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THE MICROWAVE SOCIETY AND CROCK-POT GOVERNMENT

*Governor Bill Graves
State of Kansas*

I am pleased to welcome this very diverse group to Kansas. We thank you for coming, and are glad to be able to acknowledge the role that Barry Flinchbaugh's played over many years in agriculture and rural Kansas economic development.

Kansas has the enviable position of not only being geographically the center of the United States, but right now, in a public policy sense, the agricultural center of the United States. We probably have more clout than many of you think we deserve. But we're going to take it and keep it for as long as we can. But any time you discuss the creation of the farm bill back in Washington, you have names like Bob Dole, Pat Roberts, Dan Glickman and Barry Flinchbaugh come up. We have all of the big names working for us, and I hope that speaks well of this country, and I hope in the end, reflects positively on how the farm bill is reworked.

This gives me the chance to say to all of you how important we believe the work you do, in the land grant universities of this country, is to the back-bone of this nation, and agricultural policy. The graduates you produce lead this country. Thus, we are pleased that you decided this year to come to Kansas to have this conference.

Barry asked me to speak about citizen involvement and public policy development. I made a note when he said that I got over 60 percent of the vote; I'm glad that he didn't ask me to talk about political involvement, because six out of 10 voted right in the last gubernatorial election, so they obviously have their politics straightened out. But I'm going to start with citizen involvement.

It made me think of the oration that I wrote for the Optimist's Club rhetorical contest as a sophomore in high school in 1968. Without boring you with the entire speech, it began something like this: The American education system reflects the values of our nation. One of the most important values taught in our schools is that of citizenship. Since the beginning of my own education, I've been made aware of the importance of good citizenship; that is the survival of democracy in America. I have learned that a democracy depends upon its people, and its people must take an active role in this nation's affairs in order to ensure that our heritage of democracy might be passed on. This participation by the people is called good citizenship. I got second place for that speech.

I was thinking back about that, and the fact that there are some people who no longer think that the education system reflects the values of our nation. I hope that it does, and I hope we continue to invest in the American education system, because I believe that it is a critical link to developing citizenship skills and values in young people, who are so very important today.

As Governor, I have discovered the best place to learn about citizen involvement and to get advice and input, is someplace many of you are familiar with, and that's at the State Fair, which I attended about 10 days ago. A gentleman walked up to me and said, "Governor, you are doing a great job, so far." Then I went by the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association Birthing Center. I don't know how many of you have birthing centers at your state fairs, but this is a big deal in Kansas. We actually have bleachers, and people come in and sit around for hours and wait for a cow, or hog, or something, to give birth at the birthing center. I walked in with the executive director of the Fair Association to take a tour of the new center, and there was a young veterinary student from KSU, a young woman who was taking care of twin calves that had been born the day before. We stood there and asked a lot of stupid questions, and I would have assumed she knew we were probably politicians, but instead she turned to us and asked, "Are you all a group of veterinarians?" The director of the fair was quite embarrassed that this young woman didn't recognize me, and he said "No, this is Governor Graves." This young woman looked at me and it was clear, she didn't know who I was, and she didn't care who I was.

I mention that to you because, as I thought about that, in a funny sort of back-handed way, that was the ultimate compliment to somebody in public service. What if some of us could go through our terms in office and perform the duties that we are required to perform without becoming household names? It seems to me, that, in this country, one of the reasons there is cynicism and distrust among the electorate, is because most of what they know about us comes from hearing all the bad things about public officials. We all know more about Bob Packwood than any of us want to know, and, this is not just in Republican politics. We all know more about Dan Rostenkowski's problems than we want to know, and we all have our own favorite list of those people who have gotten themselves in trouble. So I guess my goal is to go back to the fair next year and hope somebody doesn't recognize me; probably says that I've been doing all right.

I've been governing Kansas for nine months, and I think that I have a fairly interesting and unique perspective on being a new Governor. Most of what we do and where we work seems to be internal. It's kind of the inside "baseball stuff." You put together a cabinet and staff. You go to work on some of the issues of the day. You make critical appointments, and again it's

basically internal. You work with the legislature; that's kind of inside "baseball stuff."

The point where we come in contact with the general public is always on those policy matters that are of greatest concern to them. That's what keeps you up late at night more than anything else in this business. In fact, a friend was counseling me and advised that, "Governor, you need to understand that you just can't be all things to all people," which may sound like good advice. Although in spinning that around, I would say to you in your respective states, and depending on who your respective leaders are at a particular moment in time, or on a particular issue, that your leader can't be all things to all people. How many of you want to volunteer to be in the group that doesn't get served because I'm having a bad day? Who wants to get left out in the cold in terms of the responsiveness of voting the way you want us to vote or on addressing the issue you want us to address? Who wants to volunteer to be part of that group? The answer to that is, nobody wants to be part of that group. That's the problem with public service today. We are expected to be all things to all people, regardless of what the difficulty of the issues are that we face. And we have some issues that are no different from the issues that are taking place in your state.

We are having a great debate right now about closing a mental health or mental retardation hospital in our state, because we believe that, if we spend more dollars in community services, we can do a better job of taking care of people. We think that the old bricks and mortar approach has out-lived its usefulness. We are trying to find a balance between closing down a state institution and rechanneling our effort and our energy into communities. That seems to make sense. But there are always those conflicting interests of the patient, the family and the people that work in those institutions, who don't want to see that happen. The communities that are going to lose the economic impact of those institutions don't want to see that happen, and, yes, collectively, the state probably knows it's in our best interest to move in that direction. Someone is going to go away not feeling very good about that problem.

We're having a big debate about gambling in Kansas. We seem to think everybody's leaving Kansas and going to other states to gamble. I don't know if that's true or not, but I've been saying to folks, "Why don't we resolve this issue once and for all, and have a statewide constitutional vote to see whether or not we should have gaming in the state?" It seems to make sense. But not to some people, because they feel the gaming interests have a tremendous amount of money, and will come in and influence all of these folks, who don't know any better, to go out and support having expanded gambling in Kansas. So, some don't even think we should have a statewide

vote on the issue. They think we should just do our jobs as public officials and just say "No" to influence on gaming in Kansas. I happen to be one who thinks citizen involvement in that regard is very important.

How about speed limits? That's going to impact everyone in this room. Just how fast is too fast? How fast do people need to go to be satisfied in terms of speed limits in this country? I have a horrible problem. Everywhere I go I am driven by members of the Kansas Highway Patrol. These guys drive the speed limit all the time! I think I'm in the one car on the road that everyone else is going past. There is a genuine public policy debate in this issue, and it has to do with public safety. We try to find the balance between making sure we don't have accidents, take lives and have the type of property damage associated with automobiles, by keeping speeds at a reasonable level. At the same time, it is not government's desire, and not my desire, to restrain people from moving quickly and efficiently around our state to conduct business or for whatever purpose. But again, it's one of those issues where I can line two people up in this room and have them on opposite sides of the issue.

We're debating how to keep all the bad guys in jail. Every state is probably struggling with prison construction. Every time I talk about this issue, I think of the Kevin Costner movie, "Field of Dreams," where they said, "If you build it, they will come." We have, in our public debate, and in our legislature, made a decision that we want to put bad people away, and as a result we need to spend dollars to build more prison space. But, at the same time, we have a lot of people saying that we should be more focused on community corrections; that we should be investing our dollars in programs that will keep individuals from repeating crimes and from coming back to our corrections facilities. I don't know that we can do both, because the Kansas taxpayer, and I would bet taxpayers in most of your states, are very, very, unwilling at this moment to absorb any more financial obligation on behalf of the state.

The list goes on and on, and I could discuss a number of others. But let me tell you where I see this whole thing going. I'd like to describe the dilemma that we're faced with in public service, as the microwave society trying to live with a crock-pot government. Stop and think for a minute. Everyone of us gets up in the morning and we fire up the oatmeal in the microwave. On the way to work we run by the same-day dry cleaner, and just before lunch we run in and pick up the photos we left yesterday. And then we drive through McDonald's, and, when the voice comes on the speaker, we order lunch and someone hands it to us in a plastic bag. Everything we do, and with every day of our lives, we become very, very impatient. I think what we're seeing, at this moment in history, is people who are impatient with the government that really hasn't changed much over many, many years; thus, the microwave society and the crock-pot government. But I would submit to you, and I would imagine most of you would

agree, we're probably fortunate that we have the system of government that we do, the slow deliberative process that we go through.

I want to suggest three things to you and you'll think I'm preaching to the choir. First of all, in this microwave society, it is as critical now as it always has been, that we continue to focus on education, and to make sure that people know as much as they can about this system of government so they can understand and appreciate it. Joyce Carrey, an English author, once wrote that it's the tragedy of the world that no one knows what they don't know, and the less the person knows, the more certain they are that they know everything. For those of you who didn't get that, it's the tragedy of the world that no one knows what they don't know, and the less the person knows the more certain they are they know everything. I would submit to you that we have a lot of people like that, whether it's their fault or not. It might be simply the circumstances of growing up in a situation where they didn't have educational opportunity. We have a lot of people who are uneducated about the political system and the system of democracy that exists in this country. As a result, we find a lot of people making a lot of outrageous, uneducated, ridiculous statements, and yet, most of those people firmly believe in a lot of those things that they are saying.

I think for us to get everybody singing out of the same book and on the same page, we need to continue to encourage, no matter how long you've been doing it, and beating this drum, education. It is so critical to this country and the future of our nation. Lack of education will undermine the democracy that has served this nation so well for so many years. I think that we need to say to people that they need to appreciate the system of democracy that we have. In Kansas, and every other state, except for the unicameral government in Nebraska, every single citizen gets represented in the House of Representatives on a public policy debate. Then they have the opportunity to be represented in our State Senate on a public policy debate. Then a governor gets the opportunity to represent collectively all the people in our state before signing, or vetoing, or making any decision on legislation. Three times, people have someone, who is charged with looking out for their best interest, involved in the process. It's slow and cumbersome, and does sometimes create confusion, yes; but I think it contains the kinds of checks and balances that are so critical to good public policy.

In the 15 years that I've been involved in state government in Kansas, anything that usually has been rushed through at the last minute, or has been done in a hurry, has ended up being wrong. And we probably regretted doing it. Not always the case, but in most instances.

We have tremendous diversity in Kansas. If you travel from the northeast to the southwest, you would think you were in two different worlds, in terms of geography, in terms of the population, and in terms of the difference between

the agricultural community and small manufacturing. Right now you're in Johnson county, which is probably the fastest growing, and soon to be the largest county in our state. We have a county in western Kansas where we could take all the people who reside in the county and put them on a bus, or buses, and bring them into this hotel, and they could all check in for the night. Now when you talk about diversity, this is not a large county by many of your standards. We have about 400,000 people residing here. I think there are around 1,200 residing in Wallace county. We have to make or create public policies that service both the 400,000 who are here in this county, and also that small number in western Kansas, and again that makes it difficult to be all things to all people.

So, I would first of all reiterate that education in terms of citizen involvement is so very very critical, because without sound education, they're likely to be involved in a counter-productive sort of way. Secondly, I think, by being educated, it will create a citizenry with a greater appreciation for the wonders of the process that we have in this state and this country. And I think that, finally, that appreciation will reinforce the realization and the understanding that government can't be all things to all people. Hopefully, folks will be more inclined to be patient with us and understand that we are all working for the best common interest, but sometimes, individually, you'll feel like you've been left out in the cold.

Again, I thank Barry for inviting me to come over and get a chance to extend my thanks to you all for traveling to Kansas. We're glad that our weather is cooperating to a certain extent. We're all proud this morning because for the first time in the history of our state, both our football teams are ranked in national polls. For a number of years, the word "rank" had nothing to do with quality relative to the football programs in Kansas. But we all woke up today on a high note. It's great to have you all in our state, and I hope you have a productive conference. Enjoy yourself while you're here, and travel safely on your trip home.