go through with this that there might be a Grand Jury. Suppose somebody stood up on the floor of the Senate under the cloak of immunity and name names and the amount of money involved and so forth. He said, "If you did that, you would have to name some of your colleagues." I said, "Well, suppose somebody did that?" He didn't change his mind and I didn't change mine, but I went back to the Biltmore Hotel in OKC where Don Baldwin and I were rooming together. He had a bedroom off to one side and I had a bedroom on the other. We generally ate breakfast together and so forth. I came in from my bedroom the next morning into the central room and Don Baldwin said to me, "Fred, the corn stalker is going to call for you in a little while." That was Ray Fine who was a senator from Gore, OK. He was a great big, tall, tough guy. He had been a prisoner of war with the Germans. One weekend he came back with his knuckles all skinned up and said that he had a county commissioner that he had had to teach a lesson to. (Chuckle) We called him the Cornstalk lawyer. So Don said he was going to call me in a minute. He said, "He called me a while ago and said, 'Freddie went out to see the redhead last night at the mansion. (Talking about Edmondson.) He was talking about standing up in the Senate and accusing senators of taking money for this turnpike deal. You can be expelled from the Senate for that.'" Don Baldwin said, "I told him to call you and tell you himself." So in a little while the bedroom phone rang and it was Ray Fine. He said, "I heard you went to see the redhead last night." I thought that was pretty damn interesting that he already knew that since just me and Edmondson had known it. I said, "Yes." He said, "What were you talking about?" I said, "We were talking about this turnpike. Ray, don't tell me that you would support a damn thing like that. I mean hell, look at all the money that's involved in this damn thing. You've always been against turnpikes, I can't believe you'd be for such a damn thing as

that." So he never did get around to threatening me about getting expelled from the Senate or whatever. Anyway, Edmondson called me that weekend at home and he said, "We're having a meeting at the Skirvin Tower on Sunday. If you could come in a little early, we'd like for you to sit in on this meeting so we can talk about turnpikes." So when I got there, there were bankers and Harry Bailey and people like that who were for the turnpike. Edmondson was there and some of his people. I was the only one who was the problem, so obviously it was a meeting set up for me. They laid it out and explained that this was the only way it can pass and so forth. Then Edmondson asked me what I thought. I said, "I can't support it." He said, "What if we pass it without you?" Of course I knew he couldn't but I said, "Well, do it if you can—if you want to." Well they backed down then and asked, "What could you support?" I had already written it out. It was a deal with safeguards, and that's what we eventually passed. I put all of the writings about it in the Great Plains Museum in Lawton. Incidentally in the meantime, later that week, Otis Sullivant, who was a hugely important political reporter for the OKC papers, stopped me in the hall at the State Senate. He said, "I hear you are against this turnpike deal." I think Otis was honest. I said, "I am." He said, "Are you just going to butt your head up against a brick wall?" I said, "Otis, surely Mr. Gaylord if he knew what was involved with this, he wouldn't support a bill like this. I think I ought to go and talk with him." He said, "I will set up a meeting for you, but don't do it if you are going to cave." I said, "I am not going to cave." So he set up a meeting and I met with E.K. Gaylord Senior in downtown OKC. There was a little sign on the elevator at each floor that said: "You can walk up one flight and down two by the time it takes you to use the elevator." (Laughter) So I walked up to his office. I explained it to Mr. Gaylord and he did back me. Later, he wrote a really good editorial saying that Oklahomans were lucky that Fred Harris didn't give up on this and that it finally got it passed. Incidentally, the way I blocked this is I made a long speech on the floor of the Senate. A huge portion of the House of Representatives came over and stood in the Senate to hear this. In those days we didn't record debate, but it was recorded. Later, somebody asked for unanimous consent to have that speech transcribed and printed in the Senate journal. That was the only one up until that time that had ever been done.

JE: So then your turnpike bill passed?

FH: Yes.

JE: And that became the H.E. Bailey Turnpike?

FH: One day really ironically in the State Senate, after this bill had passed and they had started construction, without any notice to me whatsoever, a member of the Senate who had always opposed turnpikes, introduced a bill to name the turnpike the H.E. Bailey Turnpike. Several of those guys who had been involved with Bailey supported it. I could

see that it was going to pass. I offered a substitute bill to name it the Bill Logan Turnpike. Bill was my predecessor in the State Senate and who had pressed for it. I got a pretty good vote, but it is called the H.E. Bailey Turnpike.

JE: It runs from where to where?

FH: It runs from OKC down past Lawton down to the Red River.

Chapter 11 — 2:47
Death of Senator Kerr

John Erling: I am going to jump now to halftime of the Orange Bowl game in 1963 between Alabama and OU. Tell us about the announcement that was made at halftime.

Fred Harris: I was in the basement of my house in Lawton where the TV set was with some other people watching the game. At halftime they announced that Robert S. Kerr had suffered a massive heart attack and died. At the game, Howard Edmondson was there in person and so was President John Kennedy. Kennedy was up in the box and Edmondson was down closer to the field. They showed Edmondson on TV going up the steps to Kennedy and they said there was no question what they were talking about. The governor will have to appoint someone to fill the vacancy until the next general election. About that time my phone rang and J.C. Kennedy called me, a political friend from Lawton. He said, "Ned Shepler and I are going to send a telegram to Edmondson suggesting that he appoint himself." Meaning he resigns as governor. He only had seven days to go I believe it was. George Nigh, the lieutenant governor would become governor and would appoint Edmondson to the Senate. He said, "Do you want to sign that telegram with us?" I said, "No, if I were going to suggest he appoint somebody, I would say appoint his brother, Congressman Ed Edmondson. I think he could get elected. I wasn't thinking at all about myself. I was thinking about running for governor again. I had run and lost and wanted to run again and I was certain then that Kerr was going to support me this time. I had reason to believe that. If I thought anything about myself it was that I had lost a good supporter in Kerr. They said they were going to go ahead and send the telegram to Howard to appoint himself—and they did. Incidentally I talked to Drew Edmondson when I was at the Oklahoma Historical Society talking about Howard Edmondson's governorship. Drew Edmondson is Ed Edmondson's son. I was telling him that I had suggested that his dad be appointed. He said, "Howard offered it to him, but Ed thought that it would look like nepotism and that he couldn't get elected." So Howard did appoint himself.

JE: Through the Lieutenant Governor?

FH: Yes. In all of the history of the United States Senate, a lot of the people, not a lot of governors, have in effect like that appointed themselves to the Senate, but only one in history has ever been elected after that to the office, and that is Happy Chandler from Kentucky.

Chapter 12 — 9:51
Race for Senate

John Erling: The Kerr people, how did they cotton to this arrangement?

Fred Harris: I had become good friends with Bob Kerr's brother Aubrey Kerr. Don Baldwin and I stayed at The Biltmore Hotel in a Suite, which makes it sound a little more fancy than it was. It has since been torn down. It was really kind of a shabby place, but it was sort of grand central station for political figures. I would get up one morning and there was Governor Gary having breakfast with us. Gary was sort of a straight-laced fellow and I walked in wearing pajamas with my hair standing up and Don Baldwin said, "Raymond, have you ever seen a head of hair like that?" (Chuckle) Aubrey and people like that used to hang out in our room and I became friends with them. Of course Bob Kerr and I had seen each other a lot and he had said a lot of good things about me I learned from people including his family and his wife and his sons. They felt that this was their office, irrationally, but they really resented Howard Edmondson not only appointing himself, but appointing anybody without talking to them.

JE: The Kerr people?

FH: Yes. It was sort of the tradition in the Senate up until that time that the senator's wife would be appointed or somebody like that. When I went to the Senate there were only two women in the Senate and both of them had been appointed to start with when their husband died. So right away, Robert Kerr, Jr. who was a lawyer in OKC announced that he was going to run.

JE: Let me just say here that there was a gentleman on the landscape named Bud Wilkinson.

FH: Yes.

JE: He was obviously the head coach of OU Football, which was THE thing in the state of Oklahoma and he was as a coach an icon.

FH: Yes, absolutely. Oklahomans always suffered from that Okie image and Grapes of Wrath and so forth. Gee, almost the only thing that ever came along in that day that made you proud to be an Oklahoman was the Sooner football team, and Bud Wilkinson was responsible for it. He was just almost a sacrosanct figure.

JE: And Robert Kerr courted him as a democrat?

FH: I think so. I never knew it at the time, but I learned that later. Wilkinson was registered as a democrat.

JE: He came from the University of Minnesota, He was a democrat coming from there.

FH: Yes.

JE: It's obvious that Wilkinson gave in to the Republicans because they were courting him as much as the Democrats were.

FH: Right, that happened sometime in the future. Robert S. Kerr and Raymond Gary, the former governor did too. Raymond Gary hated Edmondson, and Edmondson hated Gary. Edmondson thought Gary was somewhat corrupt. He and his brother had been in the oil business and the asphalt business and so forth. Raymond was a teetotaler and a very strong Christian and was very rural in his outlook. Edmondson was urban, modern and was for reform and by then had kind of developed sort of a playboy image. *TIME* magazine had written him up where he was stopped in Chicago late at night in the company of the television weather girl, who was of course not his wife. He'd also been written up soon after he got into the Senate for being at a party at Robert Kennedy's house where somebody was thrown fully clothed in a tux into the swimming pool. I think all that sort of offended Raymond, but they were really bitter enemies, so he was running against Edmondson. The Kerr people didn't like Gary. I think they had some oil business dealings in the past or whatever and they disliked each other because of that. So here you have Bob Kerr Junior, Edmondson and Gary—two of them former governors, announcing they were running for the Senate. Aubrey Kerr kept telling me about Bob Kerr Junior, "That boy will never run." He never liked politics. He always thought that was his dad's business. It turned out that he wasn't a good speaker. People would comment that he was nothing like his dad. Aubrey would say, "That boy is going to pull up lame in the backstretch and they're going to put that saddle on you." (Chuckle) I was thinking I was going to run for governor. Then along about this time the Wilkinson thing began to develop. Wilkinson went into court and changed his name. His name was Charles B. "Bud" Wilkinson and he changed it to just Bud Wilkinson. At the same time, he changed his party registration. All of this was in the paper. He became a Republican and it became known that he was going to run apparently for the U.S. Senate.

JE: What convinced you then to not run for governor and to run for the U.S. Senate?

FH: You know, so many of the things that happened to me happened in a flash and they are sort of serendipitous really. I'm reading a wonderful memoir by Anna Quinlen right now and she says that it's just weird how you make your plans and then, she doesn't say it this way, but then life happens. (Chuckle)

JE: Yes.

FH: You look back on it and you think comment this could have gone this way or that way. One time I was up in my hotel room at the Biltmore. My wife LaDonna was there and a guy who had been a volunteer campaigner for me, a lawyer down in Lawton named Bill Sexton. I guess we were planning to go to some meeting that evening. I came home from the state Senate session and they told me it had just been on the radio that Bob Kerr Junior had withdrawn as a candidate for the Senate. Well, I still didn't see how that affected me. I was thinking how is that going to work now? I didn't know who was going to run or what. About that time I got a call from Robert C. McCandless. He had been an intern and then a staff member of Sen. Kerr's in Washington. I met him when I was a speaker at a Chamber of Commerce dinner in Frederick one time when I was about to run for governor. He was traveling around that area for Kerr as a staff member. He, way back then, had begun to talk to Kerr about me. So he called me and he said, "My brother Bill and I want to come and talk to you." Bill McCandless was a manager and partner/owner of a big discount furniture store in Oklahoma City. He was a graduate of Northwestern University and he had been active in my campaign for governor. The Biltmore Hotel had kind of one of these illegal bars—all hotels back then did. Technically, you had to become a member in order to order mixed drinks. He wanted me to meet him downstairs at the club. I said, "Okay." As I left, the last thing LaDonna said to me was, "Now don't you let them talk you into running for the Senate!" I said, "Oh no, they are not going to do that, I am running for governor. I'll be back in a minute." I went down there and both of them said that I ought to run for Senate and that these type of opportunities happen very often and that I should do it while I have the chance. Bill McCandless, who I thought had damn good judgment said, "You can win this thing. Gary and Edmondson hate each other and each of them has got their problems." Bob McCandless said, "The Kerr people have got to help you out. I don't have any inside information that I know that none of them likes either Edmondson or Gary. You've got this organization already out there." I sat there thinking about it and it made sense. (Laughter) So not 30 minutes later I went back upstairs and I said to the Donna, "Well, get ready because we're running for the Senate!" (Laughter) I went right away down to Lawton and got together with J.C. Kennedy and Ned Shepler who were my very close friends. They were the two guys that sent the telegram to Edmondson that he should appoint himself. I told them I wanted to run for the Senate. I told them about the McCandlesses talking to me and how they laid it out for me. I made it look a little more definite that the Kerr people would support me. They told me they didn't think I ought to do it and that I would be elected governor next time I ran and that we were going to have to support Edmondson. I lived across the street from J.C. Kennedy. We were really my very closest friends, but they were the ones that helped talk Edmondson into doing this. But that didn't phase me, because by then I had made up my mind. I made it up instantly and so we ran.

JE: Obviously Edmondson and Gary were well-known across the state and you were just coming on—people really didn't know Fred Harris?

FH: Yes. The Associated Press did a really good poll that showed that Raymond Kerry and Howard Edmondson each had about 33% or 34% of the vote and I had 14% of the vote. But each of them had more than 90% who knew of them. Less than 50% of the people knew who I was, which always came as a shock to us legislators. We think that everybody knows us because we've been doing that job a long time and in the newspapers or whatever. But, we thought that that was a really favorable poll for me because those guys had probably had about all of the support that they were going to get since they were already very well- known. I was not well-known and if I could become well- known, because there was all of that undecided crowd out there, that I had a much better chance at it and that's why it worked out.

Chapter 13 — 9:06
Primary—Democrat

John Erling: So then you went on a campaign of just shaking hands?

Fred Harris: I had studied the campaign of Birch Bayh of Indiana who beat an incumbent. He had made it almost a hand-to-hand campaign. I decided I would go to every single town in Oklahoma and announce this—every one—and I did. At most places we would have a meeting, but in little towns I would walk down Main Street and shake hands with every damn soul. A lot of well-known people were contacted in advance to let them know that we would be in Nowata at 1 o'clock and we invited them to come down and have lunch with us. I would go by the newspapers and most of them had generally run my picture and maybe a story that I was going to be there. I had a good staff with me. I would say to people, "I am running for the Senate and I would appreciate your support." A lot of times people would say to me, "I like Raymond Gary, he's a good governor, but you know he's just an old-timey kind of guy and he can't beat Bud Wilkinson." Or sometimes they would say, "Edmondson hasn't really done that good of a job." But if someone told me that they were definitely for me, I would write their name down with an "A" next to it. I had a good staff at the Biltmore Hotel working for me. All of the "A" people would get a letter right away from me saying I was glad to see them when I was in their town and that I appreciated their expression of support and that I wanted to stay in touch with them. A "B" Letter was that I was glad to talk to them and that I appreciated them considering my campaign and that I would be back in touch. It took months and months and months.

It was just done undercover. You didn't ever know the effect of it—nobody did. Once we had a critical mass of supporters, I would pick out the person that I wanted to be the chairman of my campaign in that county. I would ask them to hold a meeting in their home. We found out that these were much better received if they were held in homes. You had to have women there. It was a different crowd all together than if it was just men. Women made it a hell of lot more serious of an operation. Then we would pick a guy to be the chairman to call the meeting and we would send postcards to go to the meeting. They would go because it was in somebody's home and because they knew the person issuing the invitation too. So I built a terrific organization like that all over the state. I had been introduced to the chairman of the communications department at The University of Oklahoma, a man named William R. Carmack. We met at a statewide meeting in Lawton to talk about economic development. I was the speaker at the meeting because I was the chairman of economic development in the state Senate. One guy got up and welcomed us but he said that he couldn't stay, so we were the only ones up there—what were we going to do? (Chuckle) So we sat around in a circle up there on stage and talked to each other. Bill Carmack talked about the two-step method of persuasive communication. The idea is that you identify or make opinion leaders and reinforce them, so that's what we did. What advertising does, is not so much change minds, as reinforces supporters and gives them enough encouragement that it sort of makes millionaires out of them and they begin to speak out. That's the way we ran our campaign. People thought I had a lot of money, like Kerr money, but that wasn't true, it was just a trickle but it was important. So ad agencies wanted to handle my account, which had never been true for me in the past. There was one guy named Ross Cummings who had an agency when I was an undergraduate and he was about a senior at OU. He had been the editor of the campus humor magazine called *Wagon Wheel*. In the last issue, he brought on the campus a stripper from OKC and posed her in what appeared to be only a rather short football jersey. He posed her in the Bizzell Library and here and there. The regents killed the magazine as a result of that. (Laughter) But he had an ad agency in OKC and he had terrific ideas. He said, "People are turned off by political ads. They get very excited about politics and they are interested in the news, so why couldn't we put or advertising in a news format? Instead of you behind the desk talking about farm problems, what about showing you on your dad's farm with cattle in the background?" He won a bunch of awards. He ran an ad campaign with a big picture of me and a small message. The picture served as the message.

JE: So the election was held and what were the results?

FH: Well, in the first go-round Edmonson ran first and I was second and Gary was third. We were going to be in a runoff two weeks later and I thought Gary was going to be

eliminated. So, from the very first we were very careful to be very friendly with the Gary people and I knew a lot of them too. We immediately called every one of our county chairs and told them to go at once and talk to the local Gary supporters and bring them into our campaign. Then Raymond and I arranged a meeting in Madill where he was from and he agreed to endorse me. He had no alternative. He hated Edmondson, but it was very important that he did that. A couple of small town editors moved into my headquarters and proved to be very important for me. There were Gary people everywhere supporting me. Then there was a very crucial TV debate with Edmondson. I was against it. I didn't want to debate Edmondson. He was a terrific speaker and debater and I had never taken formal debate in school or anything. But I knew I had to do it, so I did it. It turned out very well. It was kind of like the Kennedy Nixon debate. T gave me almost equal stature with him. I was a lot younger than he was and less experienced, but we thought we won the debate and that was kind of the reaction around the state and I think that was very important. In the runoff election, I carried every county in the state except one, including Howard's home county of Muskogee county.

JE: Why was that? It is because as you alluded to that he was not seen as a hard worker?

FH: Yes and he had that playboy image. In the primary, my themes for my campaign were "Win in November." There were huge green letters on my billboards that said WIN, but it stood for Win In November. That was primarily against Raymond Gary, because people were saying, "I like Raymond, but he can't win this thing." I faced Howard Edmondson in the runoff and the theme then was "Hard Work Is The Difference."

Chapter 14 — 9:30
Bud Wilkinson

Fred Harris: Then against Wilkinson, my theme was "Prepared for the Job". People loved Bud Wilkinson and he was a great football coach and he did so much for Oklahoma, but what does he know about politics? Whereas I was a guy who was viewed as prepared for the job. I ran ads that said: Fred Harris, prepared for the job. The ads showed that I was a political science major and a lawyer and a State Senator. It turned out that Wilkinson was really almost a John Birch. First of all he was very shallow and he didn't know politics, he knew football. Secondly, he had very simplistic and vey right-wing views on things, but nobody knew it. For example, he was the first coach to have a black player on his team, Prentice Gautt, who was an All-American football player for him. He went around the state showing football films and campaigning for Mr. Wilkinson. But, strangely enough, one

of his All-American fullbacks who married a Walters girl, Buck McPhail, signed on as my treasurer. I think that hurt his sports career as far as coaching positions and so forth, but it was important for me. Wilkinson was a formidable opponent and it took us a while to figure out what to do with them.

JE: He would go around the state talking about certain subjects.

FH: He had a set speech, the big theme of it was why Rome fell. The had a right-wing thing in those days that talked about how there was just too damn much welfare and that was why Rome fell. (Chuckle) Bill Carmack, who was later my administrative assistant, had studied for the ministry and had read Greek and Latin. I could ask him for some Greek thing and he could give me something to say. I put off as long as possible the kickoff of the fall campaign to save money. Wilkinson was already campaigning very early and was featured in the papers with his speech about why Rome fell and all of that. We would sort of laugh a little at Wilkinson. We had this huge kickoff thing and I had all of my people come in from all over the state to the Hall of Mirrors in downtown OKC. I said, "We are late getting started with this fall campaign because it turned out that I wasn't prepared on what is the central issue of this Senate race. Mr. Wilkinson has been speaking everywhere about why Rome fell and I just had not prepared on that. I have since researched it and I discovered that the real reason why Rome fell was that they decided to let the Gladiators run the government." We got into it a little bit without being too mean and kind of joked about Wilkinson and made him a little more human. Then two or three crucial things happened. One is the dumbest move you can imagine. He brought Strom Thurman into the state.

JE: From South Carolina.

FH: Yes, he was a terrible segregationist and racist and kind of a Stone Age kind of person. Wilkinson had been playing on his friendship with John Kennedy. Kennedy had appointed Wilkinson as head of the national physical fitness program. The first time I went to Hyannis Port and we were having dinner over at Robert Kennedy's house, Jackie said, "Ethel and I became so concerned about all of the reports, which were accurate, that Bud Wilkinson was going around Georgetown badmouthing the president and saying he was a liberal. Of course, Bobby and Jack were both so crazy about football they didn't want to hear it. Ethel and I wrote Jack an anonymous letter telling him about what Bud Wilkinson was saying." (Chuckle) I thought that was kind of sad that the president's wife had to send him an anonymous letter. So you would think that Wilkinson would just keep playing on his friendship with Kennedy, but instead he brought Strom Thurman into the state, which gave us a double advantage. One is, he scared the daylights out of African Americans. They sent him down into George Wallace country, down in southeastern Oklahoma, obviously on purpose. That was written up in the papers and black leaders spoke about it. The second thing was he made all this scary talk about Vietnam and increasing our

effort there, so that was a crucial thing. Another crucial thing was Lyndon Johnson—he was overwhelmingly popular and running ahead of Goldwater.

JE: And you had a TV debate with Bud Wilkinson?

FH: I really did not want to do that. I thought since he had been on TV so much that he would come across as a really nice, likeable guy and that's important in these debates. I thought I would come across as sort of a slashing, cutting politician, so I put it off as long as I could. My own people said it was killing us that people thought I was scared to debate him. I had never been in a formal debate before, but Bill McCandless' Northwestern University degree was in speech and communications. I also had Bill Carmack who was the head of communications at OU. We decided to challenge Wilkinson to a college-type of debate. There would just be the two of us up there. So we challenged him and we got an angry cry out of him saying, "Wait a minute, I was the one wanting to debate." We went to the CBS station in OKC. He had as his advisor Ed Turner, who later went to CNN as the news director, but he was the news director there at this local CBS station. They were really cute. We flipped a coin as to who would speak first. They waited until 1 minute before it started to say that they won the toss. What I was planning on doing if I went first, I would take about a jillion positions right quick and I would also sound for Johnson and Humphrey and state that I think Mr. Wilkinson ought to say whether he was for Goldwater and Miller. I was going to ask him how he stood on these issues. So I wanted to go first, but they waited until the very last minute and said that Wilkinson would go first. He spent a great deal of his time explaining how hard he had worked on trying to get me to debate him and how I wouldn't do it. He said very little about real issues or whatever. So when it was my turn to talk, I used my same strategy. I said, "Mr. Wilkinson wants to talk about why we aren't debating. We ARE debating, so why don't we debate?" Then I explained what I believed it and how I supported the Johnson and Humphrey ticket. I asked Wilkinson to say whether he was for Goldwater and Miller. It rattled the hell out of him. He said, "Yes, of course I am for Goldwater and Miller because the democratic parties has all of this socialist history." It sort of smoked him out on the issues and that debate proved to be hugely important I think.

JE: So then the election takes place and you beat Bud Wilkinson.

FH: Yes, that was a tough one.

JE: Was polling taking place up until the election and did it favor you or him?

FH: We didn't have many polls until the end, which showed it as being very close. I never doubted that we were going to win. We had such a great organization working on it and we had an adequate advertising budget. At the very end, we had this kind of thing… Phillips Petroleum Company, I didn't know then how they did it, but they put a hell of a lot of money in Wilkinson's campaign, even though in those days a political contribution

by a corporation was a federal crime. We later found out in the Watergate Scandal that Phillips and Lockheed and several others had backed the Nixon campaign by giving a bonus to a vice president, let's say $10,000 and the vice president would take out the tax on it and the rest of it went into a Swiss bank account serving as a slush fund so they could get cash to Nixon. Phillips was one of those that did that with Nixon. Apparently, that's what they were doing with Wilkinson. I knew it because I knew he had big Phillips money from inside information. There was a VP at Phillips who was kind of a token democrat. I can't recall his name now, but all of a sudden he sent me a personal check for $2,000. My first thought was to save the heck and not even cash it and then after I win send it back to him and teach him a lesson. Then my treasurer Bill McCandless told me how much we were in debt, so we decided that we would just cash his check. (Laughter) But that illustrates how you learn to hedge your bets, because they thought, this guy might win this thing!

Chapter 15 — 4:37
President Lyndon Johnson

Fred Harris: Humphrey came out to Oklahoma to campaign for himself and for Lyndon Johnson, but he also spoke for me in Oklahoma City. Then we flew up to Tulsa. We took him to his plane and he got inside and then all of a sudden he exited the plane and came back down the stairs. He came up to me and he said, "Fred, you are going to win this thing." That's the feeling he got from being there. I literally repeated that to Joe Biden when Biden was running for the U.S. Senate. The campaign was moving well and just right at the last, but still some people saw it as an upset.

John Erling: You attached yourself to LBJ? You had bumper stickers?

FH: My press guy was just terrific. We had bumper stickers that said Harris/LBJ and we had a brochure that showed our profiles. A guy that worked for Johnson told somebody, "I don't think the president is going to like having his name second!" (Laughter) Which, that's probably true, but Johnson came to Oklahoma toward the end of the campaign to dedicate a dam. It was one of Bob Kerr's Arkansas River navigation projects. I couldn't be on the platform because this was a presidential visit and I was a candidate. Johnson didn't want to be associated with candidates in tight races because he didn't want to put his prestige on the line and it was obviously a close race. I attended the dedication and so did Wilkinson and we both had our campaign signs there. When we flew back to Oklahoma City where he was going to make a public appearance at

the state fair, he flew by helicopter. Carl Albert said, "Get on here with us." I said, "I can do that." He said, get on!" So I got on the helicopter and flew with the president back to Oklahoma City. I think Ed Edmondson was there and Mike Mulroney. I sat across from the president. I am a good listener in a situation like that, so he started talking, primarily to me. He started telling us about how Robert Kennedy tried to get him ditched off of the ticket after John Kennedy had offered him the vice presidency. We got over to Oklahoma City and of course I wasn't on the platform they are either. Johnson made a really famous speech. He said, "There are people who want me to go North in Vietnam, but I don't think American boys should have to do what Vietnamese boys should do for themselves." That was his position. I don't know if he believed it—but that was his position.

JE: That came back to haunt him then didn't it?

FH: Yes. I don't think he believed at the time. Under the Fairgrounds stadium there is a big space where we had a big private party/fundraiser. I was invited to that and Johnson was there but it was closed to the press. There were drinks and it was a standing up crowd milling around. Ross Cummings, my press guy, I don't know how in the hell he did it because this was a Secret Service thing and you had to get through the Secret Service to get in there—but Ross got in there with the cameraman and a soundman. So we were in there and Johnson is walking around with his scotch in hand. He's shaking hands and he comes over to me and he says, "How are you Fred? It's good to see you!" I gone to Washington and had my picture taken with him so he knew who I was. About that time, Ross Cummings put a microphone right up in the president's face. The camera started and you could hear it whirring. He said, "Mr. President, would you say a word about Fred Harris?" Well, you could tell that Johnson was just madder than hell. He was thinking to himself, I said no press, but he was conscious that the sound was on in the camera was whirring. So he handed his drink to somebody else and he turns to me and shook hands with me. Then he looked back at the camera and these are his exact words, because we used them in an ad. He said, "I need Fred Harris in Washington. Send me old Fred and we'll charge hell with the bucket of water. Old Fred will bring home the bacon and tack the coonskin on the barn door." (Laughter) So that's how I got the public endorsement of Lyndon Johnson.

JE: So that was seen on television over and over and over.

FH: Yes. You couldn't make up those words. (Laughter)

Chapter 16 — 8:00
Fred Goes to Washington, D.C.

John Erling: So on election eve, it was a close vote was it? Did the results seesaw when they came in?

Fred Harris: No, but on radio and TV if you didn't know what was going on you would have the impression that Wilkinson was winning this thing and he was running ahead. We were getting reports from our people out in the field about Adair County where he won by 200 votes. We knew he had carried that county before we had that in the news report here. Finally, we were still running ahead and my people said let's get ready to go down and declare victory. I went to get my mother and father who were in a different room and my mother was in tears she said, "I'm so sorry Freddy." I said, "No, we won! Were going to go down and declare victory because we won it!" By the time we get down there, everybody will know that. They could hardly believe it. Wilkinson called me later, so by 10 PM I was elected.

JE: By a close, close margin wasn't it?

FH: Yes. I was elected first by 51%.

JE: And he had 49%.

FH: Yes. I was really kind of sad because I knew every person in that ballroom personally. That night I said to them, "You and I are not always going to agree. If I would agree with you all the time, I would either be dishonest or a fool because we won't agree all the time. You are never going to have to worry about what I stand for because I am doing what I think is the right thing." But the thing I was thinking to myself was this was one of the most exciting things that had ever happened in these people's lives. Now they get to go back home and I get to go to Washington. To be a governor you stay right there, but to be a senator you leave home. I knew we would never again be that close. I had already set up a plane to fly to Washington for the special election and by 10 o'clock the next morning I had been sworn in as a senator.

JE: Do you know the name Walt Helmerich?

FH: Yes.

JE: He owned Helmerich and Payne and Utica Square in Tulsa. He was one of the financial chairs for Bud Wilkinson. Walter told me in an interview that can be heard on this website, that after the election was over Governor Bellmon called Wilkinson and Walt into his office. He as much as read the riot act to Bud. He told Bud he was too pompous. Walt said Bud would go out to these small towns and he wouldn't talk football, but he would talk about the gross national product. Walt told me, "Those people didn't know what the GNP was."

FH: Right.

JE: He could have mentioned players he knew from their areas and what great people they were and how much he loved them and he would've gotten votes like that. So Bellmon said, "You were just too pompous."

FH: I'll be darned.

JE: Yes.

FH: Well Bellmon certainly wasn't pompous. I mean, he was the guy who really knew how to as George Washington said put the hay out where the goats can get at it. (Chuckle) When I went to Washington I took with me two couples that had been very active in my campaign. They put me temporarily in the office were Edmondson had been. This was the very next day after the election. I went over to be sworn in as a senator and they came with me. They sat down and I was taken into a room and explained to me how much money I would have for staff and things—it is very complicated and I didn't understand any of it at the time. They had me sign my name on some form and then they told me congratulations. The here my wife and my friends were in the other room and I was just sworn in as a senator and they came all this way to see me sworn in. (Laughter) we got back to my office and Mike Mansfield, the majority leader, called me and invited me for a cup of coffee in his office at the Capitol. So I hustled over there. That was kind of funny as well because I punched a button and the elevator and in those days they had people running the elevators. I punched the "Senators only" button. The elevator came at once and the doors opened and there was not a soul on there but the guy who ran the elevator and he closed the door and went on. So I punched the "Senators only" button again and again it came at once. The doors opened and the kids said to me, "Can't you read? That says "Senators only". I said to him, "Well, I am a senator." He said, quote "oh my God who are you?" I said, "Well you wouldn't know me because I was just elected, but my name is Fred Harris from Oklahoma." He said, "I'm sorry Senator. Excuse me—please get on. Do you want a car?" I said, "Yes." So he punched a button that rings a bell that let's them know his senator is on the way. I got there and there was a car sitting there waiting for me with a driver. I sat down in the middle. I didn't know that senators normally sat up front. We waited and waited and waited and finally this guy said to me, "I'm sorry sir but a senator is coming and we have to wait on him." (Laughter) So I thought to myself should I tell him? About that time the senator did come and he recognized me. He said, "Why didn't you sit up front?" I said, "I didn't know I was supposed to!" It turned out that all Joe Mansfield wanted was a cup of coffee, but I also got to meet Robert Kennedy while was there. I thought that since he was the majority leader that he would say, "Here's the program." But that's not how it was. I came back to my office and Clark Clifford called me and in a little while he showed up.

JE: And he was?

FH: He was a big-time lawyer and a huge influence peddler. He had been on Truman's staff. He came in wearing a wonderful double-breasted suit with coiffed gray hair and God he was impressive. We went into my office. When he left I thought to myself that's about the most impressive guy I ever met. A few staff people asked me what he had said. He said to me, "How did you pull off that brilliant campaign?" So I spent a little time telling him how brilliant I was! (Laughter) The next day we flew to New York just for the hell of it. We went by to see (inaudible) of *Meet the Press*. First of all, I went in with a cigarette in my mouth. He said to me, "Could you put that out? I'm allergic to tobacco smoke." I said, "okay." I shook hands with him and he almost went to his knees. It turns out that he had arthritis or something—poor guy. He said to me, "Why didn't you appear on *Meet The Press* when we asked you to appear jointly with Bud Wilkinson?" I said, "Well, I wanted to, but I just couldn't work it into my schedule." He knew damn well that was a lie. I didn't want to be frozen in time at that moment nationally. Also, I didn't think it was a good idea to debate Wilkinson at that time, so I didn't do it.

Chapter 17 — 6:51
Re-election 1966

John Erling: We don't have time to go into all the things that you of course promoted, but I would like to bring up again that as a member of the public works committee, you felt almost obligated to promote Robert Kerr's goal by guiding through Congress?

Fred Harris: Yes. I got on the public works committee because of that.

JE: It became known then as the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River navigation system. Lyndon Johnson spoke about at one time in kind of an embarrassing way. He said, "Bob Kerr is looking down from heaven address and we have to finish that project." One day I had lunch with some people including Abe Ribicoff, who was a senator from Connecticut. He said to me, "Whatever happened to that crazy idea Bob Kerr had to make the Arkansas River navigable up to Tulsa?" I said, "Well, it's damn near completed." (Laugh) So we got that done and then I went on the finance committee, which is really important. But John McClellan, was kind of like Lyndon Johnson, he sort of thought I was going to be a Bob Kerr, so he asked for me to go on his government operations committee. He told me, and this is true, he said, "Every senator who become president has been on this committee." I went on that committee at his request, and he got me assigned to it. I had been on the subcommittee with Robert Kennedy of what had been the old McCarthy committee, the Senate investigating subcommittee. Then one day I dreamed up having a subcommittee

of my own. I got John to name a new subcommittee. I don't think anybody had ever done that before. I was the chairman of the Senate subcommittee on government research. John and I later fell out. He thought that these riots in the black sections were almost like a communist plot and that they were all planned. We held hearings and his committee on the riots and at the same time I got Johnson to appoint the Kerner Commission and we had an entirely different idea about what had happened and why.

JE: You were finishing the term of Robert Kerr—that was really what you are doing.

FH: Right.

JE: So then in 1966, you ran and you were reelected, over Oklahoma City attorney Pat Patterson.

FH: Yes. By then, the Vietnam War was becoming more unpopular and Johnson was not as popular as he had been 2 years earlier. Patterson made his campaign primarily about his opposition to Johnson. He called me "Little Lyndon from Lawton". "Laughter" Then he had a really effective radio ad that the Republican National Committee produced and paid for. A little girl was reciting the Lord's Prayer and then in the background you hear a siren that gets louder and louder and then breaks. Then a man's voice says, "Stop! Fred Harris will not allow our children to pray in schools." Everett Dirksen was a Republican leader in the Senate. In my first two years in the Senate, he made us vote 9 times I believe it was on a constitutional amendment to allow prescribed prayer in schools. That did cause me a lot of trouble but had Patterson been a better candidate (chuckle) I think I would've been in a lot of trouble.

JE: How did you attack that?

FH: Not very well. One time in Wynnewood at a town meeting, an old guy stood up and said, "Fred, why won't you let our kids pray in schools?" I started out explaining about the First Amendment and the separation of church and state. Before I got halfway into that he said, "Well, don't you believe in the majority rules?" I said, "Yes I believe in the majority rules..." I was going to explain that the Bill of Rights puts a limit on what the majority can do." And interrupted and said, "Well, the majority of us want our kids to be able to pray in schools." So I never did get to finish my answer. Later I saw an ad by Lee Metcalf from Montana. It started out with a tight shot of the Bible and a voice reading it. You didn't know whom the voice belongs to, but we can read the Bible too. It says, "When you pray, pray to your Heavenly Father in secret." Later as the shot gets wider we see that it's Lee Metcalf who was reading this. He looks into the camera and he says, "That kind of prayer, has never been prohibited." Why didn't I think of that?

JE: Didn't you send out a letter declaring your belief in the separation of church and state?

FH: Yes, for a little while the Oklahoma Baptist Convention was against allowing prescribed prayer, but they later changed their stance on that. But the issue never has gone away, as you know. When I ran for the Senate, I thought I was running really for an 8-year term.

I thought that winning and the effect of that would hold over for the entire term, and that's what really happened. If Bellmon had run against me that time it would have been a tough one, but he waited and 2 years later ran against Monroney and beat him.

JE: You remained a firm supporter of LBJ's Great Society programs?

FH: I was. I liked him. Johnson was terribly complex character. There were a lot of things about Johnson I didn't like and he and I eventually fell out toward the end when I turned against the Vietnam War. Also, the Kerner Commission, which I had gotten him to appoint, he thought did not give him sufficient commendation for what he had done in regard to poverty and race. But, we reconciled at the last and after he went out of office too.

JE: As you were becoming progressive and liberal, the state was not.

FH: That's right.

JE: There was then a big chasm between the state and you near the end?

FH: That's right.

JE: Is that what caused you not to run for the Senate again?

FH: No, I wanted to run for president. There was an Associated Press poll, which showed that I would have won, and I think I would have. But, I watched Bill Fulbright, who was a neighboring senator in Arkansas, who had in Washington a very urbane, internationalist kind of image—but when he got back home he would put on a flowery tie and start shaking hands. He took off from the Senate for damn near a year can spend all that time in Arkansas, but actually I don't think he really was for civil rights for example, because he always voted against it. But when he was at home in Arkansas he was even more outspoken about such things. I thought to myself, do I want to go through that? Am I going to be shaving my positions and so forth? And what would be the outcome? I am in the Senate, and hell I have already been in the Senate, so I decided it was either up or out for me.

Chapter 18 — 7:35
Kennedy—Johnson Feud

John Erling: So in 1972 you chose instead to make a run for president?

Fred Harris: Yes. I kind of jogged for president. You almost really have to take two runs at it. You can't really know how to do this without really trying it twice. (Chuckle)

JE: Right, because then you ran again in 1976.

FH: Yes, in '76 I ran for President, but in '72 I really tried to put it together, but there wasn't any way I could do it.

JE: You traveled the country in an RV?

FH: I did in 1976. I wrote up a 4-page memorandum that I was going to give to Walter Mondale. We were very close friends and I wanted Mondale to run for President in 1976. I wrote the memo about how to do it, both in process and in issues. Then, all of a sudden, before I could get it to Mondale, he announced that he wasn't going to run. He said, "I just don't like the prospect of having to stay in Holiday Inns for a year." (Chuckle)

JE: About LBJ again, there was this blood feud between him and Robert Kennedy, I guess we can all it that, what fueled that?

FH: Robert Kennedy thought Johnson was corrupt. He also never forgave Johnson for raising John Kennedy's health as an issue at the 1960 Convention, which he did and it was true. He did have Addison's disease and probably the treatment itself is what caused his thyroid to atrophy as we now know. Johnson knew all of that. Johnson thought that Kennedy was a lightweight and said that people. He thought that Kennedy had not amounted to anything in the Senate and was a womanizer, although Johnson was too. But, all those kind of things Kennedy knew and he hated Johnson for it. He also thought he was not modern. He thought he was bought and paid for by people like the Halliburtons. He thought he used his office to make money with a television station and other things. Johnson thought Robert Kennedy was a rash sort of snot-nosed kid who was vicious and who had said and done a lot of things against him too. Then this thing happened at the convention—I heard it from both Johnson and Kennedy. Old man Joseph Kennedy figured out quite rightly that Kennedy could get elected with Johnson on the ticket, and probably couldn't without Johnson. So John Kennedy did what his father said and offered it to Johnson and Johnson accepted. Incidentally, Johnson when we were on that helicopter, he said that Robert Kerr came busting into his room and said, "They tell me you are thinking about running with our boy from Boston. If you do I'm going to take my .30-30 and shoot you right between eyes if you are thinking about that." Walter Luther and others were just crazed by this idea that they would take Johnson on the ticket. So Robert went down there and said, "You shouldn't take yourself off of it. If this is your brother talking, have him call me and tell me, otherwise I'm going to go right ahead." Of course, Kennedy wasn't going to do that. From Robert's standpoint, he thought Johnson wasn't worth a damn as vice president and that his advice was no good.

JE: Did they cut him out a little bit? He had to be a lonely man.

FH: Oh yes, oh terribly. *Time* magazine wrote that I was the only person in Washington breakfast with Lyndon Johnson and lunch with Hubert Humphrey and dinner with Robert Kennedy, which was true and they all knew it. But with Robert and Ethel, they just loved to talk about Johnson.

JE: Did they make fun of him?

FH: Yes, it was just terrible. It was so weird to me. For example, I'd see Robert McNamara over at Kennedy's house and they were against the war—and then I would see him at White House meetings with the president and he was for the war. But Kennedy, he knew that I was a supporter of Johnson's and liked him. For example, one time Robert Kennedy said Kosygin was going to be in touch with the Vietnamese in Paris.

JE: Kosygin? The Prime Minister of Russia?

FH: Yes. Robert said, "If you can talk to the president (Johnson) and get him to tell Kosygin that we'll do this and that, stop the bombing and whatever I think that we can make a deal." So I said, "Okay." I went to talk to Johnson and he said, "Oh hell, I've already tried that and that won't work." He just dismissed it. One time I was back home in Oklahoma and Dean McGee called me and said he was on an airplane with Louisiana Senator Russell Long and he said, "The President wanted me to tell you this so you could tell Fred Harris. He (Johnson) told me, "I could do a lot more for Fred Harris if he wasn't so close to those Kennedys." Dean McGee said, "He wanted me to pass that on to you, so you do whatever you want with it." The following Monday I went to the White House to see the President. I repeated what I had heard back to him. There was not any movement in his face. He just sat and looked at me. He said, "I'll tell you the same thing I told Malvina Stephenson." She was a reporter for the *Tulsa World*. I told her, "Don't you know that those Kennedys are trying to build a clique in the Senate?" I said, "So am I Malvina." (Chuckle) Johnson just changed the subject to something else. (Laugh) One time I was at Hyannis Port having dinner with Robert Kennedy. The phone rang in the other room and Ethyl went to answer it. She came back to the dining room and said to me, "You're in trouble now kid! President Johnson's on the phone for you." I thought it was a joke, but it wasn't. I got on the phone and he said, "How are you doing Fred?" I said, "Just fine." He really didn't say much of anything. Obviously, the only reason he called was that he just wanted me to know that he knew where I was.

JE: So he was jealous of that wasn't he?

FH: Yes, he never said anything directly to me about it but he did say things to me about John Lindsay.

JE: The mayor of New York?

FH: Yes, we were very close. He ran the Turner Commission and Johnson thought Lindsay was going to run against him. One time he said something to me about "your friend John Lindsay..." I said, "Hell, he's too busy, he's not going to run for president." Another time he talked to me at the White House. He said, "Look at this." He picked up the *New York Times* and showed me a story about John Lindsay announcing poverty funds. He said, "By God, you have to get down to the last paragraph almost before you find out it's my money!" (Laughter)

Chapter 19 — 7:38
Hubert Humphrey

JE: Some comments about Hubert Humphrey—

FH: Yes, I liked Humphrey.

JE: I am from Minnesota and North Dakota so I would see Hubert Humphrey every once in a while myself, but you didn't know him very well obviously.

FH: Yes.

JE: Describe him.

FH: Well, first of all his appearance was different than what you would think. My dad was so surprised that Humphrey turned out to be tall and lean because he had a round face and he photographed heavy. He was a tall, straight guy. He was quick to tears and quick to laugh. Any time he ever spoke, as somebody once said, he would make two of the best speeches you've ever heard. (Laughter) He would make you laugh and he would make you cry. He felt deeply about things. He let himself be used by Johnson and abused by Johnson and he knew it. I was put in the strangest position making a speech in New Orleans at a joint thing sponsored by Loyola and the University of New Orleans when Johnson announced he wasn't going to run, which came as a hell of a shock to me because I couldn't believe it, but it turned out to be true. When I got back the next morning to the office, Robert Kennedy had called and word for me. He was in Pennsylvania somewhere and he had already announced that he was running for president. I was with him at his house the night he decided to run for president but I wasn't a part of that. I had already signed on to be a chairman of an outfit called Cattleman Country for Johnson and Humphrey. Anyway Robert called me and I tried to get in touch with him and I never got him. He never called me back and I think he just couldn't stand it. I mean, they were such close friends. At the same time, almost that same hour, Hubert Humphrey called me. He had been in Mexico. Johnson had given him no prior notice—that was the way he treated Humphrey. Humphrey invited LaDonna and me to come and have breakfast with him and his wife Muriel the next morning at their South Capital condo. So we did—just the four of us. He wanted my advice on whether they ought to run. I was hard on him. I told him what I thought. We talked it over and I left and I didn't tell him that I was for him. We got to the elevator and LaDonna was in tears. She said, "We just seemed so cold." I said, "Well, I don't think that we should have told him to run, you have to be careful about it." She said, "I know, but it just seems like we could have been warmer about it." Anyway, the next thing I know Mondale called me and asked me to co-chair a campaign luncheon for Humphrey. So that's how I inched into it. Then Mondale called me and asked me to fly

with him down to Key Biscayne to visit Humphrey who was down there on a friend's boat. Humphrey wanted to talk to us about being his national co-chairs of his campaign. So we flew down there and met with Humphrey. Mondale told me that he was going to do this in advance—he called Humphrey and asked him if he really wanted us to run this, or if he just wanted us as figureheads. Humphrey said, "No, I want you to actually run it." So we both agreed, and we ran his main campaign. We started from the first pressing Humphrey to break with Johnson on the war. Larry O'Brien and others have written about this. We thought he was going to make a speech breaking with Johnson on the war before the convention, but he met with Johnson and I don't know what Johnson told him—I think you told him that he was going to get a lot of Americans killed and that they were going to work this thing out if he didn't screw it up, so he didn't do it. But at the convention then, my job, among others—I was in charge of the delicate operation but also Humphrey asked me to work up an anti-Vietnam plank, which was in the words that Ted Kennedy had given in a speech at Worcester, Massachusetts. My job was to go around and try to sell that first to Hale Boggs, who was chairman of the platform committee. Hale Boggs said, "Will you look me in the eye and tell me that Humphrey's position?" I said, "That's exactly what I'm telling you." John Connelly said, "I can't believe that, but I won't oppose it if that's what he wants." I knew that Connelly wanted to be the vice presidential nominee. Then Hubert Ellington said that he would support it. Then after midnight that night, Bill Welch of Humphrey's camp woke me up and said, "The Johnson people have moved in here. We can't find Hale Boggs. They are pressing these people on the Vietnam plank and we have to come up with a compromise plan." I said, "I won't do it." I used a word that I have learned from Robert Kennedy and I said, "This is the time for some moxie." They said, "Yeah, but Johnson will beat us." I said, "It doesn't make a damn—let them do it. We've got to stand up for what we are for." But Humphrey backed down. I was really sick with the campaign. Larry O'Brien called me later and asked me to help Humphrey write an anti-Vietnam speech, which I did. We got to Salt Lake City for a televised deal and it was just a constant running argument on the trip there and while we were there. The speech had three paragraphs that were mutually inconsistent. The first paragraph said unilateral bombing halt with no conditions. The second paragraph said that the other side ought to do something first. The third paragraph said if they don't—we'll just bomb the hell out of them. (Chuckle) I just thought it was awful. We taped the speech and there was about a 5 min. delay before and went on the network. We were going to watch it in the studio as it was aired. Humphrey went off into a little room off the studio and called Johnson. When he came back he was just as white...I can just imagine what was said, but it was too late, I mean the damn tape was feeding. So I got on the press bus because I just wanted to see what people were saying. Before I even got to the hotel Ted Kennedy had come on and

there was an AP story saying that he said this was just what he was looking for and he was for Humphrey. That I think came across as a peace speech. We have had that as an afterthought. Larry O'Brien had put on a tag thing at the and asking for money and the money came in so rapidly it paid for another national television broadcast. I think that was a big, big thing but it was very late into the campaign.

Chapter 20 — 5:40
Harris for Vice President

John Erling: Hubert Humphrey considered you for Vice President?

Fred Harris: He did. He narrowed it down to Edmund Muskie and me. I was in New York with my wife and it had been in *Newsweek* that Robert Kennedy would choose me as Vice President. I knew from the daughter of a guy who worked at *Newsweek* who happened to work for me. Also there were stories that Humphrey would choose me as Vice President. It seemed like you would question what you were doing because I was trying to get Humphrey to name me as his VP. I called my daughter who was working on the Humphrey campaign and told her that I was going to talk to Humphrey and tell him to count me out of this. So my wife and I went to see Humphrey in the morning. I told him, "I am going to go on the Joy Bishop Show out in California and I am going to say that I told you I don't want to be considered for VP, so you are free to do whatever you want. I don't want anybody questioning my motives." He said, "Don't do that Freddie. I really am considering you. Go ahead and go on the show and do some good for yourself, but I am seriously thinking about you." Well, I was in touch with Mondale all of the time and a couple of his staff people so I knew what was going on. By the time I left California, Humphrey had it narrowed down to four people, Muskie, me and two others. By the time the convention came around, it was Muskie and I. I was staying one floor down from him at the hotel. He was supposed to make an announcement at 10 o'clock. I was sitting around with my family and staff wondering when he was going to call me. All of a sudden, somebody came in and said, "It must be you because the Secret Service has moved onto this floor." Well, it turned out that they were there for another reason. Then a minute later, Humphrey called. He asked me to come to his room. He took me back to a bedroom and closed the door and said, "Is there anything that would cause any trouble that might come out about you?" I said, "No." He said, "Hold on a minute." So he left. What I didn't know is that across the hall in an adjoining bedroom was Muskie. So he left me there with the door and closed, and then he came back and he talked to me some more. He told me about a daughter of

Muskie's and asked me if I thought that would be a problem for him. I said, "No." Then he talked to me some more about what I could do. Then he left again and talked to Muskie, although I didn't know it at the time. He comes back again and he had tears in his eyes and he said, "Fred I'm going to have to pick the older guy." I said, "If that's your decision, I will nominate him."

JE: How did that make you feel?

FH: I don't know...

JE: Were your hopes high?

FH: Yes, I thought there would be a god chance that he would choose me, but I have won and lost, you know? He said, "Will you go with me to tell him?" I said, "Yes." We walked into the other bedroom and there was Muskie standing there with his back to us. He turned around and Humphrey said to him, I don't know if he did it on purpose like this for suspense or what, but it must have been the longest sentence Muskie ever heard. Humphrey said, "Ed, shake hands with the guy that's going to nominate you." (Laughter) I did wind up nominating him.

JE: Wow. What a life. We could go on and on talking about all of this stuff.

FH: Well, I've led a great life since, as a professor and a writer and so forth.

JE: Yes, you have. You went on to teaching here at the University of New Mexico?

FH: Yes, I am a Professor Emeritus of Political Science at UNM. I am the director of the UNM Fred Harris Congressional Internship Program. I go to Washington about once a month looking after my interns. It's been a wonderful life where one thing sort of led to another.

JE: A lot of things led to another after you were picking cotton!

FH: Right! (Chuckle)

JE: Just think about that and what you came from, but then others did too. Hubert Humphrey from South Dakota and Carl Albert, too from Little Dixie and all of you guys came from very poor backgrounds.

FH: One time, we were on a little Air Force plane, me and Humphrey and Albert. We started talking to each other how poor we were (chuckle) and Humphrey and I just had to give up, Carl Albert, he won pretty...I mean, we didn't act like we were competing, but we were. He said that he had graduated from the eighth grade at Flowery Mound and there was no high school there. His dad told him that he did not have the money to send him to high school in McAlester. But he told him if he would stay there for a year and work on the farm, he would see that he went to high school even if I have to sell the farm. So Humphrey and I decided, okay, Carl wins! (Laughter)

Chapter 21 — 1:55
Legacy & Obama

John Erling: How would you like to be remembered?

Fred Harris: Well, that I never did really forget where I came from. When Don Baldwin got elected President pro tempore of the State Senate during my first term there, he said to the democratic caucus, "I'll never forget you and I'll never let you down." That's what I said when I made my victory speech at The Biltmore in Oklahoma City.

JE: And that's the way you'd like to be remembered?

FH: Yes.

JE: Quickly, prognostication in the 2012 race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney?

FH: I like Obama. I know him personally and I've seen him and talked to him six or seven times. He is the smartest president I've ever had anything to do with. Bill Clinton is close—they may be the same, but Obama is much more disciplined. It's much easier for him to make a decision and stick with it when he makes one because he's got guts and he is as well-motivated to do the right thing as anybody I have ever had contact with.

JE: Do you think he will win this election?

FH: I think he will win, yes and he certainly ought to. He is sort of withdrawn and cool. He's not sort of a Bill Clinton kind of guy. God knows he would take over the world if he had Bill Clinton's ability to deal with people person-to-person, and that's caused Obama some trouble I think that he is cool and detached, but his other qualities greatly outweigh that I think.

JE: Well I want to thank you for this time talking to us. It's so kind of you to allow me into your house and to do this for the sake of history. I appreciate it very much.

FH: Thank you very much for as Margaret says, for allowing me to talk about my favorite subject. (Chuckle) These long answers remind me of a thing Bob Kerr used to say. He'd say, "It's like the guy who brought the book back to the Library of Congress and said, 'Hell I didn't want to know that much about penguins!'" (Laughter)

Chapter 22 — 0:25
Conclusion

Announcer: We are grateful to former Senator Fred Harris for telling his very interesting story to VoicesofOklahoma.com. We thank our sponsors who join us in preserving our state's legacy one voice at a time. Our bookstore features some of the books written by Fred Harris. Share this story with a friend and let students know about this research tool—the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.