Voices of OKLAHOMA

Wes Watkins

Determination & leadership led him from rural OK agriculture to 20 years as a congressman.

Chapter 01 – Introduction

Announcer: Congressman Wes Watkins was raised on a small cattle and peanut farm near Bennington in southeast Oklahoma. As a young boy, Watkins was involved in 4-H and FFA and later became state FFA president. Wes found time for leadership positions in school despite working three part-time jobs, playing basketball and baseball, and earning the title of salutatorian of his graduating class.

Wes's determination and success followed him to Oklahoma State University, where he worked on the college farm and lived in a converted chicken house. Wes again showed his leadership skills as president of the OSU student body. He was an honor student and selected as the Outstanding Agriculture Senior. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Agricultural Education from Oklahoma State University.

In 1974, Wes was first elected to public office when he won a seat in the Oklahoma State Senate. Two years later, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He ran for governor in 1990 and 1994. In 1996, Wes again won election for the Third District Congressional seat, which he had previously held from 1977 to 1991. He was re-elected by wide margins in 1998 and in 2000.

In total Wes represented Oklahoma's 3rd congressional district for fourteen years as a Democrat and six years as a Republican.

One great testament to Wes's support of CareerTech is that the Wes Watkins Technology Center in Wetumka bears his name.

And The Wes Watkins Center for International Trade & Development is located on the north side of the Oklahoma State University campus. Founded by Congressman Wes Watkins in 1990, the building serves as the hub of international activities for the university.

Chapter 02 – 8:30
A Lasting Impression

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today's date is March the 1st, 2017.

Wes, would you state your full name, please?

Wes Watkins: Wesley Wade Watkins.

JE: Were you named after somebody?

WW: Named after both my grandpas.

JE: And your date of birth and present age?

WW: December 15, 1938, and my present age is seventy-eight.

JE: Where are we recording this?

WW: We're recording this at the OSU Center of International Trade Development on the OSU campus in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

JE: You're being awfully humble right now, because the name on the outside of this building is Wes Watkins Center.

WW: That's right. It's an honor to have it on the building. But it also is a great responsibility having a name on a building. But it does allow me to visit with young people and talk to them about their future.

JE: Where were you born?

WW: De Queen, Arkansas.

JE: Your parents' names, your mother's name?

WW: My mother was Mary Etta Johnson Watkins, her maiden name is Johnson. My daddy's name is L. V. Watkins Sr.

JE: Where did they grow up, what was their background?

WW: The background for them was basically Arkansas. De Queen, Arkansas, is just right across east, twenty miles east of Broken Bow, Oklahoma, in the deep southeast part of the state. They were married in that De Queen area. After a number of trips to California, we settled in southeast Oklahoma in a little community of Bennington.

JE: Your mother, what type of person was she?

WW: My mother was an unbelievable person. I look back at it, she had very little formal education but she was a woman with a world of wisdom. She was not able to get her education. Her father had her in the fields working and she had completed basically the eighth grade. And that concerned her.

I have two siblings, a sister that lives in Tulsa in assisted living. And a brother that's in Muskogee who has ill health. But my mom kept talking about the importance of needing to get an education. Now she thought about getting through, say, high school, but I'm proud to say that all three of us have not only received our bachelor's degree, all three of

us have gotten a master's degree, and my brother went on and got a law degree. So her influence has had a major part of our life.

JE: Talk about your father, his personality and what he did.

WW: My father had a type A personality. He also had a very limited formal education. But he had a lot of common sense and he was basically hardworking and looking for jobs.

At the age of four, my age at the time, we went to California and we ended up going to California three times before I was nine years old in a search for a job.

JE: Would that have been in the '30s?

WW: That would have been in the early '40s. World War II ended as we were on our way back to Oklahoma. That would be around 1945. Nineteen forty-six, basically, is when we got electricity in Bennington, Oklahoma, as far as out in the country there. But my dad couldn't find jobs in southeast Oklahoma, going back and forth, back and forth. He actually lost, I think, his self-esteem. He turned to alcohol—he ended up becoming an alcoholic and he ended up dying as an alcoholic.

JE: How old was he?

WW: He was about sixty-two when he passed away, but it made an everlasting impression on my life, in fact, leading me into, really, the political arena. Because I was very active in student leadership here at OSU and was president of the student body and student senate. And when I had won that election, a fellow asked me, "Wes, when are you going into politics?"

I said, "What do you mean?"

And he said, "When are you going to run for elective office? I want to help you."

And I asked myself a question that I've told a lot of young people when they come to me about going into politics, *What is your mission? What are you all about? What's your passion about?* And I asked myself the question, *What would I do if I got into politics?*

I thought about my family situation and there had to hundreds and thousands of others similar having to leave to find jobs. And I thought, *You know, if I could do something about that, if I could help them have a better way of life, being able to stay and live and work and raise their family*—at that time, basically the southeast part of the state where I grew up as a boy. So that's what I started out on.

Now, my life has been a lot of different things including a Democrat, a Republican, Independent, but my mission has always been the same.

JE: Your father being an alcoholic, were you ten, eleven, twelve?

WW: All during that time.

JE: And so that had to have a tremendous impact on you.

WW: It did. It did, in fact, I do not drink, I do not smoke, I do not take alcohol of any kind. I saw what happened in my own family. My dad had a great personality. He could have

probably owned half of Bryan County, down there where Bennington is, if he had stayed off the bottle. But he chose to go the other way.

My folks were separated and divorced probably five or six times.

JE: Because of the alcohol?

WW: Basically the alcohol, yeah. And as a result, I watched Dad deteriorate. My mom, last time he went back toward California, she said, "We're going to stay at Bennington."

Bennington is a little, small community twenty miles east of Durant. Bennington has about 250 people in it, somewhere around that today. It was a great place to grow up. Everyone knew you, everyone helped raise me. In fact, as I've stated, you know, when I came to OSU I was probably the greenest country kid—

JE: [small laugh]

WW: ...that you could ever imagine, and I'm not lying about that. But I came to OSU, the entire world opened up to me. International was not even my vocabulary when I came. And now a facility here, a building, and all the things that we're trying to do worldwide.

So going back to my dad, each of us is a role model. Each of us will be a role model one way or the other, on a positive way, or it could be a negative way, but we're role models. I learned some things that I didn't want to do.

JE: Your mother, did she die in an early death too?

WW: No, my mom saw me elected to Congress as a Republican. Now I mention it that way because we had to have quite a summit when I became a Republican because, you know, in southeast Oklahoma, my congressional district was 82 percent Democrat and we'd always been lifetime Democrats. And I served fourteen years as a Democrat, but Mama, it really bothered her when I became a Republican. But she died before Thanksgiving, 1996.

I was elected as a Republican to go back to Congress early that November of 1996.

JE: When you were a young person, were you a reader? Were you interested in reading necessarily, extraordinarily?

WW: Sears and Roebuck catalog, that's about the main thing we had.

JE: You didn't have books?

WW: We had some books, yeah. I read what books that we had out in the country.

JE: Yeah.

WW: And in early years, we had lamps, and in 1946, Rural Electric came and we put the lamp up. But the Sears and Roebuck catalog, the Montgomery Ward catalogs, you could learn a lot in math by figuring prices and subtracting and doing all the things. And you also read a lot about a lot of different things.

JE: Most people looked at that for dreaming what they were going to buy, and you may have done some of that, but you saw it as a learning tool?

WW: It was a learning tool. Basically, I didn't have any money hardly to buy anything. We didn't think about ourselves as being poor or in poverty because most of the other people are the same way.

JE: You graduated from Oklahoma State University but you stay on campus. Didn't you work here?

WW: I had the good fortune—I stayed here and got my bachelor's degree in 1960, in Agricultural Education. I was going to be an Ag teacher—that was the person that became a great influence on my life was my Ag teacher, in the FFA, the Future Farmers of America. I'd come here on judging contests and speech contests through the FFA, which is great leadership training for young people.

Chapter 03 – 4:00
Hard Work

Wes Watkins: So when I graduated from Bennington High School it was the draft of 1956 when I graduated, the cattle I'd had raised, I had to sell a lot of them for, like, twelve to fifteen cents a pound, way below market price because we didn't have any pasture. So I sold what cattle I had and I boarded a Jordan bus and I went to California on that Jordan bus in 1956. I got there on, I think, it was a Sunday afternoon, but I met a fellow, Mr. McDruger, who had a poultry farm.

I talked with him and he was very nice and polite and he told me I'd probably be able to go to the beach and ocean and all that. But the next morning, I went to work and I worked every single day that summer, around Norco, California. I didn't even take time to go get a haircut. As a result, I was able to come back and pay off my notes.

I came to OSU with eighty-eight dollars in my pocket. I was very thankful to have that.

Probably one of the best things though was working on that poultry farm because I went into the Dean of Agriculture's office to see about getting in school, and there was a fellow named Fred LeCrone, who just passed away within the last decade, great guy. Also Randall Jones, whose son became my roommate when I was working on my doctorate.

But Fred LeCrone asked me that day in 1956, "Watkins, what can I do to help you?"

I said, "Professor LeCrone, if I can just get a job I'll make it."

He looked at my resume and saw that I had worked on a poultry farm in California all summer. So he sent me to see a guy named Delbert Black here on the campus, who is a manager of the poultry farm, where that old Ag building is and everything now.

I went out there and Mr. Black hired me to work part-time, but also I found a chicken house, an empty chicken house and I moved in it.

John Erling: You moved in it?

WW: Yeah. I lived in it for two years. I got paid, I think it was fifty cents an hour.

JE: [laughs] Not in a chicken coop but—

WW: Well, it was a chicken house. A coop I think of being much smaller.

JE: Right.

WW: A test house, the research on eggs and the hens. I got up every morning at four o'clock and gathered eggs. I mixed a lot of feed rations and I did a whole lot of scooping of manures along the way. I lived there for a couple of years.

Then I got a better job on the campus in the infirmary. I got up every morning at four o'clock there and mopped floors. And I had my room there and three meals a day in the dietician's kitchen. And also had clean sheets, which meant a lot to me.

Dr. Cooper, who we just had his funeral last week, Dr. Cooper hired me. And I want to tell you, Dr. Cooper was quite a character, quite a guy, everybody loved him, he was athletic. But Dr. Cooper never called me his congressman. He'd always say, "John, I want to introduce you to my mop boy."

JE: [laughing]

WW: But here's why I love OSU so much. I was elected when I was there on the poultry farm the state president of Oklahoma FFA, it was the launching pad, I had no idea. That was probably the greatest year of the formation of my life.

When I was mopping floors here my senior year at OSU, I was elected president of the student senate. I didn't have any money. I wasn't anointed to do that, but that's when that fellow asked me, "Wes, when are you going to go into politics?"

JE: So that was a key moment, wasn't it, for you?

WW: Yes.

JE: You could have become interested in politics perhaps later on, but who knows?

WW: Who knows? I don't know, yeah.

JE: But the fact that that man asked you that question—

WW: I wish I could remember his name. Here's this baby old step forward, but he said, "I want to help you." So I thought, *If I went into politics, what would I do?*

Chapter 04 – 3:35
High School Relations

John Erling: You didn't do anything with politics immediately though. You went into other things. Didn't you become a home builder?

Wes Watkins: Yes. What happened, I stayed here and got my master's in 1961. Spent a year doing that. And I wrote a paper called "The Need of a Multicounty Organization for the Economic Growth of Southeast Oklahoma," because this has been on my heart, you know. My advisor recommended that I apply for Pfizer Land Grant scholarship. I was kind of the first Pfizer man, you know? It was mainly in rural development.

I was here and the good Lord blessed me because the Christmas of '61, I met my wife-to-be at the door to the library.

JE: And what was her name?

WW: Lou Rodgers, at that time.

JE: And you met her at the door of the library?

WW: Yes. I'd left the infirmary job and I took, really, the best job on the campus. I was the head doorman of the OSU library. And I was checking out books—as I tell them, I was checking out other things too—but Lou Rodgers was a daughter of a Presbyterian minister from Cushing. She was going to Park College outside of Kansas City, at that time, a Presbyterian school, her father being a Presbyterian minister. But she had come back home to Cushing and had to over to OSU during the Christmas of 1961 to do research paper and use the OSU library.

Then I was informed that I should check her out studying on the second floor, so I did. When she started to leave, I introduced myself to her. And then we dated some. But in the Christmas of '62, I gave her an engagement ring. But I was working on my doctorate at the University of Maryland in Rural Development. I had the scholarship to go and I went up there.

When I came back, Lou and I, we decided she was going to American University; we'd get married in '63. While I was there, we were about to get married, President Willham, the president of Oklahoma State University, saw me standing in Whitehurst Hall. He came in there and said, "Wes, what are you doing nowadays?"

And I said, "President Willham, I'm working on my doctorate at the University of Maryland."

And he said, "Well, I was just kind of interested in what you're doing because we're going to set up a high school relations program and we want to hire a full time person to do that."

I asked him about it a little bit. He said, "I've got to go through the regents to get money," that was in 1963. He said, "If you're interested, I'll call you."

He did call me about six weeks later and offered me the job. The first week, I think, was in August, so Lou and I, even though we were just newlyweds and all, we headed back to Stillwater, OSU, pulling our little home.

Our first home was an eight-feet by twenty-two feet travel trailer. For four years, I went across the state of Oklahoma, speaking to high schools while I tell people, "I was

preaching the gospel of OSU and trying to inspire young people to lift their vision and plan to go ahead and get more education." And I'd tell them if they needed a job, "I'll help you. If you're willing to work, I'll help you, just like Fred Lecrone helped me."

So I did that for four years.

JE: I'm sure you influenced many, many, many lives, didn't you?

WW: I'd like to think maybe, you know—

JE: Yeah.

WW: ...I've done that. That's what the goal was. A lot of them still walk up to me and say, "You know, I came to OSU because of you."

JE: Yeah.

WW: And that makes you feel like, *Hey*—

JE: Now many of these kids here, their parents were influenced by you.

WW: Oh yeah.

JE: Maybe grandparents too. [both laughing]

WW: Grandparents, yeah. Try to ask you, John, you're right.

Chapter 05 – 6:40
Rural Development

Wes Watkins: I got then a call from a couple of guys in southeast Oklahoma, Dick Hefton, who was part of the *McAllister News-Capital*, and Fred Stovall, who owned the *Wilburton-Latimer County News*, heading up an organization that would become an organization if they got the person, the executive director, the need of a multicounty organization for poverty areas in the United States.

I delivered a paper while I was at the University of Maryland, just twelve miles out of DC, to the Department of Commerce, about need of a multicounty organization because of southeast Oklahoma's economic problems, of how its welfare, unemployment, underemployment, all of that. So they'd called me and asked me if I was interested in heading the first one and getting it organized.

And I said, "Yes I would be." I had to make a decision about leaving OSU, and that was a tough one. 'Cause I owed so much to OSU. But I went down and I headed the Economic Development District, formerly called Kiamichi Economic Development, KEDDO, and worked on the economic opportunities, etc., and there's other things that came from that.

John Erling: I need to go back and ask you, you talk about OSU so much, where does the University of Maryland come into this whole story?

WW: The University of Maryland comes in because I went there to work on my doctorate.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: I finished all my doctorate except writing a dissertation.

JE: Why the University of Maryland?

WW: Because they had an outstanding graduate program in Rural Development.

JE: Okay.

WW: Now we had Agriculture. Agriculture is part of Rural Development. Rural Development is more than just Ag. Small towns in rural areas, water, sewer, industrial, building jobs, building things like that. That's why I went to University of Maryland.

JE: So the Economic Development District, that must have been a real rewarding job for you.

WW: For instance, we did not have Career Tech.

JE: Career Tech?

WW: Career Tech, or Vo-Tech, as they were called first, Vo-Tech schools.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: There's one in Ardmore, to the west of this southeast quadrant. There's one in Muskogee. We didn't have in the deep southeast, why? Because the first law they set up was to form the Career Tech or the Vo-Tech schools in school districts with a $40 million tax base and serving 15,000 people. We couldn't qualify, we needed it the worst. We had the worst economic conditions; we had the highest rate of welfare, unemployment, underemployment, out-migration, all that, lowest educational level—we needed it. But we couldn't get it there.

Long story short on that, I formed a bus tour throughout the southeast with a US senator on the bus and one of his representatives. Carl Albert was on the bus, we made a two-day tour. I pointed out every stop, what that community was needing, what the applications they had, and I brought up the fact that we could not qualify for Career Tech.

I got Dr. Francis Tuttle and I got Dr. J. N. Baker, who is president of Whilpers [uncertain] State College, they all agreed. We ended up forming the school district, those seven counties of KEDDO. That was our base then. And we had the millage election—I went all across that getting the people to vote the millage. Couldn't tell them where the schools were actually going to go but I said, "For our children and grandchildren, it's better if they left with a skill than without one." And I got them to vote the millage to build those.

We ended up having enough money to build three schools—one in Hugo, one in Poteau, one in McAlester, and we put the headquarters for Kiamichi Vo-Tech School in Wilburton.

JE: So you had to sell these people on a vision and you say millage?

WW: Yeah.

JE: It was a tax on their property.

WW: Yeah.

JE: And they had to agree that you can tax my property because we believe in your vision. And that passed.

WW: That's correct.

JE: Do you remember the percentage?

WW: It was close, I know I won a steak dinner. [laughs] A guy in Buffalo Valley who was with the State Career Techs—and this would never go, this is not gossip, I'll bet you, but yes, it was the people lifting their vision for the children and grandchildren. An area that has been critical, people have been critical because of the educational level. They've been critical with drugs and, you know, problems like that. The good people, they need opportunities, and that's what I was trying to give them back then. I worked at that two years. I had an industry that was going to come to Hugo and ask the question, "Where would my employees live?"

We all looked around at each other, we hadn't started a subdivision or anything like that in Hugo. People had been moving out of Hugo one at a time. We lost that industry because that was a problem.

So I started saying, "All right, what do I do?"

I went to Tulsa, talked to a couple of builders over there. They kind of laughed at me, I was wanting them to come to southeast Oklahoma and build. Went to Oklahoma City, the same thing kind of happened, couldn't get them to go. I had dug the footings and built a couple of homes here, my new bride and I, when we came back from University of Maryland, Washington, DC, area. I started and built two little houses out here east of town.

I brought a guy into the southeast part of the state though named Cecil Purdue. He had a home building operation in Chickasha, where he could build your home or anyone's home, custom-built, but precut it and put it on a truck and brought the sections in and could set it up in twenty-four hours and have it up out of the weather.

I brought Cecil Purdue to southeast Oklahoma, him and his wife, Peggy. We toured the southeast and I was giving him the best sale job I could.

Spent the night, the next morning, he said, "You know, Wes, we can't move our plant here but if you'll join me, we'll build a plant wherever you would like to do it over here in eastern Oklahoma."

So I told my wife, I said, "You know, I guess we either put up or shut up about the new homes."

We built an operation in Stigler, Oklahoma, sixty miles from Fort Smith, sixty miles from Muskogee, about sixty miles from McAlester. We then set up an operation out of Idabel. Went down there and set that in place. We became the largest home builder in the state of Oklahoma.

JE: [laughing]

WW: But we built small homes. We didn't make big profit, but we built a lot of them, built a lot of them. I was getting up at four o'clock again, working away, trying to get all the crews developed. So I got into home building. And I was in home building about ten years or so. It was the best experience for me to have when I went to United States Congress or State Senate, the first.

Chapter 06 – 11:15
US Congressman

John Erling: You brought up the name of Carl Albert.

Wes Watkins: Yes sir.

JE: Let's first of all talk about the person of Carl Albert, tell us about him.

WW: Tremendous man, a great role model as far as his work and his vision. He became the Speaker of the United States. He was the number one congressman.

JE: He was the US House Speaker.

WW: House Speaker.

JE: Yes he was.

WW: Bright, very bright, a Rhodes scholar.

JE: And a short man.

WW: Yes he was.

JE: I understand he stood five-four.

WW: Yeah, five-four and I still remember he kind of gave a commencement address in my little hometown of Bennington, not my senior year but my eighth grade, I think. He came there and I remember one of the things he said, a little joke he kind of said, on himself. In the speech, he said, one of the students came out, and all gushing, "Yes sir, that's a brilliant speech, Mr. Speaker, it's wonderful, etc."

Speaker Albert said, "You know, I thought, *Wow, what did I say that turned this guy on?"* He asked him, "What did I say to you, young man?"

He said, "Well, sir, it wasn't what you said. But I figured if a little short guy like you could become Speaker of the United States House, that I have a chance of being President." [both laughing]

WW: Great respect I have for him, even though he wasn't for me when I ran for Congress.

JE: Well, you do kind of have a love, not hate, but a—

WW: Oh, no.

JE: ...you were in odds with him and we'll talk about that.

WW: Yeah.

JE: Your first foray into politics, of course, you saw him and knew him and all that. Did that plant another seed that, *Man, I'm around Carl Albert and I would like to do what he does*?

WW: No, actually when I came down to try and make a decision on what I was going to do about the economic growth in southeast Oklahoma, the building of jobs and all, I had to think, *I've got to have an area big enough to work. I've got to have more than just, say, like one county, etc.* So I thought, *Well, what kind of territory?* And I thought, *Well, it's just logical to look at maybe Congress.* He had twenty-five counties in the deep southeast, went over to Ardmore and that area and came up to actually Lincoln County, Chandler, and Langston, Logan County, Guthrie area, he had that. Didn't have Payne County but he had those. So I thought the logical thing was maybe look at Congress. I had never thought about the State Senate.

But I was in the home building business, as I mentioned there, and I got sued on a fraudulent Worker's Comp case. And I found there was a terrible situation in the Worker's Comp. I had Bible study in my business in Ada, Oklahoma, that was after I had gone out to Chickasha for one year. After I set up the operation home building, we set up land development to try to have lots and things like that set up.

I agreed to come there with Mr. Perdue for one year and set up that phase. Then I moved to Ada, back into the third congressional district because that's where I could build homes, have a big market area, all out of Ada.

One thing I started doing is having Bible study for my employees. We met at least one morning a week. Giving young men one last chance before they were sent to maybe prison. I was working with a minister and a judge. That probably touched some of them but a lot of them I lost. Many of them approached me some time later. But I found out another thing, there was a need to help some of the convicts get back in society.

So in the home building business I had met with a lady there and her young daughter, about five years old, redheaded, I can still see that little girl. Her daddy was in prison and he was to get out but he needed a job. So I hired the man. He was a draftsman.

I had a draftsman, one and maybe a half time on another one, so I didn't have room for him as a draftsman. But I said to him, "Johnny, if you'll work on the paint crew use one arm to paint." Why I say that, he was a one-arm, he was a one-arm draftsman. I said, "Johnny, if you'll work as a painter, I'll put you on the paint crew."

"Okay."

About ten days later, downtown Ada, he went down and hired a lawyer and sued me on a Worker's Comp case.

JE: Over what?

WW: Bad back, that's what he said. But I found out later he had done that some other times. One of the lawyers that helped him was going to run for State Senate. You may remember George Miller, State Senator George Miller, Channel 10? He was the state senator. He had resigned right in the middle of his term and become the number two guy for Lloyd Rader in the Department of Human Services.

Well, that seat was vacant in the State Senate. I had never thought about the State Senate. Like I say, I was looking at the bigger picture. But I went and talked to my banker, talked to the concrete guys, the lumbermen, all the people I was in contact with. Asked them about getting somebody, "Let's get somebody to run for State Senate."

The conclusion was, "Well, Wes, you got more interest in this than we do, why don't you run?"

I'd only lived there about a year and a half. You know, I thought, *I can't do this*. But before I let this attorney, this lawyer, run and just walk in there, Lou and I, my wife and I, talked about it. And I said, "Well, I'll run." If I had lost that probably would have been it. And I guess I'd been out of politics, but we won, we won. And as a result, I went to the State Senate.

I was in the home building business and I continued to do that. But then I thought, *Well, I'm going to get out of politics because I can't make a living in the State Senate*. Now that was a turning point because I thought, *Well, I'm going to get out and not run again*.

And I'll be danged, on June 5, 1976, Carl Albert announced he was not going to seek reelection.

JE: After thirty years.

WW: After thirty years. And we didn't look back. The party leaders were against us but through the FFA days, through the home building, through all the others, we put together, I think, the greatest campaign I've ever been associated with.

JE: Who were you running against?

WW: I was running against a great guy, Carl Albert's chief of staff, Charlie Ward, a good man. Lived in Tulsa for a while. Very active in the Methodist church. We had also Hamp Baker, Corporation Commissioner, Gary Payne, a state representative, and Marvin Andrews, who had run two or three times. Kind of a rancher perennial candidate.

JE: All those people were running for the job and then Carl Albert supported Charlie Ward, endorsed him.

WW: That's correct. Yeah, yeah.

JE: So your odds of winning are not very great.

WW: Well, that's what all the pros were saying, you know, all the political pundits were saying, "Hey, Carl Albert's the man." In fact, one of the things the *Times* reporter asked me, "Wes, are you taking any of that Washington, DC, money?" 'Cause it was known as kind of dark money.

And I said, "No, I'm not." Well, I didn't just tell the whole truth, I wasn't even offered any money out of Washington, DC, 'cause Carl Albert had it all shut off. He had it all for Charlie Ward.

JE: Wow.

WW: But that year, we received more donations than any other member running for Congress. But they were small gifts.

JE: Unbeknownst to you, you were laying the ground through your home building and all that and the contacts you made with all those people. They got to know who you were.

WW: Yeah. I had no idea when I was state FFA president that that was going to lead me that direction. Through OSU here I was president of the Ag school, blue key, honorary leadership stuff and all that multitude of those organizations. But I didn't know that was preparing me to go into politics, until that fellow asked me that question.

JE: Obviously you're a Democrat running as a Democrat. Carl Albert was a Democrat. Tell me how the primary turned out?

WW: Like I say, all news people, everybody wasn't giving us much chance to do anything. Well, in the primary, we came out leading with a ten-thousand-vote lead. And in a run-off with Charlie Ward.

Now I cannot explain the electricity that went through the body of people throughout the southeast. It was at that time that people realized I could win. And the electricity and momentum was going so strong, we came out of the run-off with 63 percent of the vote, with about a thirty-thousand-vote lead. And then we won the general election with over a hundred-thousand-vote margin.

JE: Had Carl Albert lost some of his influence? He'd been there so long, thirty years, you would have thought that no matter who Carl Albert endorses, that person would have won.

WW: That's what most people thought.

JE: Were they getting tired of him?

WW: Well, I don't know if they were getting tired of him. I think he had become a little more liberal because he was working up the ladder to be the leader in the United States Congress. That became his key constituency, and they were really giving him fits up there in the Watergate time period.

He went to my little hometown of Bennington, as I mentioned, about 250 people, campaigning for Charlie. So he got heavily involved in that race. I think the people decided they wanted their person.

JE: He had become a Washington person, apparently.

WW: I think some people thought that. You know, felt like that.

JE: Yeah.

WW: I always liked Carl Albert very much and I understood why he had to be so active for Charlie Ward. Charlie Ward worked for him for about seventeen years. So it was a natural thing.

JE: But then when you won the primary, Carl Albert endorsed you.

WW: Yes, he said he'd be for me, yeah.

JE: Did he work for you?

WW: I didn't ask him to because I didn't want him to be uneasy about or awkward about the whole thing. But I did go to every one of the people that I knew had been active for Carl Albert in trying to help Charlie, whether it was a banker in Elmore City or wherever it may be, I went to them and asked them personally for their help.

Most of them were uneasy and I said, "Hey, all I ask you to do is if you can be as loyal to me as you have been to Carl Albert."

And what happened after that, I didn't have an opponent. The next election I didn't have a Democrat, or Republican, or Independent, anybody run against me because I'd gone to all the people trying to let them know I was wanting to be their congressman and work for them.

JE: You were reelected six times by close to 80 percent of the vote. Unheard of, unheard of. I'm going to say this and you're not going to say yea or nay, but if Carl Albert were running again, it's a possibility you could have defeated him.

WW: That's what a lot of people said.

JE: Right.

WW: A lot of people told me that.

JE: This giant from little Dixie. It's amazing that you overcame his support of Charlie Ward and won that. I mean, the headlines had to be blazing.

WW: It was a very humbling situation. And what makes me feel as great and humble, my last election. After being a Democrat, an Independent, and Republican, I never lost a third district of Oklahoma. But my last election I got over 87 percent of the vote, nearly 88. I gave them a lot of reason not to be for me but they knew that I was sincere about what I was trying to do.

JE: And then you didn't seek an eighth term in 1990?

Chapter 07 – 8:45
Al Gore and the Internet

John Erling: Al Gore started in Congress the same year.

Wes Watkins: Yes sir.

JE: The two of you, I believe, worked on issues together.

WW: Some issues, yeah.

JE: What was your impression of Al Gore then when you met him?

WW: Well, he was the son of a United States senator and he was running for president, right then, I thought, in many respects. Al Gore is a bright guy, smart, very politically oriented. Of course, he was raised there and educated there in the shadows of the United States Congress in Washington, DC. I found him to be a very capable guy. He made the gym every morning for basketball practice and everything like that. I was down there working out myself some.

But he and I served on the Science and Technology committee?

JE: So did he invent the internet? I say that facetiously because supposedly he had said that some time.

WW: No. Let me share you the story about that.

JE: All right.

WW: People wondered why I got on Science and Technology committee. Now I got on the Bank and Finance committee because I realized that economic infrastructure that I was trying to put together for southeast Oklahoma, financing is the number one thing you got to have. Unless you're a public held company where you could issue stock, you got to put together some kind of financial package to help industry.

We didn't have that opportunity throughout the area of southeast Oklahoma. Had small banks that made cattle loans, pickup loans, but business industrial loans? I got on the Bank and Finance committee when I went to Congress, the first thing I did. You were allowed two committees when you went to Congress.

The second committee I was on, I got on Science and Tech. Most people said, "What in the world did you do that for?" Science and technology, very futuristic committee, but also I had gone to Southeastern and used their library, their database down there in a little group called TUSK, Technology Use Study Center, funded by NASA. NASA was under the jurisdiction of the Science and Tech committee.

See that big black book over there? That's the Overall Economic Development Plan, OEDP, for southeast Oklahoma. I used the database out of TUSK and putting that Overall Economic Development Plan together, which was required by the KEDDO, the economic district I put together.

One of the former presidents of University at Eastern last Wednesday night said that there's over 300 million dollars' worth of projects that he could point to in that book that we were able to put together. But I went there because I converted that TUSK, which was dissemination from NASA research. If you had some questions, you could send to them.

I converted that to an IAC, an IAC, Industrial Application Center. I put more money in it. I ended up taking that changing that to an ITRAD. An ITRAD was the Industrial Technology put together in that area.

To make a long story short on that, I converted it and called it Rural Enterprises, Inc., REI. REI is the most comprehensive rural economic development district in the United States. I'm proud of it, it's brought in over two billion dollars for business and industry in that area. I've tried to put together a culture of people that could help me develop the economic industrial base of that part.

Now Al Gore was there too. Make a long story short on that, I put together all this economic infrastructure, technology incubators, the new process fair, Senate CITD, the international trade, and we'll talk about that maybe after a while. But I pounded a table and I know I became obnoxious probably to some of them about technology transfer.

Remember what I mentioned about Henry G. Bennett out there in the hallway a while ago? Harry Truman, President Truman tapped him to head the Point Four Program, which is today the USAID, the only foreign aid type program that the United States has as being implemented to try to help those areas.

Now recognizing the technology transfer here at the Land Grant University here at OSU, the Land Grant University was set up by the Moral Act of 1890, requires and mandates instruction, research, and extension technology transfer.

In Agriculture we did a beautiful job throughout the United States. We have experimental stations doing research. We became the garden spot of the world after the 4H, FFA, taking research, and all that. But the point, we were mandated at the Land Grant Universities to do research and do extension.

The federal laboratories did not require that, the *federal* laboratories. Now I was sitting there on that committee, pounding a table about that, about technology transfer, in fact, became known kind of as Mr. Technology Transfer. Now Al Gore was there.

I thought I heard the bells ringing for me to come home and be governor. Not enough people heard the bells ringing so I didn't become governor. And I thought I was really out of politics.

Al Gore went over to the United States Senate. He tweaked some language over there about getting to use. And I found though when I was on Science and Tech there, they had no technology transfer in the federal laboratories. The Stevenson-Wydler Act, which was coming out of our committee, I tweaked that and got one half of 1 percent of

money to establish a technology transfer in the federal laboratories, so they'd have a person trying to get the nuggets out of that research that could be commercialized.

We were mandated to do the extension here on Land Grant Universities but not on the federal level. Got one half of 1 percent, that was about $175 million though to start setting up these.

Now here's where I'm coming to on that. Al Gore became a United States senator and he walked in DARPA. That's the military, or the Department of Defense, research. In the book *The Coming Jobs War*, by Jim Clifton, who was a chair and CEO of Gallup International, the great polling organization, he points out on page 75, Dr. Vernon Cerf, the head of DARPA, said Al Gore came in and after the discussion, he said, "Well, Dr. Cerf, is there anything there that can be commercialized?"

Dr. Cerf said, "I thought Al Gore was kind of crazy to ask me that question." Dr. Cerf said, "Well, yeah, there might be."

He said, "There's some fiber optic stuff that here in the military that [indecipherable] we utilize."

Well, Dr. Cerf took that, he said, "I wonder what would happen if Al Gore did not have ever asked that question? If we had missed the bus or missed the plane and didn't come and ask that question." He said, "He went to people like Bill Gates, Steve Palmer, individuals like that to commercialize it." He said, "Al Gore was the mentor of getting that done."

JE: We're talking about the technology for the internet.

WW: Internet, yes. That's exactly right.

JE: And he asked the question, "Can we commercialize that technology?"

WW: Yes, that was the question.

JE: So maybe, I don't know if Al actually said it or not, he didn't invent the internet.

WW: No, he was, I'd say, the guy who opened the minds about commercializing the technology that was there in the department, DARPA. Along that line, why is that important? That dotcom industry, over thirty years, he points out in the book *The Coming Jobs War*, by Jim Clifton, page 75, about this meeting of Al Gore and Dr. Cerf.

Dr. Cerf pointed out and Jim Clifton says, "Over the thirty years of dotcom, they estimate that it brought in $100 trillion to our economy."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: What would have happened if we hadn't had that $100 trillion in our economy?

JE: You know, I suppose Al Gore did ask that question but eventually it might have come to that.

WW: Eventually?

JE: But it could have been ten years, five years.

WW: That's right.

JE: We don't know and it got a jumpstart on it.

WW: Jumpstart is a good word to use and it's right there. We are in serious trouble in this country. Not just in my southeast Oklahoma where I was, but think about the state of Oklahoma and diversification, the coming jobs war, as Jim Clifton talks about, Oklahoma, what did we find? We had to cut out 16 percent in our higher education budget this year, cut deeper than that even in this last go-around. We've got to build and diversify our economic base. We've got to look at finding that other nugget. And there are others that we've got to go and find them and get them implemented.

Chapter 08 – 7:43
Technology Transfer

John Erling: All the house building you did, then you were in a position to bring technology jobs to your district and the houses were there.

Wes Watkins: I—

JE: You were able to bring those jobs because of those homes. Is that true?

WW: Well, in certain areas. I was able to say, "You come and we'll build houses for you." I even had the gall to do that for Weyerhaeuser—they bought out Dirks in 1970, and that was when I was in the economic development. And I said, "If you'll come to Idabel, Oklahoma, I'll help you get homes."

I didn't know that Weyerhaeuser had a bigger home building program than I had.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

WW: So I was up against some tough competition, but I did, I went down there and the first twelve homes I think I built were for Weyerhaeuser people. But the need of a home, see, the basic thing of a home, we didn't have.

JE: But you became Mr. Technology Transfer. What does that mean?

WW: That was where I wanted to get, not just research, the billions of dollars that we were shoveling, I wanted us to find the nuggets out of that research and find out what kind of businesses or industries could be started. And trying to get technology transfer up on the level of research. Research was the sexy thing that most people were for. I was trying to get the technology transfer out of that research to be applied. Because everything you see, at one time was an idea.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: Even you and me, if we believe in a Creator.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: We are an idea. That little plastic bottle, my watch, everything was an idea.

JE: Yep.

WW: I went back and put together a new product and processes fair. I'd go into schools and I'd talk to them about problems. You know, the old statement is, "If there's a problem, there's an opportunity." Well, if there's a technology problem, there's a technology opportunity. And the only way you can solve that technology problem is with a new product or a new process. Everything, shares, everything was one time just an idea, a new product.

But a new product and process means a new business. And a new business means jobs. That's how far I went back to trying to change a culture. I wanted these young people to not look at the problems they had and not, "Woe is on me, I've got a problem." I wanted them saying, "Hey, what's the answer to that problem?"

So I started this new product fair. Every year, I had with the career techs down that area. I'd fly in from Washington, DC, and I'd go wherever it was happening, down at Idabel, or Broken Bow, or Atoka, or wherever it might be that year. Just like you and I are talking here, I'd say to that young man or that young lady, "Tell me about your product, your creation." I would look in their eyes, just like I'm sitting here, and I would see a twinkle come in their eye. Them telling me about what they had created, that self-esteem that was coming out, they were proud of what they had created.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: And as a result, I—getting things repeated back to me for what I'd been talking to them about, they had taken a different attitude. A lot of them were more optimistic about doing something with their life and trying to get them to build opportunities.

We needed to do that at our statewide, and that's why I left the Congress and I ran for governor of Oklahoma. I would have implemented that.

JE: But you decided not to run for the US Senate when Henry Bellmon retired.

WW: That is correct.

JE: And Don Nickles became the senator; he was thirty years old. Why did you not run for that senate seat?

WW: Because I was on Appropriations and I was utilizing that to the benefit of the third district of Oklahoma.

JE: You brought a lot of money back to that district, didn't you?

WW: Well, yeah I did. Needs were here, a lot of needs, basic needs. For instance, this building right here is the center of international trade and development. Why did I do that? I put together everything I could, putting an economic infrastructure together, the financing, the technology, the incubators. I was the founder of the business and industrial incubators, placed a house industry that started that idea or a contract or

whatever. New product processes fair. I wanted them to look at the problems and come out with an idea.

They say only about 2 or 3 percent of the ideas will ever be commercialized but that would be more than what we had.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: I found changing that attitude probably was the greatest benefit of all. Now the CITD, I said, "What else can I do?" and I found that for every one billion dollars of exports you create fifteen to twenty thousand new jobs. That's economic development.

JE: Yep.

WW: Now I found also on a survey back in the '80s that we were only doing about three billion dollars of exporting. But also I found that 56 percent of our businesses or industries would like to do exporting. Why weren't they? I can tell you why. They didn't know how. They were intimidated by language, by currencies, by insurance, by transportation, all those things. So just like you and me, if it's something I don't know, I put it way over here, I'll get to that one of these days, maybe.

That's what I'm trying to do right here, right now is change our culture attitude. I gave the commencement address at OSU in 1987, it's called "International Trade: Opportunity or Destruction? Which Way America?"

In the late '70s when I went to Congress, in '77, we had a trade surplus. In 1980, when I was working on the Reagan budget, I found that we had a fifty billion dollar trade deficit, mainly with Japan, an ally, it wasn't too scary probably at that time.

Time I gave that commencement address in '87, thirty years ago, it was up to about 170 billion annually.

President Donald Trump, last night said we had an 800 billion dollar trade deficit.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: I asked Greenspan, head of feds back there in '80s, "What did that mean, this debt?"

He said, "Don't know." It's significant all right.

JE: Explain that term "trade deficit."

WW: We import more than we export, goods and services, so we have 800 billion dollar. In 2011, that was thirty years after I had approached President Bolger here at OSU about building this facility and we had over 500 billion.

JE: In trade deficit?

WW: Trade deficits. About half of it was the Middle East. We know the reason why, the oil we were importing. The other half was several areas but the biggest chunk of it, over 300 billion, was with China. Why is that important? Well, it would be like for me putting on your desk the Chinese and say, "Here's 300 billion dollars, it's yours."

Trade deficit. What are they doing with it? They're buying coal mines up in Australia and those coal mines have bought up coal mines in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kentucky. They bought one third of the Eagle Shell in South Texas, right where we're sitting in the Mississippi lime, Devon sold them over a billion. Sandridge, also Chesapeake. They've got over three billion dollars' worth of play in the Mississippi lime.

JE: They've sold them what?

WW: Rights to the Mississippi lime. Three billion dollars' worth of investment with them and their drilling here in the Mississippi lime.

JE: The Chinese?

WW: Yes, the Chinese.

JE: And why do the Chesapeake and Devon and why would they sell that to them?

WW: That helped them in their drilling, in their production, and all like that.

JE: Right. But then they let the Chinese in.

WW: Yeah.

Chapter 09 – 7:28
Reagan and Carter

John Erling: About presidents you served with—Ronald Reagan, talk to us about him. He was in touch with you. He wanted to get conservative Democrats on board, didn't he?

Wes Watkins: Oh yeah, a very charming guy. He didn't worry about the details like Jimmy Carter did.

People ask me who was the smartest president and I have to say, "Probably Jimmy Carter."

Now people look at you, "What?"

I said, "Yeah, Jimmy Carter. A nuclear engineer, he wanted to know details and absolutes." And in the political game there's a lot of variables, there's not as many absolutes. But Jimmy Carter knew that I'd only supported him 24 percent of the time when I went to the White House one time, and he pointed that out right there.

I said, "You know, that 24 percent more than you supported me, Mr. President."

JE: Let me just say, you butted heads with Carter over water projects?

WW: Oh yeah, yes. They vetoes one of my water projects right down in an area where I'd gone and campaigned for him. Lou and I brought Jimmy Carter to Ada, Oklahoma. We were charter Carter members. We had Billy Carter, his brother, he spent the night with us, and he was a character himself. But we had Carter there and one of the first things I did,

there were, I think, about eleven water projects that his people, or I should say probably McGovern's people, he put some of McGovern's people into the offices up there, they vetoed a water project I had.

And I looked forward to going up there with Jimmy Carter because there was a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia, a Baptist. I was raised as a little Baptist in Bennington, Oklahoma, on a peanut farm, and I looked forward to going. So I went in 1976 to Congress. Jimmy Carter went there to the White House but we butted heads on some stuff.

JE: And probably didn't get along then after that.

WW: No, we liked Jimmy Carter. You know, I liked him as a man and he's been a tremendous, I think, post-President.

JE: So he didn't have the charm of Ronald Reagan for the game of politics, but he had smarts, he was bright. Here comes Ronald Reagan, and he gets on the phone and he wanted conservative Democrats. Tell us about that relationship.

WW: He—well, President Ronald Reagan had to have a certain number of Democrats because in his time right there we had the majority. So there was a group of us we called the Boll Weevils, southern United States primarily, more conservative along the way. We were able to put together coalitions of votes. It let us have some leveraging about doing some things.

For instance, on the budget that year in '81, I was trying to help our small oil producers in Oklahoma. Stripper wells, those are wells that produce less than ten barrels a day, what I call my friend Charlie Wrangle from Harlem, "Charlie, these are Mom and Pop type. We're not Exxons or Texacos, all that."

I put together a coalition of trying to exempt stripper wells from the windfall profit tax. If you recall, that was something that—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: ...really was detrimental to the oil patch here in Oklahoma. In fact, about 90 percent plus of the oil wells in Oklahoma are stripper wells. It was just bankrupting some of the people.

JE: What is a stripper well?

WW: They're getting the last of the oil out of the wells. Producing less than ten barrels a day. I got them so the windfall profit tax that was on them was exempt.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: And that let them survive and stay in business. For instance, right around Pontotoc County, Ada, Oklahoma, and that area, there were about two thousand stripper wells and the royalty owners, you know, the farm people out that had land, they were getting little checks. So all this was very important to the livelihood of trying to keep things going in the oil patch.

So I put together about six or seven, they came later on to Ada and had a reception for me and stood up for because it was a hot potato.

President Reagan then came along with a bill but I had agreed to the chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Danny Rostenkowski out of Chicago, if they would stay stuck also with making sure it was in the bill, I'd stay stuck and support that particular bill.

Now what came a hot potato was President Reagan put some language in later and an independent petroleum association came out in support of President Reagan's. I had put together the language to get stripper wells and I kept three or four oil people notified to what I was doing and why I was doing it. So we got that put in there and it stuck, but I had all kind of pressure coming against me because they wanted me to do what Reagan said.

JE: You voted against him?

WW: I did.

JE: The constituent didn't like you very much for that. Did they hold that against you for a while?

WW: No they didn't, I explained it. In fact, Congressman Jim Jones whom I think is one of the great statesmen we had in Washington on the budget. You remember, he was budget chairman. And I figured I owed at least to study the budget a little bit more in depth. They was talking about, it was budget chairman for Ronald Reagan, he admitted later that he had cooked the books, so to speak. He says in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine they'd released a Trojan horse on the American people in that budget.

I had voted against it and I developed a form of simple formal trying to figure the budget. I passed that to civic groups everywhere I'd meet, Ardmore, every place else. One of the articles came out, "Get out of Washington, DC, if you can't support the President." Not one person came even close to the budget deficits they were so much greater.

I said, "Would you vote for a budget that would put that far?"

And they said, "No, we wouldn't." Even Jim Jones took that and used it, I think, in Tulsa.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: That form that I had given.

JE: This is the trickle-down economics that Reagan talked about.

WW: Yes. There's no way Harley, and this is something we've got to be very careful about right now, what's going on right today, when you have a buildup in the military and buildup throughout, you've got to make sure the economic growth takes place. And we've got to do that. That's why, again, it goes right back to coming jobs war. Look at the situation, the huge deficits, we cannot get out of our problem by just selling to ourself.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: We only have 4 percent of the people in the world in the boundaries of the United States. We cannot consume enough, that's why you see the low right now, it just came out, 1.9 percent growth in our GDP, less than 1 percent most of the last four years of Obama. That would not even let us get ahead of anywhere. This is why the book *The Coming Jobs*, I hope you'll get that. If I got a copy out there in the car I'll give it to you. We've got to build the economy, that is the only way out of it.

Now that was my problem in southeast Oklahoma. It's a problem for the state of Oklahoma, big time right now.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: It's a problem for our country. That's the only way we get out of this, get up 3, 4 percent in our GDP. So, yeah, I had trouble going along with that. And when David Stockman, who had helped put it together, two months after it had passed, I think, December of '81, *Atlantic Monthly*, he revealed that they'd released a Trojan horse on the American people.

I told David Stockman, he came to Congress the same time I did. Bright guy, Michigan. I said, "Thank God, you've confessed that you just cooked the books on that."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: Why I went through all that, I came through it in good shape.

Chapter 10 – 10:50
Switched Parties

John Erling: So you've been a Democrat all these years, but you did switch parties.

Wes Watkins: Yes.

JE: And you switched to the Republican party.

WW: Not immediately.

JE: Tell us what happened. You did become a Republican?

WW: Yeah.

JE: Why?

WW: I ran for governor of Oklahoma in 1990. I lost that race. David Walters had run against Henry Bellmon four years earlier.

JE: And he lost.

WW: He lost.

JE: His name was out there.

WW: That's right. But in that situation we put together and we had a good organization but we've gone every place for four years.

JE: When you ran for governor, were you running as a Republican or a Democrat?

WW: Democrat the first time, yeah, yeah.

JE: The first time as a Democrat.

WW: Yeah.

JE: All right.

WW: You remember David Walters was indicted from seven felonies for laundering money and one misdemeanor. The judge came down and dismissed the seven felonies but he was governor. So the party just kind of embraced him and we basically said, "Well, what's wrong with this picture?"

JE: Yeah, you were very disappointed in the lack of support by the Democrat party, the hierarchy.

WW: Well, yeah, this didn't seem to matter how you ran the race. So I ended becoming an Independent and—

JE: For the next campaign for governor?

WW: Yeah. I would have loved to become governor as an Independent. I would have loved to have reached across the aisle and brought Democrats and Republicans together. So under my belief of what we're talking about—economic growth and job development—I announced for governor as an Independent from the Port of Catoosa, on a barge, because I wanted to try to emphasize the need for international trade. It was, like say, for every one billion dollars you create fifteen to twenty thousand new jobs. One billion dollars of exports.

So I was out of politics. I was out here cleaning out my land. I'd bought forty acres of land. Our first grandchild was born. My wife said, "How can we kind of keep them together?" Just on the north edge of Stillwater here. When you go back to Tulsa you might want to go by. Go by that golf course right here north edge, about three miles out there. I bought the land on the north side of it, all up and down that golf course. And I gave each one of my children two and a half acres each to build on. They had begun to kind of look at building.

The successor to me in Congress was Bill Brewster.

JE: All right, let me bring you back to the governor's race as an Independent.

WW: Right.

JE: You won only 23 percent of the vote but you syphoned off enough votes from Lieutenant Governor Jack Mildren, the Democratic candidate, to allow Frank Keating to become the third Republican governor in Oklahoma history.

WW: I guess that's one way you can look at it, but I was doing one thing, and that was trying to become governor. And I—

JE: No, you didn't intend to do that, of course, but that was the end—

WW: I—I—I was so surprised that Jack Mildren didn't carry one single county in southeast Oklahoma, not one.

JE: Don't you think this issue to run as an Independent is pretty difficult, in any race?

WW: Well, I knew it was. But I was trying to do what I thought was best for Oklahoma, pull the parties together, an Oklahoma coalition so we could do what we needed to do, and that's build the state and diversify the economy. I had six congressmen, one sixth of the population, that's 16 percent, roughly, of the population in that economically depressed area.

But we were building over a third of the jobs in Oklahoma. One year, maybe two years, I got over 40 percent of the new jobs. We were doing something right.

JE: Yeah. But, you know, the state of Oklahoma, you didn't have name recognition, did you? As much as they knew you here, did you feel that the western part diamond knew you?

WW: Yeah. My problem was we had a couple of people, as you know, I hate to use names, that people wanted to try to get rid of in politics and they thought that that person, like Gene Stipe, owned me. In fact, Gene Stipe worked against me, he always was against me. Any time he could try to beat me.

So people out in western Oklahoma thought, because I was from down there, that Gene Stipe would own me. And it was the right opposite.

JE: We should say that Gene Stipe was a very influential state senator and there were a lot of stories about what he did. Some were fearing him. Prince of Darkness was attached to his name so that anybody who was near him got tabbed.

WW: Yeah.

JE: And so you got tabbed and that kind of happened to you. Is that right?

WW: Yeah, it syphoned a lot of it off, yeah. But I thought I was out of politics, you know, I lost the governor's race.

But Bill Brewster called me on December 17, 1995, saying he was not going to seek reelection. And that's when I decided. If I ran for Congress again, what would I do? 'Cause I had to get in one of the parties, Democrat or Republican, in order to be effective. I didn't have to go back to Congress to be a congressman, I'd already been one. But if I wanted to be an e*ffective* congressman to help my people and build economic jobs and development, I had to get in one of the political parties. So I had to make a decision.

Now 82 percent of the registered voters down there are Democrat. But I made the decision I was going to run Republican because that was my best shot at getting a best assignment to do the job that I wanted to be, and that's effective.

JE: But that was a big risk, wasn't it?

WW: It—

JE: To run as a Republican?

WW: Oh yes. We'd never elected one. There's one, I think maybe, at the beginning of statehood, a Republican, but we hadn't ever elected a Republican in that area of the state of Oklahoma.

JE: So the Republicans were promising you a seat on the Ways and Means committee?

WW: I negotiated for a seat. See, I would probably have gone back on Appropriations Ernest Istook had gotten on Appropriations. The way the seniority worked, I'd got all my seniority, fourteen years, I would have gone above him back on that committee and I'd have leapfrogged. I'd have caused a lot of gnashing of teeth and a lot of problems for the leadership. But I said I'd go to the Ways and Means committee, the tax writing committee and the trade committee. So if I could get an assignment on the Ways and Means committee and on that committee on tax and trade.

Now let me say this to you, because every last business in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is benefiting from my decision. And sixty-four counties in Oklahoma are benefiting for that decision.

When I was in that race, I was approached by a CPA firm out of Ardmore. I met them down at Hilton. Hilton's in Carter County, Carter County–Ardmore. They asked me about 168 J of the US tax code, if I was familiar with it. And I said, "Yes."

And that was an Indian tax incentive for reservations. Oklahoma, we do not have Indian reservations, but we have more Native Americans per capita than any state in the nation. California has more Native Americans but a lot larger, of course. We could not qualify for these tax incentives.

One of those tax incentives accelerated depreciation. If I build a manufacturing building or any basically business, instead of taking thirty-nine years to write it off, you can write it off in twenty. That affects the bottom line. If you happen to hire a Native American—you have a card that certifies you're a Native American—you could get up to four thousand dollars tax credit for every employ. You could get about a 40 percent tax incentive to federal taxes.

Now why did I say that? You did not have to be a Native American in Tulsa, Oklahoma, you just had to be in that territory. Now the problem was, how do you describe former Indian land?

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: That's the proposal I was taking to the committee. Former Indian land I—what I put together was the old Indian Territory. As you know, Indian Territory formed the state. The old Indian Territory took in sixty-four counties, not an Indian reservation, sixty-four counties have that tax incentive that we have gotten industry after industry because of the incentives that we got in this area.

In fact, Macy's, I think they used it when they were locating in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They're using them, so yeah, an Independent and a Republican, but my mission has always been the same.

JE: People had to scratch their head when you ran as a Republican. Come on now, and they'd say, "You're a Democrat, how can you go to the other side?" How did you explain that?

WW: 'Cause politics wasn't my motive of being in political office. My motive was the mission of trying to build the youth on the future.

JE: Yeah, but—

WW: Those children and those grandchildren, the same reason they were willing to vote a millage on themselves and not even know what the career tech was.

JE: I know, but many of your people weren't looking at that.

WW: Oh—

JE: They were looking at the party label.

WW: Let me assure you, it was a problem. My mama, my dear mother, had a hard time that Roosevelt Democrats. My brother who is a liberal Democrat, he didn't. I had people say to me, "You're the first Republican I've ever voted for in my life."

Yeah, some never got over it. I had some good friends I lost. But most of them stayed with me.

JE: Who were you running against?

WW: I was running against Darrell Roberts, the majority leader of the state Senate. He was from Ardmore. And a marine, handsome guy.

In fact, I was telling you about the CPA firm that met me over at Hilton, the small town there. They said was I familiar with the tax freeze? And I said, "Yes." But one other thing I added, I said, "Hey, I've got to beat your state senator. I'll be on the committee, the Ways and Means tax writing committee, if I'm elected. But I've got to beat your state senator first."

JE: Darrell Roberts?

WW: That's right.

JE: Carl Albert endorsed Darrell Roberts in 1996.

WW: Against me as a Republican, yeah.

JE: So there you have Carl against you again.

WW: Right.

JE: You had all that, the odds were against you again as they have been other times before in your life. Carl Albert is endorsing the Democrat. You'd been a Democrat and now you're running as a Republican, so how did that all turn out?

WW: Well, I had like a 97 percent name recognition. And I had about a 80-some odd percent, nearly 90 percent favorability. And the election, I put the R by my name, the Republican. I won with 51.8 percent of the votes.

JE: Isn't that amazing?

WW: That's the anchor [laughing] that I—but I made it!

JE: Wow.

WW: And when I got the last election in 2000, I'm humbled by the fact that I got nearly 88 percent of the vote the last election. I thought maybe I'd better just walk away while I was on top.

JE: Yes, ev—you were elected by 51 percent and then ran again and you win about 87, 88 percent of the vote.

WW: Yeah.

Chapter 11 - 4:25
Last Campaign

John Erling: This ever get to your head? This is pretty heavy stuff, what you have done.

Wes Watkins: Yeah.

JE: And winning against odds, you'd have reason to get proud of all that.

WW: Well, humbly, let me say, I had a purpose. And I felt like that wasn't just my purpose, it was the purpose of trying to help the people who were hungry for jobs. They were wanting someone to try to help give them a better way of life. I never lost sight of that. I've tried to be a public servant, truly, and trying to build jobs.

I missed getting to be governor. I could have changed Oklahoma.

JE: Let me say that after you went back to Congress as a Republican, you became at odds with the House leadership. You wanted to bring $25 million for highway to your district and they thought you weren't coming back and they tried to give that to another congressman in a tough election and spread the money around. But you must have done something because they gave the money back to you. What was your leverage? What was your argument?

WW: Well, I'd gotten out because I had surgery, the base of my brain and the top of my spinal cord.

JE: You had left?

WW: I had left in '98.

JE: So they didn't think you were coming back from that brain surgery?

WW: Well, I even announced that I was not going to seek reelection. The campaign was going. I was under surgery—the base of my brain, the top of my spinal cord, I didn't know what was really going to happen in my life. As a result, I announced that I was not going to seek reelection, I wanted to be with my family, etc. I got out of the race, I said I wasn't going to run.

And I saw the opponent, Walt Roberts, was raising all this money.

JE: This is the 2000 election?

WW: Yeah.

JE: And he's raising all that money.

WW: But I knew he wasn't raising it. I knew that Gene Stipe was. I didn't find Walt's tracks but Gene's. That's when that became the downfall of Gene Stipe.

JE: The money he raised for Roberts?

WW: That's right. 'Cause if you remember, there was ghost cattle, Roberts did have cattle to sell. Ghost trailers, and then there was a mammoth art sale, but Walt Roberts hadn't even made that art, he was kind of an artist, in a way. There was over $250 thousand that went into the campaign.

JE: So they tried to show that the money came from those entities, which you've just said.

WW: Sure.

JE: In actuality, the money came from where? They were over—

WW: It was not reported.

JE: They were over giving their limits.

WW: Yeah, that's right, you've got it. I was seeing that happen, and after about six or seven weeks, I announced that I was going to reenter the race. I felt like I couldn't let him just totally own that seat.

JE: Gene Stipe—

WW: Yeah.

JE: ...would have owned that seat.

WW: Yeah, and Walt Roberts would have been his boy.

JE: His puppet, right.

WW: Yeah, exactly. So I reentered that race and was successful.

JE: Then, obviously, you had to go out and race a lot of money.

WW: I did. Yeah, I did, I had to.

JE: And you went back and, of course, then I suppose, the name Gene Stipe was beginning to be attached to Mr. Roberts and they were fearful of him.

WW: Yeah.

JE: They knew you had that kind of going for you.

WW: Yeah, they knew people. We had a lot of different things that took place in that race. It was an unbelievable race. You know, he said he had a bull and ninety head of cattle, but he didn't have.

But people don't understand. I said, "If that one bull was taking care of all those cows, he had to be on Viagra."

JE: [laughs]

WW: That's just went awfully weird. All the cattlemen people that farm. Ranchers were probably my greatest supporters.

JE: They tuned in to that when you said that.

WW: Oh, they tuned into that big time.

JE: Right.

WW: You know, we say, "Honk if you've seen any of Walt's cattle." [both laughing] So we had a fun time out of it. But maybe we'll get to that.

JE: And that was your last election?

WW: That was my last election.

JE: That you won. I don't know, it doesn't look like it but you have some battle scars, don't you?

WW: Oh yeah, a lot of them would be over the governor's race, the money situation, and the congressional race. I always promised my wife we would not go into debt. I'd go into communities at a diner or a café, we'd pass the bread basket, and I'd say to the people, "If you believe like I do, I ask you to open your heart and open your pocketbook and give." That's how we raised all that.

JE: So you would go into a restaurant—

WW: Yeah, we'd have town meetings, you know, we'd invite people to come there.

JE: Oh, to come there, of course.

WW: Yeah.

JE: So you retired after that?

WW: I did.

Chapter 12 – 8:11
9/11 and Tick Research

John Erling: Tell us about 9/11, the day that America was attacked and the twin towers. Nine/eleven, where were you?

Wes Watkins: I was sitting in a dentist's chair in downtown Washington, DC, I had a dental appointment. I was sitting back watching the television up there and the first one announced. And then, all of a sudden, you saw that other plane, and you knew that wasn't an accident. That had to be a terrorist or some group putting together that kind of attack.

I immediately kind of dismissed myself and told the dentist I needed to get back to Capitol Hill. I left there and I had to go around the White House, when it was emptying—people were leaving the White House—

JE: Yeah.

WW: Because the other plane came in and hit the Pentagon. People's face, I mean, they were startled. I hope I never see that kind of scared, startled look. We came around the White House as they were trying to empty it. I had an apartment right behind the House on D Street.

My wife happened to be there at that time. We continued to live in Ada and I'd commute back and forth every weekend just about. But she was up that week. We had Democrats and Republicans coming to our apartment. They were getting out of the Capitol Building and we were there. Steny Hoyer was one of them who's still there as a Democrat leader.

It was a very chilling, very sobering type experience, to say the least.

JE: Many of them gathered in your apartment obviously watching television.

WW: Yeah.

JE: What was said or done in that?

WW: Not much said, I mean, it was just you're lost for words. Or are they going to be attacking the US Capitol Building? Evidently, Flight 93 went down in Pennsylvania that was headed to come hit the Capitol or the White House, one of the two, they were trying to get in there.

We spent an hour or so there and finally we went back over to the Capitol Building.

JE: Did you sing together?

WW: We went out on the steps of the US Capitol Building and we sang "God Bless America."

JE: And this was a whole group of you?

WW: Yeah, there was a group of us.

JE: Saying, "God bless America"?

WW: Yeah. We had unity then, brother.

JE: Yeah.

WW: [laughing] Today we may not have much unity and it worries me because will the glue be there for us to get back together?

JE: Your congressional office was evacuated.

WW: Yes.

JE: Then they find anthrax in your office?

WW: Yes they did, they found that out in the mail. Actually, it was right below me, in the building there they had received the mail.

JE: So that just happened to be at the same time?

WW: Yeah.

JE: It had nothing to do with the attack.

WW: No, right.

JE: It just happened to be that they had that.

WW: I didn't even have a car in Washington, DC. I'd arrive back in Washington at noon on Mondays and I would normally leave on Friday some time, and fly back and work the district on weekends. It was a seven-day a week job and I was trying to make it all work out. But I got the closest place I could in the Longworth Building. They Ways and Means committee was right below, I was up on the fourth floor. I could go on down to the garage, walk out of the garage, walk across the street, and there was my apartment. That's where I would usually about ten thirty, eleven o'clock at night or so, sometimes later than that, be working in my office. I had soup and cereal most of the time. But, you know, I worked there. I had a purpose in being there. I wanted to try to do everything I could to accomplish it.

JE: You did some show and tell, I'm seeing, because in the late '70s or early '80s, I think, you wanted some research money for ticks.

WW: Yeah.

JE: To get rid of the ticks in lakes in southeast Oklahoma. So to impress on the conference committee, what did you do?

WW: Well, I was on the Appropriations committee and on the Appropriations committee I was on Energy and Water and on Agriculture, two different subcommittees. But I had jurisdiction over all water development, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, USDA Watershed program, all water development, basically came through those committees. I had a very keen interest, and still do, on the water and maximizing the use of the water for the economic growth of southeast Oklahoma.

Well, on water development, like the Corps of Engineers, you had flood control, recreation, municipal and industrial use, those purpose are why those lakes were built. Some of them were more recreation than others. Well, we had lakes like Broken Bow Reservoir and McGee Creek and others down there. We had a lot of people that were disturbed because people would come over and picnic or camp out and they'd have ticks on them.

But, hey, recreation was one of the functions of that lake. So I thought some research money on getting rid of the ticks would help for more recreation and more tourism and things like that, for that area. In fact, McGee Creek, I went down the hunts. Hugo Shelfcoff out of Dallas was developing resorts on lakes. And I'd gone to see him.

He had said to me, "What are you going to do about those ticks up there?"

Well, I put the money in for tick research. I got it passed through the House. Going to the Senate, the chairman of the Senate had said that he was against that phase.

So my chairman over the House, said, "Wes, you got problems about your monies," which was about a quarter of a million, maybe a half million, something like that.

So I thought, *What do I do?* I called my staff member in Ada, Linda Whitworth, I said, "Linda, go over to the Kerr lab in Poteau." They had some tech research going on. And I said, "Get fruit jars and get some of those vials of ticks, those research vials."

So he got about seven or eight of those vials and put them in a Kerr jar, wrapped the top of it with pantyhose so that they could have breathing room, and meet me at the airport and make sure I bring those back to Washington, DC.

Senator Mark Hatfield, a wonderful guy—

JE: From Oregon.

WW: From Oregon, yeah, was chairing the Senate. And he's the one who's going to knock out my money. Good guy—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: You know, wonderful guy.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: And I just couldn't believe but I thought, *He doesn't understand.* So I went back to Washington, DC, over that weekend. I took that jar of ticks. I'm glad we didn't have a plane wreck or people would have been wondering, "What in the name of peace are you doing?"

So I was getting kidded when I was going into the conference in the US Capitol Building, with symbol there for the conference. They were kidding me about did I bring my lunch because I had a brown paper bag and walked in and set it down.

I said, "No."

They started in, "Work your disagreements, item 251, item 252, you know, House recedes to the Senate's position. Senate recedes to the House position. The Senate has an objection." It come to the number, whatever it was, "Tick research."

Chairman Hatfield said, "I think we can do away with this phase of it."

I said, "Just a second, Mr. Chairman, may I visit with the committee about this?" In discussion, I reached down and got the jar of ticks. And I set it up on there. I had them out of the vial, there were just in this jar, just everywhere. In fact, right now I just see those ticks just crawling all over everywhere.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: Sent them around, got to Chairman Hatfield, he looked at that, and he said, "My goodness, give him his money, give him his money."

So I got my 250 to 500 thousand dollars for tick research that I was needing to be able to do more tick research for down there.

I went back to my office and my phone rang. The secretary said, "It's the *New York Times* calling for you."

I said, "Really? What in the world?"

So I got on the phone. They said, "Are you the congressman that brought the ticks to the committee?"

JE: [laughing]

WW: I said, "Yes sir, I am." It's amazing, that's the only time that I ever was called by the *New York Times* but it was about tick research.

JE: Well, it works.

WW: Yes it did.

JE: And I don't know what came out of the research for that, if you followed that or not.

WW: They did some good, I don't know how much they've been able to continue because a lot of budget cuts.

Chapter 13 – 9:18
What Are You Most Proud of?

John Erling: You had an amazing career in politics. That gentleman who asked you, "Are you going to get into politics?" he kind of jumpstarted you into this, got you into it. As you look back on your work, what are you most proud of?

Wes Watkins: Well, I've tried to do it right. I think I did. My motive is right. I think I followed through on that, just like I said last Wednesday night when I was at a book signing in Durant, Oklahoma, from a president of East Oklahoma College who is familiar with OEDP said he calculated over 300 million dollars' worth of those projects that we'd listed back there a long time ago were accomplished. I'm proud of the fact that I served on the Appropriations and I was able to do a lot of things that helped me change the unemployment figures, which still are hurting from an economic standpoint. It's a never-ending job. It's a never-ending job. We're trying to build the job, build the economy.

Like I said, the tax provisions are still alive, still going. It's probably leaving over 200 million dollars a year in Oklahoma for economic growth and development. Why I say that, if a guy's not having to spend all his money on taxes he can go ahead and put more pipe in the ground. You don't have to be a Native American industry.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: It's any industry or business that's in that bill. I look at that, I look up there and see most of that economic infrastructure I put into place.

JE: Yeah.

WW: And incubators, I'm proud of. One of the things I'm proud of is out there. You might just overlook it, the Sierra Club Award. I was working on Ag appropriations and one of

the land owners down in southeast, a lumberman kind of guy, said, "Wes, they're clear-cutting a lot of timber, the US Forest Service."

You ever been on Talimena Drive?

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: God given beauty, tourism, it's all there. I think I have a story in the book, but I was called and he asked me, "Can you come down and see?"

I said, "Yeah, I'll come."

Probably weekend or next weekend after that when I go home, I went down and looked out across the Talimena Drive. And it's just scarred. You can see the scars.

JE: Because of the trees?

WW: Clear-cutting, they call it. Well, I'm not against that in locations. But tourism and recreation is a big factor on economic growth and development. Select cutting, yes.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: Select what you want to cut, the bigger trees, select those, leave the others. So I had to get nine groups, agencies, and things like that together. I went back to Washington and I got Paul Jackson, a young man I was telling you about, wanted to be the Paul Harvey of Ag. Paul and I, we worked with these nine, trying to establish a boundary of a national wildlife and wilderness area down off of 259, which is south of Heavener. Down at Talimena there is now a winding stair mountain national recreation and wilderness area.

I was working on that, like, at midnight one night, and Paul made the statement, he said, "Wes, they're all mad at you, all these nine different agencies, Ag groups, other groups and all that, down there the timber people."

And I said, "What did you say, Paul?"

He said, "They're all mad at you, they want more."

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

WW: I said, "Paul, package this up and take it to the committee to be printed. We're going to go with this, winding stair mountain national recreation and wilderness area."

They all were wanting a little bit more. I thought, *Hey, if they all feel that way then I've probably got a pretty good balance here, a pretty good research.*

JE: Yeah.

WW: Well, I put that together when senators and others didn't even want to touch it. In fact, they didn't until after the fact. But we've set aside the largest amount of land for wilderness and recreation wildlife area.

In that shadowbox out there in the hall I got that Sierra Club Award. And I kind of grin because here I am, the job buildingest congressman that ever came down the pike.

JE: Does it still bother you that you didn't become governor?

WW: It does in some ways.

JE: You've done all these things, all these accomplishments, and yet it still gnaws at you a little bit.

WW: I knew my motive was right in running. I know I could have made a difference.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

WW: I know I could have built a better way of life for our children and our grandchildren.

JE: Yeah.

WW: Here. And I'm still trying.

JE: Yeah.

WW: I want us to lead in international trade and development. I am working right now with changing the School of International Studies to have global studies and partnerships. We can build tremendous jobs, we can provide a way to provide an education for these people, these businessmen, all these students, they can become knowledgeable of their work place. And that's the world.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: That's the global. I want us to get that in place so that our children can compete with any group in the world.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

WW: I'd like for people to know that I'm a believer in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. And this name on the building—

JE: This name on the building says "Wes Watkins Center."

WW: Yes.

JE: What about it?

WW: Well, I hope people look at it and say, "There's a good man."

JE: Yeah. Well, this has been fun to review your life like this. It has been very, very remarkable what you've done and accomplished. You and your family can be proud. I'm glad the university has honored you with this center here on campus. This is wonderful, so thanks for contributing your story to Voices of Oklahoma. We appreciate it.

WW: Thank you, thank you so much. I appreciate you. I used to listen to you at all time. When you'd click on, I'd say, "Let's listen and see what he's got to say."

JE: [laughing]

WW: Yeah, and I mean that, I respect you very much and appreciate your making things better. It's kind of a takeoff on the title of the book but making things better in Oklahoma.

JE: Yeah.

WW: For citizens.

JE: Very good.

WW: Now we each have our niche. Yeah, I wish I could have made the governor's deal. I really, really believe as an Independent I can change that. But who would have thought that today

we do not have one Democrat in statewide elective office, all Republicans? And, when I was in the state Senate, there was only, I think, twelve Republicans in the state Senate.

JE: Yeah.

WW: And now there's only six Democrats in the state Senate.

JE: As you sit here today, you ran as a Democrat, Republican, Independent. But you're thinking as a Democrat today. Is that true, or not?

WW: Oh, I'm still a Republican. [laughing]

JE: Okay. [both laughing]

WW: But they can't believe it. Let me say, look at this picture, there's seven billion people in the world. We only have 4 percent of them that live in the boundaries of the United States, only 4 percent. That means there's 96 percent out there that we need to export to. But those seven billion people, half of them are living in poverty. One billion of those living in poverty are going to bed hungry tonight. Let me tell you how many people that is: three times the population of the United States of America are going to bed hungry tonight.

JE: Yeah.

WW: Most of them don't have a bed. That's why up there on the board, that I hadn't mentioned, international trade and development, Lou and I, my wife and I have endowed a chair. I didn't think I'd ever endow a chair. I've been in public service. But when Boone Pickens put a 100 million dollars in to match up money for endowed chairs, I thought, *Well, how can I place an emphasis on international trade and development?* We pieced together the 500 thousand dollars to match a chair.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

WW: So we have an endowed chair. And as I mentioned that vermiculture out there and selling the assets. But also Matthew 25:40 scholarships. We put together the assets from our vermiculture and we were able to endow four Matthew 25:40 scholarships—we call them Matthew 25:40 scholars. That Scripture, Matthew 25:40, reads, "In as much as you do unto the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do unto me." So now we have twelve Matthew 25:40 scholars going out, not just for travel abroad or study abroad, but service abroad where they'll spend a month, six weeks or so, in the poverty areas and the hunger areas around the world.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

WW: They don't need an old man like me that if I fall down there in the middle of the field I can't get up, but bright young people. It's unbelievable what's happening in their lives, as well as helping the lives of others. So we're working with those twelve. We've got about seventeen endowed scholarships but those twelve are focused on Matthew 25:40. That's what I'm still all about doing.

JE: That's wonderful.

WW: You know, it's a labor of love for the Lord and for what I can accomplish.

JE: Well, thank you very much, Wes, I appreciate it.

WW: My pleasure.

Chapter 14 – 0:33
Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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