

KIRK WATSON FOR MAYOR
Interview Aug. 15, 1996

Interview conducted by Ken Martin, editor of the *In Fact* newsletter.

IF: So you want to be mayor of Austin, but you're not running in a vacuum. Ronney Reynolds is out there, lurking. Right now he's being cute. He told me last night he would not make an announcement about his political future until after the budget is adopted. I said, hey, you have been out talking to people for support, are you changing direction now? All I could get out of him was, I'll be making an announcement in September. So what do you think, I understand you two have met and talked, is he running for mayor?

KW: That would be my, just based on the evidence I've seen, is he's going to run for mayor. But that's from me talking to people. I talked to Ronney some time ago and he indicated he'd be running for mayor. In fact, that's the reason he indicated he wanted to meet with me, to get my input on where I thought Austin ought to be going. That was the stated purpose of the meeting. But that was a few months ago. It may be, and I've talked to a couple of people who've said he has talked to them. So I don't know what to read into that.

IF: I don't know. He's just being cute right now. I mean I've published numerous times in the newsletter that he's gonna run for mayor and he's never called me up and said, hey, you know, he's never jerked me up short and said, you know that that's wrong. So I just take it at face value that he's running for mayor. But now he's being really cute, you know, and I look at him and he'll just stall and give me a big grin and not say anything. The way he quoted it is, "I'll announce my political future in September."

KW: And I noticed it the first time you printed it that way.

IF: He said the same thing again last night.

KW: That obviously jumped out at me. And then I noticed when the Statesman kind of ran their little blurb on me, there was a way they used the language about what is likely. I noticed, and maybe I'm reading too much into that, but based on the way you had phrased it, I thought maybe they had talked to him. He didn't talk to Amy (Smith). Amy tried to talk to him on that article for the Chronicle, and I think she told me that he said,

“Oh, I’ve got other things that I’m thinking about besides this other stuff, and Kirk hadn’t said what he’s gonna do, and I hadn’t said what I’m gonna do, so it’s premature.” Maybe, I think what he’s, I think there’s a lot of people interested in my candidacy, and were encouraging me to look at this, because they’re interested in new, they’re interested in fresh, and focusing on the future of this city. And maybe he’s hearing some of that too. That’s not really something I want to be quoted on because I don’t know. But it’s really not fair for me to speculate about what his plans are.

IF: I just figured you had talked to some people who had talked to him.

KW: Yeah, I talked to some people who had talked to him, and I....

IF: And you hadn’t gotten any sense that he’s gonna do something else?

KW: No, no.

IF: OK, we’ve got enough, I just thought maybe somebody told him Kirk was going to run and was gonna kick his ass, so maybe he would go back and run for Place 2, or pick a new direction or something. (I laugh.)

KW: I’ve been told by a couple of people that some people have said to him, you know, why don’t you stay here in Place 2, and he said, I’ve said I’m not gonna do that. And I believe him on that. I don’t know.

IF: There is the matter of style to consider, which plays a part in how voters respond to a candidate. How would you compare your style to Ronney Reynolds’ style?

KW: (Long pause). I’ll be honest with you, I haven’t sat back and studied Ronney’s style, so I can do that. I’d rather talk about me for a second.

IF: OK.

KW: My approach is to be just extremely open to, I’m one of these guys who kind of wear’s his heart on his sleeve. People know how I’m feeling and what I’m thinking most of the time. And I’m real open and from the standpoint, when I don’t know the answer to something in addition. And that’s one of the things you know, part of the difficulty in politics today, I think, is that the correct way of doing things in the political world, is you’ve

got to be, anybody asks you a question, you've say, this is the deal, I have the answer. I'm not going to necessarily be that way. Now I have strong views. I have, I will take strong positions, but one of the things I think needs to happen in this town, is we need to start focusing on new ways of approaching things that may mean somebody doesn't just have the answer, what you've gotta start hearing the community more. So my style is going to be real open, real accessible. I intend to enjoy this campaign. I intend to enjoy being mayor. And part of that means being in touch with people. That's one of the things I think I'm gonna enjoy about the campaign, I like being with people and talking to people, and having them around me, it feels good to me, and so I'm looking forward, I think it's gonna be fun.

IF: Well it oughta be if you do it right.

KW: It really should be. I was at a deal last night for (state senator) Gonzalo (Barrientos). You know I've gone to stuff forever, and involved with party politics and stuff like that, and politics in general, and man, I love having people that are happy, and moving, and have goals and values in mind, having them around you. It's just fun. Frankly that's what Austin, one of the things that has compelled me to do this is that, uh, Austin needs, in my view, to bring, to move beyond, a politics that is, I guess (Statesman editor Rich) Oppel describes it as blood sport. But what that says to me is we've got a situation here where, in this unique city, with potential to be a world-class city in my view, we have a situation we have set up the process of politics where it is, can I beat you today, and you beat me the next time, or can you run out and get enough people you'll have enough majority to beat me the next time, so you just have pendulum swings. It's an either-or kind of proposition, it's an us vs. them kind of proposition, it's a win-lose type of proposition when, in my view, there are lots of people that there would be a satisfactory, appropriate resolution, but because the process is set up so it's win-lose we don't ever identify the existence of what another solution might be, and we lose the opportunity for it. I think the city suffers for that, and will clearly suffer long term. And part of what I'm saying here is we, politics doesn't have to be blood sport, it could actually be an enjoyable process of building, the word community gets used a lot, but building community and building consensus on a number of issues. So I guess my style is to, let's all get in there and mix is up, but let's listen to each other, let's hear each other, let's not just talk at each other. That was a bad answer to a question.

IF: Well, you've given me a feel for your style.

KW: I guess so, you asked me about my style, and I give you...

IF: Now that you've said all that, briefly, briefly, how do you think Ronney contrasts? Do you think he's any different? And if so, how?

KW: I think, you originally asked a question on style.

IF: I'm still on style. Because I'm talking about how you go about doing things.

KW: I see what you're saying. I may have been originally too narrowly focused on the question of style. I think one of the difficulties we have, and that Ron represents, is kind of the old, the way we've been doing things, and the polarization that occurs with the way we've been doing things. Let me go back to what I was saying a minute ago. And by the way, I want to start off by saying I'm not critical of Ronney. I like Ronney. OK. Ronney's a good guy, a nice guy. So I want to make sure that I'm not misinterpreted as making some sort of personal attack on Ronney.

IF: No, I'm not asking you to make a personal attack. I just want to understand how you would operate differently than he does.

KW: Let's look at it this way. I'm gonna put it in the context of past vs. future way of approaching things. In the past, what we do in this city, is we say, I'm on this side, you're on this side. We also use labels. And in my view, once somebody gets you labeled, you can abdicate all responsibility for having to listen to them. Cause labels is what defines them then, the message doesn't really define them. And that's a problem right now. But in addition, we spend a great deal of time in an effort to just beat whatever this initiative might be. That gets into what I was saying earlier, either-or, us vs. them, win or lose. And we do it with heated rhetoric. And we do it relying upon the right to talk. And I'm not suggesting that's a wrong thing. But we're not focusing on the corresponding responsibility to hear. Part of the problem with that is that it's hard to hear when the way we do it is, an almost adversarial situation where we rely upon the third party to decide between these two visions, these two absolute views, you see. Or they have the best guy who can talk to you behind the scenes. We don't, in my

mind, do enough of trying to define as a community what our values are, what our goals are, what standards we will use to judge ourselves, and then be objective about it. I guess the contrast is, as I sit here today, I think that somebody has a vision of where this city should go, and how we ought to approach that, is what the people of this community are ready for. I think one of the reasons you have such a low voter turnout is that when the politics is just how do I stop, and we don't focus on other alternatives, I think what happens is a large segment of the populations steps back and says, this isn't working. I'm not part of this and this isn't working, and so they withdraw from it. I think that's one of the reasons you see a low voter turnout.

IF: Well, if you can figure that one out, you'll have done something.

KW: That's exactly right. Let me tell you, my personal view is, that if we can just, it's gonna take a lot of practice by the way, because this city is not in the habit of practicing, a lot of people say to me, Kirk, man, it can't be done. And I'm not willing to give up on that. Cause I think when we give up on that, we're gonna lose too much. My kids are not going to be able to enjoy this town they way I enjoy this town. We're gonna make the town unlivable. We're not going to have the quality of life that we currently have, although we're seeing some degradation in that. We're not going to have the municipal view. We're not gonna have the vital economy. We're not going to have a vivid cultural scene. We're not going to be able to have a healthy people, a safe people, a diverse people. We're gonna have to start talking about that now. And we've gotta start talking about it in the context of just trying to beat the other side.

IF: I understand what you're getting at. I think, my analysis of the last election is that people were defined with labels, there is no question about that. That did determine the outcome to a great extent.

IF: When Mary Arnold ran against Ronney Reynolds, you supported her.

KW: Now how did you know that?

IF: I keep a database of contributors. (We laugh.) So while this is the first time you have personally taken on Reynolds, you wanted him out of there enough to support Mary Arnold. What is it about Reynolds that makes you want to fire him?

KW: Now keep in mind this race for mayor is not necessarily about firing Ronney. He's running for a new office. He's the one choosing to do this. As I tell some of his friends who say, "Well we kind of have a friendly incumbent," I say, "He ain't no incumbent." So, you've jumped into that. My personal belief that in that race, Mary Arnold represented far better my idea of where we want this city to go, and for that matter, the way the political culture of this city should be played out. Mary, in my view, is one of the people who deserves credit for being willing to listen, to hear, and to try to build coalitions and groups. I also supported her view of trying to preserve some of the things which we love about this city

IF: So it brings me back again to what key points do you and Ronney differ on? We talked about it in terms of style before. Now what about key points or key issues?

KW: Well, just let me say now, that this is awful early, and it's going to be interesting to see how some of this plays out.

IF: I know it's early, and some of this is going to become more evident later, I'm asking you for more predictive now. You've seen Ronney because he's been there for awhile. And so, in office, so he's got a record to demonstrate.

KW: And Ken, what I would prefer, and you may not let me do this, but what I would prefer is, this is so early, and he is being cute, as you say, to use your words, he is being cute, I really want to, I really don't want to get into specifics, because I'm not sure, he's not announced, and that in my view is, I really don't want this to become a personality deal.

IF: I'm not asking you to get into personalities. I'm not asking you to say you don't like his looks, you don't like the way he talks. I'm asking you what key points, I'm talking about issues here.

KW: Well he is too tall. (We laugh.) He's too tall.

IF: Compared to what?

KW: Compared to me.

IF: Five foot seven leprechaun, right? That's what you said. (In our previous telephone conversation.)

KW: That's right. The concept of debating him and having my neck hurt at the end of those debates is not something I relish. That may be the only fear I have about debate is that my neck would hurt by the end of it. I may have to come up with a platform, literally. (We laugh.)

IF: He is a big guy.

KW: He is a huge guy. What were we talking about?

IF: On what key points do you differ? Which you were trying not to talk about.

KW: In fact, I'm gonna stick with

IF: I'd like you to talk about it a little bit. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to, but what issues does he come at that you don't agree with what he's doing? Electric utility? What? Domestic partners insurance, you supported that, I don't know where he was on it, but you contributed to that, I don't know what he did. You were with the Mainstream Austin Coalition, and I don't know where he was on that.

KW: I think you'll find that he was on the other side of the aisle. And I think that if you look at the vote turnout in the Mary Arnold race, that played a big role.

IF: Yeah, a lot of people have told me that that told Ronney, if it weren't for domestic partners, you wouldn't have beat Mary Arnold, there would have been a runoff and she would have kicked your butt. But he doesn't believe that, I'm told.

KW: No, he does not believe that. I haven't talked to him about that, but I'm told he has told people that's bull.

IF: That's what I heard, too.

KW: I think he's wrong about that.

IF: So he didn't vote for domestic partners, for the insurance?

KW: I don't know, I haven't looked that up. At that time I was supporting what I thought was fair.

IF: What about the electric utility? Do you think he sees things any differently. He was the one who held a press conference when the mayor was out of town, and said, "It's not for sale. Tell those lobbyists to go away. Put your money back in your pocket, TU. We're not gonna sell it."

KW: Apparently right now we agree, the utility should not be sold. I don't know where he stands in terms of an independent board. I believe that if we do the independent board the right way, we'll have to create an independent board, but I don't think it's appropriate to, I think we need, part of doing it the right way, is not to set that up as an automatic first step in the sale. I think that's an asset we ought to be very careful with.

IF: I'll let you off on that one so we can move on. Seems like you are more and more narrowing your political scope. Your first political job was as chairman of the Texas Air Control Board, state level. Then you cut down to the county level to be the Travis County Democratic Party chairman. And now you're focusing on the city. And there's the capitol sitting right over there. (His office is in the Westgate Building, adjacent to the capitol, on Colorado Street.) I don't know where your office is, do you overlook the capitol in your office?

KW: No, I've got the Hill Country.

IF: Probably puts you in a better frame of mind.

KW: Boy, let me tell you.

IF: Everything about the trappings of this office and its co-location with the capital suggests that your whole focus is on the state.

KW: I'm doing this to set myself up to be managing partner of my law firm. That's the next step. (We laugh.)

IF: Whatever made you decide you wanted to be—

KW: I like your focus there, I want to be managing partner of my law firm, and I think I need to be mayor first. (Laughs.)

IF: Would it help?

KW: Actually, it probably wouldn't. But that's funny.

IF: So whatever made you decide you wanted to be mayor?

KW: Couple of things. I'm never sure I've ever articulated this, so let me think out loud with you for a minute. I'm at a point in my life, personally, and professionally, too, but it's really more of a personal kind of thing, that all of my life I have been very interested in public service. You've seen my resume. Even in the context of what I do for a living, I take pride in the fact that what I do for a living is deal with people. I made a conscious decision to do that.

IF: As a personal injury lawyer.

KW: Yeah, and consumer lawyer. I do pro bono work, and by that I mean I am chairman of the State Bar committee on legal services for the poor. I do quite a bit of that, we do quite a bit of consumer stuff, I do some volunteer work.

IF: What do you mean when you say some consumer stuff?

KW: I represented people in situations where, for example, an apartment complex out here where they came home on a Friday afternoon and were told they have to move out within seven days because they were sitting on a landfill. We sued not only the owners and managers of that complex and got a verdict against them, a judgment against them, we also sued the insurance company that wouldn't pay.

IF: Wouldn't pay what?

KW: They wouldn't pay the judgment. They said they're not going to have to pay it under their policy. I do consumer work like that. I represent people in insurance situations. I've never made a fee off this but I represent and have made it known in the cancer community I'm available if we can make a case, to make a case, to sue, not necessarily to sue, but working with

insurance carriers to make sure people get coverage for the kind of treatment they need. That's what I enjoy doing is the people aspect of it.

IF: OK, so how does this make you want to be mayor?

KW: I'm thinking out loud, so I apologize if I'm rambling on.

IF: That's OK, as long as we don't run out of time, cause I've got some interesting questions, I hope.

KW: So far they've been interesting. But the point is, I've always been interested in public service. And my concept of public service is, obviously the opportunity for public service needs to be there, but the second part of it, and these are not one and two, but another part of it, is where, what point in time do you think you can make a big impact, in terms of touching lives and, with all that's going on in (Washington) D.C., and everything that's coming back, that's going to make a big difference.

IF: Oh, yeah, for sure.

KW: The challenges this city has, and the opportunities this city has, you know, I thought about it and decided that yeah, the great thing about Austin, a great thing about Austin is, we live in this country, and we live in this state, but our lives are pretty much made right here. And so while you talk about in the sense that it looks like a narrowed focus, I don't see it that way. I see it as a real opportunity at a great point in history, in the history of this city, this is still a really young city with lots of opportunities, and with what's happening on a national and state level toward the cities, this is a wonderful place to positively impact a lot of lives. There's another aspect to that. And that is, one of the great things about being mayor in Austin, Texas, for me personally, is that it has a direct impact on my kids. Virtually anything you do as mayor of Austin will make a difference on whether Preston and Cooper have an equivalent opportunity to enjoy and prosper in this town. And that's, if you want to use your paradigm here, if you look at—

IF: It's only for your family.

KW: Yeah, and let me tell you something, another great thing about being mayor of Austin, is even during the campaign, I'm still the guy, right in the midst of the campaign, I'm still the one who wakes up in the morning and

gets to wake my kids up, and get them off to school. And that's real important component. Part of what you're saying, and I haven't thought this through, if you want to do that, and I don't necessarily agree with it, but one of the things that's different is I've had some personal experiences, but I've also got a kid now who's a first-grader, we took him to first grade this week, you know his first day of school as a first-grader, and I've got a one-year-old, who turned one in July. And virtually anything and everything you do that impacts Austin in a positive way, and the people of Austin in a positive way, that's an example that makes a difference to those kids. So that's kind of where I'm coming from.

IF: It just seems with that past history of state service, and of Democratic Party chairmanship, you might of been more interested in a legislative post.

KW: A legislative post is interesting. But there's a lot of opportunities out there to serve, and this, I think, is a unique opportunity. I'm real excited about this, real excited.

IF: Well you were excited enough to move into Austin. How long did you live in West Lake?

KW: We lived in West Lake, uh, let me tell you I've got to work on my, we must have moved to West Lake in February of '93. Is that right, I finished chemo around February or March of '93, and we moved back into Austin, which I think is kind of a strange concept, I mean I never considered myself to be out of Austin.

IF: Well, politically, obviously you couldn't run living out there.

KW: That's true.

IF: Didn't you move in just so you could run?

KW: No.

IF: You didn't?

KW: Not just so I could run, no.

IF: But you obviously realized it was a prerequisite?

KW: There's no question, no question, no question it allows an opportunity, yeah, but we had lived in Brykerwoods, I had been president of the Brykerwoods Neighborhood Association. I much prefer the inner city neighborhoods. But I much prefer the inner city neighborhood, and we looked to do that. But it does create the opportunity.

IF: Past history would suggest it's more like a graveyard for political hopes than a birthing place for career politicians. Surely you don't see the mayor's job as a stepping stone for—

KW: I want to be managing partner of my law firm.

IF: I'm talking about a political job, not this money grubbing stuff. (We laugh.)

KW: Well you know that ought to be a some statement of how strongly I feel about being mayor. You know, a lot of people say to me, Kirk, why would you ever want to do that? And by the way these are people who love me and think I've got real potential. They've got my best interest at heart. In fact, I kid some of the people who are encouraging me to run, I may be finding they were really my enemies. I mean that as a joke. That ought to be some evidence of the fact, because people tell you, Kirk, if you're planning on doing this as a stepping stone, you're out of your mind. I'm not. If I were gonna pick and choose for future personal political gain, you're right, this would not be the place to pick to be. But I'm really, that ain't the reason I'm running for mayor. In fact, I think that would be, well you may have seen this quote, and I said this to Amy (Smith of the Austin Chronicle), and it's absolutely true, there may have been a time, this may not be a very politic thing to say, OK, but I want you to understand it, there may have been a time when I would have (said), "Whoa, no, not mayor," because that might preclude something down the road. But I really think that with where I am today, you know if I, if I can start the debate in a positive way, and can feel good at the end of this, and feel like I've given it all I've given, the difference, as I said to Amy, between one term and terminal, it's a big difference.

IF: Well you alluded to chemo a minute ago.

KW: You don't know about my health problems?

IF: No I don't.

KW: I'm 38. I was born March of 1958.

IF: you're 38.

KW: I'll talk to you about that in just a second. But what I was going to say is, when people first started saying, Kirk, you ought to run, then I first started saying, huh, you think we ought to be thinking about this. What do you think about that? A lot of people would say to me, it's a graveyard. And my response at first was, I must admit, to kind of, well, let me tell you, you don't move to move to a political graveyard. And I want to emphasize that it does create an opportunity, but I'm smarter than to think that you make a decision based upon going to a political graveyard. And at first it drove me nuts that people would say that. Then it finally, one of the reasons I was inclined to look at a mayor's race is because I believe Austin has these opportunities that we're losing because of this polarization and because we're not building community, and what it finally occurred to me is that what they're talking about is one of the symptoms. One of the symptoms of our current politics, and not talking where people are listening, is that people can't imagine why people with any sense would run for mayor. Well people ought to be lining up to run for mayor in this town. They ought to be lining up to do it. And I decided that part of the good fight might very well be to volunteer for that service, to see if we can't change that perspective. The young people in this community, think about, maybe not when you were growing up, but with me growing up, people that were mayor, people that were governor, people that were senator, that were president, that were state representatives, these were people you looked up to. That was public service.

IF: I'm a lot older than you are, I'm 56. My time was more naive than yours by far, you know?

KW: I'm not sure it was naive.

IF: It was. You know, what JFK was doing on the side, we didn't know Dwight had a mistress. Now we do, we know what everybody's doing.

KW: But one of the problems is, we're sucking the humanity out of politics. One of the problems with our current debate in this country and our debate in the country and the county and the city and the state, is that if an issue gets laid out on the table today, you name the issue, but if you're the one that brings it up, instead of debating you on that issue, hearing you, discussing with you, being objective and trying to figure out what the solution is, instead what we will do is see if I can find something bad out about you. Now it doesn't need to be the kind of things you were talking about, it just needs to be something that I can say negative about you. Because then what I've done, again, is I've abdicated some responsibility as a citizen, to actually discuss the issue. Because by personalizing it with your foibles, or your frailties as a human being, I've somehow been able to diminish your position.

IF: Right.

KW: Well that's wrong.

IF: I agree with that.

KW: That's wrong. And so—

IF: That's the way it's done.

KW: Well it may be worth the fight—

IF: Are you saying you're not going to use political intelligence? You won't have a researcher digging up your opponent's record? Digging up his, you take, I had this question down further, but I'll move it up my mental list here. In the runoff, Daryl Slusher linked Jeff Hart to representing a client who has a questionable environmental compliance record. And that, who can say exactly how much difference it made, but it was a tactic that was used, and the winner used it. Hart tried to attack Slusher personally by putting out a flier that compared resumes, and it said that Slusher was currently unemployed.

KW: (Laughs.) I didn't know that.

IF: They're both attacking. It was hilarious.

KW: Well, without commenting on that race—

IF: Well I'm saying that's the way—

KW: That *is* the way—

IF: That's politics.

KW: It *is* politics. And I'm not naive about politics. Goodness gracious. I guess what I'm saying is, when we were talking about the graveyard, I've decided that in a great town like this, I want my kids to respect the people who are willing to volunteer for public service. My daddy's concept of public service was to work hard as a governmental employee his whole life, and serve on the school board. I don't think the man ever put up a political yard sign. He never did any of that. He saw it as something that was appropriate to do. And that's the way I grew up. You used the word politically naive earlier, or naive time, and I'm not sure I agree with that. I think that's what allowed us to rally and build communities. It allowed us to sit with each other. Even though I may not like you all of the time, I could trust you and depend on you, I mean I may not want to have you over for dinner every night, but you could be part of the community we're trying to build for the common good. The fact that we beat up anybody that steps into that field to the point that people say you're out of your mind if you want to run for mayor, and have you got any alternatives, you know, that bothers me. It bothers me on a very basic level. Now. Can you do anything about it? Well you may not change the world on that issue. I've been watching the Republican convention, and I'm going to see the Democratic convention, too. It's gonna be the same old stuff. And that's OK, that's the way it's done. But maybe, just maybe, by stepping up and talking about it, you can change it some, and by changing it some, maybe we make a better future here, because we're not focusing on these little aspects. And if it's a political graveyard, you know, if one term's is all, then let's go for it.

IF: Well it will be interesting to see if it sticks when the going gets rough, you know. That's where the rubber hits the road. You know, when you're in a close campaign, your political consultant looks at you and says, if you do this, you'll win, and if you don't, you probably won't. That's when the negativity comes out.

KW: And I want to be careful that in discussing issues and discussing approaches and discussing votes, that's one thing. What I'm talking about, we've gotten off track a little bit because what we were talking about was—

IF: No but we're having a good conversation.

KW: That's right. Hey, I enjoyed the conversation, regardless of this.

IF: So what if I ain't gonna get all these questions answered?

KW: But what I'm saying is...I want to make sure...the way this started was with your discussion of this as a political graveyard. I'll be honest with you Ken. I think I can win this race any number of ways. But I don't want to win it, uh, and not be able to make a difference in terms of governing. And that, I think, means we have to talk about the kind of things that you and I are talking about. I think we have to lay on the table for the community what we see as some of the difficulties and problems in our current way of playing politics. And I dare them to call me names, because if at the end of it, they say, boy didn't he run a naive, losing campaign, all that means, I'll have to find other avenues for community service, and trying to build community, and I'll be "forced" and I put that in quotation marks, obviously, to sit down with my wife and my kids and figure out what's the next step in this deal? You're right. Let's see how the rubber hits the road. I think you'll see I try to run it the way I'm talking right now.

IF: OK. We'll see. Name a mayor of Austin you respected, someone you would want to emulate, a former mayor, or a current mayor.

KW: Several mayors have qualities that I would like to emulate.

IF: This is not a question I want to spend a great deal of time on, but I think it would give some insight.

KW: Frank Cooksey's passion is one thing that immediately jumps to mind. Lee Cooke's ability to work with his council the way he did, at least from my observation. Bruce Todd's willingness, whether I agree with him or not, his willingness to be bold in terms of trying to set ideas for discussion.

IF: OK, how about a mayor of Austin who is the antithesis of the kind of mayor you'd like to be.

KW: (Silence.) Well there are certainly some decisions to be made along the way that I would not be...but I think one of the things, that, uh, I would hope I would be able to do, is learn from the positive. I can't think of anybody who I would think this is the antithesis in every way of who I, I mean I think since my coming to Austin, all of the mayors have had some qualities I wouldn't want to emulate, but some qualities that I very much would like to emulate. I wouldn't write anybody off as my antithesis.

IF: Before I forget about it, I wouldn't want to dwell on it, but I would like to know about your health situation.

KW: OK, in 1992, I was diagnosed with testicular cancer. I had what's called an orchietomy, which is a fancy term for lopping off a cancerous testicle. They thought I had additional cancer. I had a second surgery. I had a third surgery, which was a corrective surgery. I went through chemotherapy. I had a recurrence, this was my great luck, the recurrence was of the benign component of my cancer metastasizing. In '95, and I had a lymphadectomy. They field dress you from here to here, and they strip the lymph node, cause I had a tumor in one of my lymph nodes. The tumor, come to find out, was a benign tumor. The original testicular cancer, which could obviously have metastasis to it, had both, like most cancers, had this weird growth component, but it has a benign component. Apparently, the chemo killed off all the malignancies but it bought me another major surgery. So that's the deal.

IF: So that was the third surgery?

KW: That was the fourth.

IF: When did you finish all that up?

KW: Well I finished chemo at the end or beginning of '93. I remember being in D.C. at the inaugural needing to wear a hat. (Laughs.)

IF: Well you got your hair back now.

KW: Well I got some of it back. Liz took a picture when we were on vacation. She took a picture of a park ranger at Mesa Verde, and I looked at the picture, and there's the back of a man's head in the foreground of the

picture, and I said, is that my head? She said that's you. And I said, man, I can't blame that on chemo anymore. I finished chemo right at the beginning of '93. I didn't have hair at the inaugural, but I wasn't going through chemo.

IF: When was your last surgery?

KW: April of '95. My last surgery in '92, they took the cancerous testicle in February of '92, then about almost two weeks to the day, maybe three weeks to the day, they did a second surgery when they thought they were removing a tumor. Then in September of that year they did some corrective surgery because some surgery had impacted blood flow.

IF: And came back a couple of years later for the lymph node problem.

KW: Yeah, I go for quarterly checkups and routine CAT scan.

IF: I had a guy who worked for me, one of my reporters at the Austin Business Journal had a testicular cancer. He lucked out, as far as I know, they took one testicle and he took a short stint of chemo and seemed to be OK last I talked to him.

KW: Yeah, see—

IF: He just lucked out, he said I saw this thing on TV about self check, and I just did it, and there it was. And he found it early on.

KW: See the deal with me was, both my parents were cancer patients. And so I've always been grossly paranoid about cancer.

IF: Well you can't be too paranoid.

KW: That's right, that's right. And what had happened with me was I developed a pain, which was probably lucky. While I did self examinations, it really kind of focused my attention. So I went in thinking I had an infection of some sort. And we did ultrasounds and blood work and the blood work was high. I found out about that when I was in Houston. But I'm well now.

IF: Well, that's the important thing.

KW: But it was, it focuses your attention.

IF: So you've been out of the woods for a little over a year now?

KW: Well, I've been out of the woods, malignancy wise, since late '92 or early '93. I did have a recurrence that was related to it last year.

IF: But you're up to strength, you know, ready for this campaign?

KW: Let me tell you, until I decided to get fat again, I was running, I was back to running right after my, within a month after my surgery, running four and five miles. And for some reason, in January of this year I decided it was OK to get fat again, and I've put on 20 pounds since January. No, I'm well.

IF: Good, that's the important thing. What are the gut issues you want to address—and we need to touch on these sort of briefly, you know—what do you care deeply enough about to tackle it as mayor? Just a few.

KW: Youth issues, health issues in this community.

IF: What youth issues?

KW: Well, it means everything from assuring that the youth of this community, and I mean all of the community, have safe and healthy places to be, and safe and healthy examples, for them. I think that another issue is health care in the community. I think it's real important for us to assure a healthy, I think a healthy population, contributes greatly to a unique, world-class city. And then maintaining a vital economy for all the community. At the same time, we pay attention to the quality of life, the environmental issues. And I think the city is ready to recognize that we can have the same goals environmentally and economically. I think the city, there is a real recognition that it's our unique qualities environmentally that help make this a viable economy.

IF: OK. In general, the citizens of Austin do not seem to revere their public officials, if anything they revile them. How will you react when people look you right in the eye and call you a racist or a liar, which I see happen sometimes in a heated debate when people approach the council?

KW: It's gonna hurt my feelings. Well (pause) now that may be the right answer. It'll hurt my feelings because I know from where I'm coming at this, it will also be part of what I'm trying to talk about when I talk about how you approach government. You know part of living in this city, and in close confines with each other, it necessarily requires us to be civil. And that's one of those situations where I hope I haven't done anything that justifies being attacked, but that's the kind of heated rhetoric that we have to figure out how to move beyond it. I think I'll handle it fine. I've made my living fighting.

IF: As a trial lawyer?

KW: Yeah, I know how to fight. And I know (when) somebody's fighting me, what not to take personal. Now in public service, coming at the way I'm coming and the goals I want to achieve, it'll hurt my feelings, but I'll move on beyond that.

IF: It gets pretty, I don't know how many meetings you've gone to, it gets nasty. The Americans with Disabilities Act crew came in wheelchairs a few months ago, they were coming real regular for awhile, and basically closed the meeting down. the council went into executive session and just let it blow over. I guess they didn't want to be seen as having the wheelchairs hauled away, like they had John Johnson hauled away when they thought he was out of order. So they just went into executive meeting, and it disrupted the meeting for quite some time. And when the African American folks came out to support the entertainment center, the woman who chaired the board for the entertainment center board was hopping up and down, screaming mad at Bruce (Todd) and would not shut up for nothing. I mean you couldn't shut her up short of dragging her out of there. I've seen people so mad down there I think any minute they're going to pull a gun out and start banging away.

KW: That would really hurt my feelings. (I laugh.) I think part of what goes with the territory is that, and one of the things you were talking about earlier, the funnel issue, you didn't call it a funnel, but what you did with your hands, and the comment I made is that we live in the country, we live in the state, but our lives are right here. You know the fact is, that's true. These people's lives are so directly impacted. I was talking about my kids. you know every decision that's made I hope will have a positive impact on my kids. Well it's having an impact on somebody. And it's having an impact

in a very crucial way. One of the difficulties of being in a city office is you've got to keep that in perspective when people are yelling at you and screaming at you. Sometimes, you're not seeing them at their best.

IF: Oh yeah, for sure.

KW: And if you hurt your feelings, keep it in perspective and *listen* to them, because you may be wrong. It may be the only way they can get your attention sometimes, is with a two-by-four.

IF: Good point. What would you change about the way the city manages its \$1.2 billion budget?

KW: Ken, I'll be real honest with you. Because of other things that have been going on and still practicing law, I have not sat down and spent the kind of time to really answer your question. There may be a couple of more if this is the kind of things you're going to get into.

IF: OK. The Priorities First! coalition served up a lesson of some sort when they defeated the proposal to spend \$10 million on a baseball stadium. What lesson can be learned from that election?

KW: I think one of the big lessons is that it is very important for people to listen to what members of the community believe are the priorities right now in this community. At a time when we're talking about budget difficulties, we're talking about how you meet this budget, what do you do here, what are we going to do in terms of health care, what are we going to do in terms of the utility transfer, things like that, and we talk about affordability in the town, things like that, the issue I think a lot of people think is, is that something that as a community we see as necessary at this point in time. And I think that baseball stadium got tied up into the concept of is this something we need at this time in this community.

IF: Exactly right. The fire chief was sitting there saying we needed more fire trucks and crews, and the EMS chief was saying we needed five advanced life support vehicles but we're only going to ask for one because we know you ain't going to give us more than one, and at the same time the council is declaring an emergency for baseball. It didn't make a whole lot of sense to me, watching that. Now Priorities First! is pushing No More Corruption! to make an issue out of campaign finance reform. I was going to ask you if

you supported that, but if you haven't read it. (I gave Kirk a copy of it at the beginning of the interview. He had not seen it before.)

KW: I have not read it.

IF: I'll just leave that (copy) with you and I'll (call you later about it).

TAPE RUNS OUT ON SIDE ONE.

[NOTE: I talked to Kirk on Friday, Aug. 16, and got his position on the No More Corruption! petition. See Notebook 183.]

IF: The Austin Campaign Finance Ordinance sets up a Voluntary Campaign Contract in which mayoral candidates who sign the contract are limited to expenditures of \$120,000, plus \$80,000 for the runoff. It also limits the use of personal funds to 5 % of the voluntary limit, and limits aggregate contributions from individuals and political committees to no more than \$1,000 for the general election and runoff combined. Will you sign the voluntary campaign contract?

KW: I'm still looking at that. Let me kind of tell you what my thought process is right now. I am a major believer in doing things that will help make a difference in money in politics. It gets back to one of the fundamental things I was talking about earlier. When we start, the way our politics are done, I think it dramatically, it is impacted by how money influences that. I am a supporter of the concept of that contract. The difficulty I see, from a practical standpoint right now, is that the amount you can spend has not been raised since (the ordinance) passed—

IF: Since '94. It was realistic when it was passed. I wrote a story about Ron Mullen when he ran for mayor the first time. He said he would spend a quarter million, and I think between him and Lowell Lebermann spent a half million between them, probably more than that.

KW: Since that time, the impact, since the altered limit, you've got an increase in TV (costs), I think we've even had an increase in postage. So at a time when it was set then, and there hasn't been a change in that, it makes it difficult for someone taking on somebody that's been on the council for six years, and who by the way it is my understanding has said, in his being against the concept, that all it is is an incumbent protection

plan, I think, if you're gonna take on the quote, incumbent, and it's an incumbent protection plan even in his eyes, and there hasn't been a raise, I have to look at it from a practical standpoint. The one other thing I'll say about that is that it's my understanding that even the guy who chaired the task force who has been looking at this recently has encouraged the council—

IF: Environmental Defense Fund

KW: (Jim) Marston. My understanding is that Marston even recommended to the council to increase the limit. Well see that puts me in a situation where I have to look at it. I have not made a final decision—

IF: But it doesn't look good?

KW: I think the likelihood is that while I believe in the concept, from a practical standpoint, I'm probably going to have to say I will not sign the contract.

IF: OK. Well do you have a wild idea of what you might be spending?

KW: No.

IF: What your target is? You haven't set one?

KW: No, I haven't set one.

IF: You and Alfred (Stanley) haven't talked about that yet?

KW: Well, Alfred and I have had some discussions, yeah, but I haven't set that yet.

IF: The seriousness of a candidate's campaign is often gauged by the team he puts on the field. And I just want to tick these off, if you haven't decided, maybe you do, maybe you don't. Who will be your consultants in this campaign for political strategy?

KW: I haven't made up my mind. All those, let me just tell you right now. I've talked to a bunch of people and I haven't made a final decision on any of those.

IF: None of them, OK. Even a campaign manager?

KW: No.

IF: Who do you think Ronney Reynolds will hire for political strategy?

KW: I have no idea.

IF: I'll look back and see who he used before.

KW: I think he used Jeff Montgomery before.

IF: Jeff's been trying to get out of local politics, and I think after the experience he had with RECA, he's probably going to stay out of it. Take Back Austin took back nothing in the 1996 council elections. But Wayne Ahart, their chairman, is adamant that the group will be heavily involved in the 1997 races. Briefly, what is your analysis of Take Back Austin's influence?

KW: Uh (sigh), I think your question says that. (Laughs.)

IF: They didn't do too well the first time out. They claimed afterwards that it's a long-term process. They never made those disclaimers going in.

KW: I didn't figure out who they're taking it back from. You know. And that's important, it gets back to what I was saying earlier. What is, let's talk about Take Back Austin, what is it, what have they set as the value that they're trying to take back? What are their goals? What standards—

IF: It's basically fiscal conservatism, is what they say. They criticize, if you read their newsletter, everything criticizes spending. They don't even sometimes, I don't think, get past the fact that there might be a benefit from spending. They just say you're spending money, and we don't like it.

KW: That's right. And I my response to that is, you know in some instances, I'll bet they have a point. Let's figure out how we come together, and figure out how we set what values, what standards, not just a screaming approach to this, but let's figure out what standards and goals we want for the city, see where the broad, as opposed to just trying to beat something,

figure out what the appropriate approach is, and let's be objective about it. I think it's going to be a very long term if their approach is to just kind of bash on people.

IF: Well it was last time. They didn't offer Jackie Goodman an interview, for example, and I told them they should, and I told Jackie she ought to ask for one. Because I don't think Jackie was anything like they painted her to be.

KW: No, me either.

IF: And I know you supported Jackie.

KW: Yeah.

IF: Well, bottom line for me is would you accept their endorsement, from Take Back Austin?

KW: (Pause) I would accept their endorsement only if their approach was different than it was this last time. Their approach this last time was part of what I consider to be some of the problem in this city moving forward. I guess what I'm saying to you is, to some degree I feel compelled to need to endorse the groups that are doing the endorsing. And what I look forward in groups that say they want to move this city forward is whether or not they are in the business of trying to build community, or merely being divisive.

IF: I like that answer. It seems like last time out, everyone was just accepting these people, I'm not picking them out, you know, any endorsement is a double-edged sword. They didn't have a track history, so maybe you can forgive some of the people who said they were going to throw in a bunch of money, but now they have a track record. The Real Estate Council of Austin poured more than \$200,000 into the council races for 1996. What's your analysis of their influence?

KW: Uh, they didn't win. (We laugh.) Hey, how's that for analysis?

IF: Great analysis.

KW: My analysis of where the Real Estate Council is, is that it is time to recognize that day in and day out, fundamentally, a debate between green, a debate that is characterized and labeled between green and developers,

they're not gonna win. In my view, this community has said preservation of the environment is of particular and significant importance. I believe that there are members of the Real Estate Council—and maybe the Real Estate Council, I want to be real clear—that recognize it is time for us to figure out those areas of agreement and build on them. What I just said, I think there are *many* members of the Real Estate Council that believe that.

IF: Well there's a lot of different thoughts running around here. Some of them I addressed in that eight-page special edition I did on the election analysis—

KW: Right.

IF: One of them was. One of them was that RECA ought to decouple itself from the developer community, that it screwed itself when it took a lot of developer money. And then another philosophy moves a click to the left and says the business community cannot win until it decouples itself from the real estate industry. It's like—

KW: But you know what I'm suggesting is that the Real Estate Council, and others, not, and I believe there are people who want to do this, OK? Not to fall into the trap of the labels, not to fall into the trap of let me see if I can just wreck your agenda, the same way that others try to wreck theirs, and instead get back to what I was saying earlier: Can we write down our top 10 goals for the city of Austin and see where we correspond and start moving the city forward? I don't believe that just because you're a member of the Real Estate Council of Austin, you want to despoil and annihilate the wonderful environment.

IF: I don't believe that either. But I believe they were so anxious to have political power, to wield in their way, that they made some mistakes along the way. But it goes back to what we were talking about earlier. Whether you want to call it us vs. them or not, when you put two PACs together, and define goals of identifying 15,000 pro-business voters, and all that stuff, you know that's a lot of work. And I don't know if it was done all that well. I talked to some of the people that did some of that work, I'm talking about down in the trenches for the firm that did the work, and I'm not sure that work was done all that well.

KW: Is that right?

IF: But that was the goal, to raise all this money, to do that. And to do what? To counter what they perceived to be an overwhelming opposition from the environmental community, primarily.

KW: Yeah, and I understand. What happens is, is, uh, what I was saying earlier, you get a situation when all the goal is, and that's too strong, not all the goal is, but when certainly a part of the goal, a big part of the goal, is to just wreck (slapping hands, motioning as if knocking one hand away, then the other), what happens is, OK this time, this group, whatever group got wrecked. So what happens is, they run out and try to identify or bring in like minded, whatever that may be, people, in terms of their individualistic kind of approach, and so they can come back and (slaps hand away), do that here. What's happened is, we've lost opportunities along the way, we probably haven't even identified all the opportunities, and a large part of the population, maybe even a majority of the population, would agree would be a better result than just (slapping hands away) knocking this back. And really all they've gained is just a majority in this time, to be able to wreck this individual here. I think there is a sense, although some people would argue that you didn't see it in the last election, but I think that on both sides of that issue, there is a sense that, this is all we're doing. And it's time to figure out where we can look at what alternatives would people embrace. And I'll tell you another thing. I think from the business community's perspective, it is very important to recognize that the environment plays a major role in why people come to this town.

IF: Well, Kerry (Tate)—one of your off-the-record supporters, although Amy (Smith) put it in the (Chronicle) article, and Kerry says without talking to her—I went to the Environmental Forum and covered her speech over there when she talked about it. I said, what is this? The chamber is talking pro-environment. You know that something's changed. This isn't the same old Austin.

KW: It's not. It is not.

IF: But this last election, still—

KW: We're still playing that same old deal.

IF: The chamber's not doing it, but this last election, it happened all over again.

KW: No question it did. And everybody will blame somebody else for why that happened. What I am suggesting to people is, you're right, it's not the same old deal. And I want to be careful how I say this, because I really don't want to get into a, but what the city now needs is somebody that can represent the future, that isn't part of the past, doesn't represent a polarization, doesn't already come to the table with expectations of polarization, and say to everybody, look, we are going to have strict standards in this town. That's what the people of this town, including the people in your businesses want. But now let's get together and figure out how we make sense of achieving those standards. We're not going to lighten the standards, but what we can do is figure out how we go about doing it in a way that makes sense.

IF: That's what the Citizens Planning Committee was all about.

KW: That's a good, I'm glad you brought that up. Now isn't that a good example of community building, where people are listening.

IF: It was. I went to those meetings again and again and again. I was really impressed with that bunch. And there were developers on there. And they worked it out.

KW: You're exactly right. I'm glad you brought that up, because that's a prime example. You know, a minute ago, you were talking about people coming down and saying bad things about the city council. Right now our concept of a hearing is going down and one side, with whatever heated rhetoric they want, and the other side, with whatever heated rhetoric they want, and let a third party make the decision.

IF: The council.

KW: That's right. And by the way, they have a right to speak. Absolutely. But there's a corresponding responsibility to listen. And what's great about the Citizens Planning Committee is, people came to the table recognizing the responsibility to listen. And look how it turned out.

IF: I thought Fred Blood characterized it really well. He's an environmental engineer. And he said, they called a war and a committee broke out.

KW: (We laugh.) I like that. But you know, it takes practice. This city's out of practice in that regard.

IF: That's the trouble. That's not where news is, you know. I go to all those meetings, but you didn't see any Statesman reporters there, or writing about it, until right at the end of the process. But you know it's like watching grass grow or something, it's not real exciting.

KW: Well that's right.

IF: But it's where the action is in terms of building a better community.

KW: But see when I was in the Air (Control) Board, that was one of the ways we approached things is, I appointed task forces that addressed certain kinds of issues. Let me give you an example. Texas had the first state Environmental Equity and Justice Task Force in the country. The concept was, if you're getting ready to create, in terms of size, the largest environmental agency, how do we come together to assure that it represents all the people. Well it was a diverse group. People had to sit and listen, not had to, they did. Another example was the Hazardous Waste Cement Kiln Task Force. There was an issue, or is an issue, although I've lost track of it so it may not be accurate, about burning hazardous waste in cement kilns. We created a task force that became a model for the country. And it had everybody on it, from citizen participation to Dow Chemical industrial people, you had everybody on that, and what they did was, instead of just coming to the Air Board, and this person telling us what the deal was, in kind of an individualistic sense, and this person had a hearing that way, what we did instead was brought people together and had a hearing that way, where they all heard. A Nuisance Odor Task Force—

IF: Was Griffin Industries in on that one?

KW: No, I don't recall that. But you see my point. I'm a big believer that if you can get people, if you get them the information, and you get them listening, then instead of an either-or, they find solutions.

IF: You just sort of make them work their differences out and bring the council something that you can say, we like that, we'll do it.

KW: Let me be clear. I think council has to provide leadership on that. One of the things we did at the Air Board, as at the Citizens Planning Committee, this is where it worked pretty well, we helped define what issues needed to be addressed, and then we participated in that, in obviously a leadership role, but we participated in it at the same time we were hearing it. That was real important.

IF: The Citizens Planning Committee did not have any council participation in it.

KW: Well, but they helped define what they wanted them to address.

IF: Yeah, they did. There was a two-step process. The first step was to lay out some preliminary goals, so they made up a dozen goals. That took them X number of months. The council reappointed them and said, OK, now go find ways to implement these goals. They spent nine or 10 months more on that.

KW: And damned if it didn't work.

IF: Yeah. They put in a hell of an effort. And Jackie's initiative, one of her main reasons for wanting to run for council again, was to get that implemented.

KW: Well let me tell you, that was a great reason to reelect her.

IF: Oh yeah, it's gonna make a great difference as time goes by. Well get back to RECA, where we were, as near as I can tell, the district attorney's office is still investigating three criminal complaints against RECA for campaign law violations, campaign finance laws. Do you have any sense of what the outcome is?

KW: No, I haven't paid any attention to that.

IF: Would you accept RECA's endorsement?

KW: I would accept RECA's endorsement if, well the answer is yes. My goal, keep in mind, is to put the past polarization behind us. There will be people that, now, now, keep in mind, whoever, I want to put the past polarization behind us. There are people that I know are involved in RECA, that I know what their goals are for this city, and appreciate, and they're gonna appreciate my candidacy. So I'm not going to say no, I wouldn't accept that endorsement. But what I will say is, that I want to make sure the way we go about doing things is in line with what I hope to do with my candidacy. I do not want to get into a us vs. them debate. I don't think that's what Austin is about. I think that's one of the great things about, that's one of the reasons I stayed in Austin. You know I love the fact that we have such divergent views and divergent people. I mean that's a long answer, but the bottom line is yeah, I would. But we've got to be careful about—

IF: The biggest thing about any of these endorsements is it's sort of like a tar baby.

KW: Because they're labels.

IF: Yeah, but the labels are not totally without meaning.

KW: No question that's true.

IF: There's a history there that, you know, and these alleged campaign law violations, finance violations, are part of this history that this group now suffers.

KW: Yeah, no question.

IF: And you are saying that you will accept it, presupposing that they aren't indicted or something.

KW: I appreciate that.

IF: This is a real possibility according to people in the campaign finance business. It's a real possibility.

KW: Is that right? I don't know, but you're right, it presupposes a number of things, but it also presupposes that they are, and I believe this to be true, of at least a large number of people I've talked to that are involved with

RECA, I believe they are interested in a candidacy that talks about focusing on the future, and brings people together, as opposed to—

IF: They said that last time.

KW: And it didn't work, did it?

IF: I think it's great. I'm not saying that that isn't where their heart is. It was in the mechanics of how they chose to get there.

KW: And that's an important component, you're right. You're absolutely right. (We're both talking at once, and it's too hard to understand to be clear who is saying what for a moment here.) Let's face it, that's why you asked the question, because you recognize those—

IF: Exactly. The Christian Coalition agenda tried to slip in the back door of the 1996 council races, with Becky Motal's pro life stance giving it away, I think. You, on the other hand, contributed to the Mainstream Austin Coalition to support benefits for the unmarried domestic partners of city employees. Did you see any other signs of the Christian Coalition agenda—I'll call it that, could call it conservative, could call it fundamentalist.

KW: I didn't.

IF: What are your thoughts about this agenda becoming pervasive in city politics? It's like Becky Motal was identified with that, primarily because several months before she declared for election, and I wasn't aware of it when I interviewed her, her name was in this overexaggerated ad that said, the council approves more than a million dollars a year for abortions? I mean a million dollars of your tax money for abortions. Of course, down in the fine print, it says, this is the reproductive services figure for five years. It would take five years to get this overblown million dollar headline.

KW: One of the things that is wonderful about this town is that we sure, we sure have a lot of people with strong views. I mean I have very strong views. I disagree with Becky, obviously. I would hope that the future politics of this town doesn't become ensnarled in issues that don't really move people forward. And sometimes I worry that's how can get characterized.

As chair of the party, I voluntarily, when invited, went and spoke to the Christian Coalition. Went on their radio talk show.

IF: When was that?

KW: Last year. Elaine Hucklebridge invited me. And my reason for doing that gets right back to what I've been talking to you forever about. And that is, I wanted to make a strong point that we don't, there are a lot of people involved in the quote, Democratic Party, that come at it from a deep spiritual sense of why they ought to be involved in public policy and politics. And that nobody has the ultimate truth on these issues. And that we don't even on agree all the time on scripture. So we are going to disagree on public policy issues. But that doesn't mean that we have to be divided as people, and dislike each other, and not be able to approach each other, even if it's issues that we feel very strongly about, that some people consider to be an either-or type of decision. So when they invited me as chair of the party, I went. And spoke. And then they invited me to come on their radio talk show. And I did that. And they asked me to come back, I think because they had never had that many calls. (Laughs.)

IF: Yeah, those stations aren't that much listened to. As editor of the Business Journal I was on one of them during drive time, and we didn't get a single call.

KW: We got a *bunch* of calls, we got a bunch of calls. And that was great. They asked me to come back and my schedule didn't allow me to do that. Elaine Hucklebridge asked me to do that. And you know I've enjoyed getting to know her a little bit.

IF: I think that's a part of Take Back Austin, you know, they have Rev. Bullock on there, and that was part of the reason they were painting that camp as being part of that agenda.

KW: See I was raised in the Church of Christ. It's pretty fundamental. And went to Baylor (University). So I consider myself. I 'm strongly grounded in a Biblical, I've read and understand, you know. But as I pointed out when I spoke at the Baptist Church there the first time, I pointed over to the piano in the corner, and pointed out that in the scripture the Church of Christ believes, says that you don't use instrumental music. But no one in my view can question the righteousness of someone who chooses to worship by

having instrumental music. Just as no one can question the righteousness of feeling of those who believe you're supposed to make music in your heart, and therefore that precludes instrumental music. We can't even agree on that scripture. But nobody questions the righteousness of our views. So how can we possibly be expected to agree on every public policy issue?

IF: Well, it's where they draw the line. The first story I wrote for *Third Coast* was published in January 1982. It was about Dr. Steven Hotze and the Austin Citizens for Decency. The ballot question that they got up enough signatures to force the people of Austin to go and vote on, was shall landlords be authorized to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation? That was 1982. That was published in January of 1982, the month I think the election was held. So this is not new. People try to make out this is new in Austin, but it's not new in Austin.

KW: No, no question, it's not new in this country.

IF: Steven Hotze is back in Houston now, after he lost that. He's a dentist. But when he was 17, his parents were Christian activists, and when he was 17, he led a pro-Vietnam war rally and got gov. Connally to come to it when he was in Houston. This is not new.

KW: It's not. But by the same token, my desire to kind of step into the fray ain't new either. There were a lot of folks who told me not to do the Christian Coalition. And my view is, uh, we're all here, we're all disagree. Goodness gracious, if I were required to agree with my wife, if my wife were required to agree with me, at a percentage level that we seem to require of our public officials, and people that we're going to try to make a better world with, at that percentage level, this marriage (laughs) would be in dire straits. We don't raise our kids that way. Why would we, I'm sorry. What time is it?

IF: It's 11:25. Let's try to move fast.

KW: And if you want to, we can come back.

IF: Well I'd like to try to finish it up today, because I'm in deep doo-doo for time the rest of the week. As Jeff Hart found out in the runoff with Daryl Slusher, the kinds of clients that an attorney has can be a liability. We've

already talked about your practice. You practice trial law, and you do this personal injury law. Can you give me an example of some of the high-profile cases you've handled, just very briefly? I guess what I'm asking.

KW: I guess I'm just a small-time (inaudible) lawyers. Well I represented. The problem with your question, in this day and age, what happens is, you always sign confidentiality agreements when you bring them to an end. I want to make sure I don't violate any confidentiality.

IF: The basic question for me is, I did some basic legal research when I was at UT but I didn't do enough. Is there any easy way to find out cases lawyers have represented?

KW: No. No there's really not.

IF: I'm sure you try to do everything you can to hide it, right?

KW: I really don't but the court, the supreme court, even had to adopt some rules to try to stop confidentiality provisions, and I always worry that I'm going to violate a confidentiality provision. But let me give you a couple of examples. We tried a case back in '92. We got a big verdict in, involved a doctor who did liposuctions on two women and they ended up in the hospital the same day, one of which died and one of which ended up just being peeled from her breast line down to about mid thigh, circumferentially, all the way around, because he basically injected her with bacteria. I got a verdict against him and some others in the hospital that treated them. I tried that case forever, like three months. Barry and I rented an apartment in Houston rented an apartment in Houston, Barry Galow, my partner, and I had to move down there. I represented the owners of Dobie (Mall) when the bricks on their building started cracking and falling off because of a mortar additive that had been put in that building when it was built. Which released chloride ions, and when it released the chloride ions, it would cause the metal to expand and rust, and it was causing a crack in the bricks. I represented them against the manufacturer of that. I represented Baylor University in its NCAA problems it had this past year over its basketball. The NCAA came back and said that Baylor had served as an example and a landmark for the way you should handle these kinds of incidents. That's one thing I'm real proud of. I'm real proud of frankly the fact that my school, which by the way, they named me one of their outstanding young alumni this year. Those were some of those.

IF: OK. You got any that are going to be a problem when this lawsuit and your opponent, whoever that might be, gets somebody like Scott Henson to go and dig up the dirt on you.

KW: I don't think so. I don't know, Lord knows, A, I don't remember everything, and B, things don't always get characterized in a way that aren't always accurate.

IF: As a former county Democratic Party chairman, you enjoy the support of a strong network of political players. This is sort of an obvious thing, I don't even know if it's worth discussion. Will you tap this network in a mayoral race? This is probably a stupid, overly—

KW: (Snaps fingers.) That's my answer.

IF: That fast, huh?

KW: As quickly as I can. And let me tell you, one of the things I'm proudest of is the fact that there are a lot of people...that really want to help me. But yeah (snaps fingers again), that's my answer.

IF: I was all prepared to play this up, with you being Democratic Party chairman running against a Republican, cause I didn't know. But yesterday I went and pulled the voter registration records up, and Ronney's voted in the last four Democratic primaries. Blew my whole line of questioning, you know?

KW: You've done my research already.

IF: Thought this was going to be a classic, draw some partisan politics into local races. I want to quickly get your positions on some key issues. I'll name the issue, you give me a quick-and-dirty description of where you stand—I'm looking for the brief kind of remark you will have to make at a candidate's forum, not the stem-winding discussion we could get into—

KW: Let me go to head real quick. I'll be right back.

(We took a head call.)

KW: What are you doing?

IF: I do write profiles. I wrote one about every major candidate in the last council race.

KW: How much ink?

IF: Usually one page.

KW: I remember those, OK, you're right. By the way that article on you in the Chronicle was good.

IF: Thanks.

KW: I thought that came out real good.

IF: I couldn't have done better if I wrote it myself.

KW: I thought that turned out real well for you. Of course, I think the newsletter's really doing well, too.

IF: Well, I really appreciate the support. OK, we were going to talk about quick and dirty answers to particular issues. Capital Metro's sales tax—would you leave it at a full penny or cut it?

KW: Golly, Ken, they're in the process now of looking at what they ought to do. One of the things about letting them, I think we ought to have a first-class transportation program in this city, and I want to assure that we have a first-class transportation. I think Capital Metro has become a target, an easy target. As I set here today, I think Capital Metro ought to follow a process, where they determine, and they do it with the community as a whole at heart, an appropriate transportation plan, and I can't sit here and tell you right now, that it's OK to do away with that quarter-cent sales tax.

IF: So the answer is I don't know?

KW: Well, I guess the answer is I don't know.

IF: The council majority voted not to issue an RFP for the electric utility, which takes sale or lease off the table. Which way would you have voted?

KW: The same way.

IF: OK. The Electric Utility Commission has recommended a charter election be held to authorize an independent board of governance for the electric utility, with the council retaining the power to set electric rates, issue debt and condemn property, that's by state law. Do you support this recommendation or oppose it and why?

KW: I support it. As you know, I sat on the panel that the electric utility put together for people to again come together and listen and discuss. Another good example of how that works. I think we ought to, with a couple of caveats. One is, I think we to take care to assure that we don't do something detrimental to the employees. I think we need to assure an independent board that brings diverse points of view, that recognizes its obligation is to the whole. And I think we need to ensure that we don't put it on the ballot in such a way that it is a guaranteed or automatic precursor to sale. But I think having an independent board is an appropriate and necessary way to go.

IF: OK. The council has previously agreed to close the Holly Street Power Plant, but there is a big price tag attached to that. With competition coming for the electric utility and the city's general budget crunch, should the city revisit the decision and consider keeping Holly open?

KW: As I sit here right now, I don't, I haven't studied all the reasons that went into the closure so I can't answer that right now.

IF: OK. Austin-Bergstrom International Airport now has more than 50 percent of the construction contracts awarded. What would you change, if anything, about the way this project is being managed?

KW: (Long pause.) I can't think of anything.

IF: OK. The state is considering condemning Mueller Airport and keeping it open for state and general aviation use. Is that a good idea, and if not, how would you stop it?

KW: Well I don't think it's a good idea. The decision was made with the airport that we're going to have another airport. I think we ought to have a

single airport. I think one of the ways you stop it is, and I don't know whether you can do it this way, but you reach out and cooperate with the state. And I don't, as I sit here right now, it's my understanding that the FAA is not going to allow that to happen, no matter what. At least to do with that tower.

IF: They're claiming, I called up and had a really long interview, several actually, with this guy up in Fort Worth. I said, look, here it is, they're doing this, they're going to take this to the Legislature, and the Legislature's going to decide. My question is real simple. The state's gonna trump the city. Are you gonna trump the state? He said, well that's sort of a theoretical. We're not dealing with it. I said why don't you just nip it in the bud? I said this is good staff work. Why don't you just nip it in the bud? Why don't you just call these guys up and say, forget about it, we're not going to let you operate the other airport. Save all this trouble. They're hiring appraisers and all this stuff. He said, the city never put it to us that this is really an emergency, or this is really happening, or this is really important. Yes, we're aware of it, but we don't. They attached no significance to it, and he claimed because the city has given no sense of urgency about it. And his boss from Washington and him had lunch with the mayor just a week or so before I talked to him.

KW: I would, the answer to your question, assure they understood the sensitivity and the necessity of making a decision on that. They being the FAA.

IF: I said you can stop this, you can put a screaming halt to it.

KW: I don't doubt that Bruce (Todd) has also conveyed that.

IF: They might have. They might be lying.

KW: I'm not suggesting that you understand.

IF: No, no. Austin's population growth makes it difficult for us to avoid becoming a nonattainment city. This is right up your alley, this is a fat pitch. How would you achieve that?

KW: How would I what?

IF: How would you achieve us not becoming a nonattainment city? How would you stop it?

KW: Well, let me just rattle off a couple of things. Number 1, I think we have to have a first-class transportation system. It's important to get people out of cars. Second, I think we need to put in place, in conjunction with the TNRCC, a small business assistance program. And by that I mean setting up programs where we can help business, I say small business, help them reduce emissions in a way that makes sense for them, in a cost-effective way, by doing that we are going to help reduce emissions, and we are going to help the businesses. I think we have to finish the studies that are currently being done, and we need to fully participate as a city in the regional air quality study to find out just how much of our air quality is being transported to us.

IF: The aerial sampling.

KW: Right. I think we need to fully fund that. The city of Austin needs to participate in that. I think we need to do what is possible to reduce the sprawl. I think that is really contributing to our air quality problems, and do it in a way where we make transportation around town efficient. But those are just some of, we really have to focus on air quality. This town is economically and environmentally at risk as a result of that.

IF: One important political base that I don't see covered for you is neighborhood associations, or I didn't before I got here. You mentioned that you were the Brykerwoods Neighborhood president. How will you appeal to that important constituency?

KW: I'm a former neighborhood president. You bumped up against it. (Jim) Cousar's a neighborhood president, my campaign treasurer, is very involved in neighborhoods.

IF: Which neighborhood is he in?

KW: Clarksville or Old West Austin, I don't remember which one...He lives on 7th Street over here. I already have people like Mike Curry, who is involved in neighborhoods. There are a number of people in Brykerwoods. You know Curry?

IF: I don't really know him, but he came up with a solution that really helped. I had been going to the neighborhood subcommittees of the Citizens Planning Committee and watched them at loggerheads because Lauren Currie and all these hard-nosed guys showed up and said, this was really bad, they saw it as some kind of conspiracy where the city was going to control neighborhood associations, you know, and it was Michael Curry that came up with a solution that broke that through. He just came in one night, he had been to a meeting or two and had saw what the problem was, he just went home and drafted something and brought it back, and they bought it. They changed it but they bought it.

KW: Well, the truth be known—

IF: If it hadn't of been for that, I don't know if they ever would have gotten over it, cause I watched this for months.

KW: Curry's great. Truth be known, Curry had been president of Brykerwoods Neighborhood Assn., and was ready to pass off the baton to somebody else. I became president of Brykerwoods Neighborhood Assn., and any success I had was because Curry couldn't give up being president of Brykerwoods Neighborhood Assn. I mean that as a compliment, in a positive way. I think I'll have good neighborhood support.

IF: A recommendation for a downtown Tax Increment Financing District is winding its way—in fact it's gonna be voted on today. Do you support the TIF?

KW: (Mumbles for awhile.) Yeah. Let me tell you my view of downtown, without going into all the detail on TIFs. I think downtown Austin ought to be the living room for this entire community. And I think it's the kind of thing that brings together the community in so many different ways. It's important that we just not focus, does that answer your question? I'm a big believer in making this neighborhood, which downtown is, making this neighborhood a really vital, vibrant living room for the community.

IF: OK. One anchor improvement that could put a lot of downtown property back on the tax rolls is the Waller Creek tunnel, which would take property out of the floodplain and make it available for development. Some people talk about the River Walk look, you know. The price tag is about \$18 million. Do you support that?

KW: In concept I support it as part of my idea of what downtown ought to be like. I'm not sure you can afford to do everything you want to do immediately. And so as I sit here right now, while I support the concept of making downtown a great living room for this community, I can't sit here right now and say, OK, we can do this, this, this and this. You see what I'm saying?

IF: All you gotta do to get a lot of money from Perry Lorenz is say, yeah, I support that. And Robert Knight.

KW: You understand what I'm saying. And by the way, that's one of the things I think the next mayor has to really pay attention to. You've got to be careful. At my home, I can't get everything I want, every time I want it, even though I know how good it would be. And so that's the importance, you can't sell bonds.

IF: Bicyclists are hacked off about the mandatory helmet law. Do you support it?

KW: Uh (long pause). Again, from what I know of the purpose of doing that, the answer would be yes. And part of this, and it may be where I come at from what I do for a living, and seeing the head injuries, and seeing people that can't afford the care they need as a result of that, and the burden on it places on our people. I know they're hacked off. You can't turn on Channel 6.

IF: I haven't figured out if it's going to turn into any real political movement yet.

KW: Who all voted for that?

IF: Everybody. It was a unanimous vote, I'm pretty sure. I'd have to go back and look to check myself, but I'm sure it was a unanimous vote. Gerald Daugherty is still pushing his ROAD petition to cut Capital Metro's sales tax to a quarter-cent. Do you support the petition?

KW: Uh (pause) I think, no.

IF: Some environmentalists tend to demonize certain entities, such as Freeport-McMoRan, based on the firm's human rights record in Indonesia and its top-polluter status in the United States. Briefly, what's your opinion of the company's record in Austin?

KW: (Pause) Uh, the way they have gone about doing some of their business in Austin, I don't think, has played positively in where this city ultimately wants to be. And that includes political tactics, that includes legislative tactics. So I'm not a, I think the way some of the things they have done have done damage to this city.

IF: Would you accept political contributions from Freeport?

KW: Um uh.

IF: Would you say that for, um um. (His answer is NO.) OK, Will you be a full-time mayor?

KW: Awful close.

IF: Getting right down to the bottom (of list of questions). As I pointed out in my front-page story this week, the LCRA's ability to provide water and sewer service changes the dynamics of development and provides competition for Austin's water and wastewater department. How should the city deal with the LCRA on water and wastewater?

KW: In a general sense, that all gets into the concept of how we're going to deal with ourselves on a regional basis. I think we need to, I think it's very important for somebody to take a leadership role, pointing out that we need to come together regionally. That's not to say we shouldn't be protecting the assets of the citizens of Austin, but we've got to start paying attention to regional cooperation. And we've got to do it in a mechanism where, is somebody going to trump somebody? So at some point, we've got to come together and start talking about a regional plan. That's part of what I was talking about earlier. And by regional plan, I mean there has got to be things we are able to cooperate on. At some point, I think it's going to become clear to the suburbs that a vibrant urban core is in their best interest. And just being able to move water and wastewater wherever they might want it, if it's not thought out on a regional basis where it makes sense for the entire area, then it's going to end up being a problem. Now

with regard to the specifics of what the LCRA is trying to do, I'm not really prepared to comment on that, but I think it does speak to the idea that we've got to do a better job of talking to each other.

IF: At the council retreat, it came down real simple. You have a MUD out there we're supplying service to, or asked to supply service to, and we don't provide the service and the LCRA does, the rules of the game today are that we could still go back and annex that MUD later. And this is not just for MUDs, it's for any territory really. But the MUD is particularly sensitive because of what happened in the last session. In this coming session, if the LCRA supplies them, and they go into to get ruled out from being annexed because we're not supplying them utilities, that's the fear. It's like Jim Smith said in that page 2 article (In Fact No. 56), the rules of the game will change. So it's a wild card. They're making it harder for us by providing the utilities. They're serving a populace but they're making it harder for us.

KW: No question. And it really bothers me that we, it gets back to what bothers me in the last legislative session. The fact is, the cities are where everybody says they want to allow the power to come back to, or where people are in the best position to control their own destiny in a day to day way, but yet other entities interfere with that. And that's gonna be detrimental in the long haul. The national and state government aren't going to be able to control all that, other than to do damage.

IF: We've got a rural controlled legislation, and we've got a rural controlled LCRA, stop to think about it, the majority of the board. And Joe Beal says, the reason I'm doing this is because my board told me to do it, to get in the water and wastewater business.

KW: From just a purely political science viewpoint, it creates a great Jeffersonian-Hegel type of dichotomy. Jefferson was saying as long as you've got rural, you could have greater Republicanism, because people are just doing their rural thing. Hegel kept saying well only will you be able to have great Republicanism wherever everybody kind of comes together and does their thing, is when we grow to a point that people are forced to face each other, face to face. Well we're facing each other, face to face, we're still drawing the line. And you're absolutely right. It gets back again to the rural urban deal. If you talk to the rural people, I think they would, you would really appreciate one of the great things about having a city is you

have these rural open spaces, and the rural people would understand that they feel tied to the city.

IF: I lived in Dripping Springs for five years and I lived in Georgetown for three years, so I have some sense of it. I've worked in all three counties as a journalist, and I see the dichotomy here. The conservative anger, the talk-radio criticism, did not materialize at the polls for the 1996 council races. Will 1997 be any different?

KW: I mean I don't know. I would hope that we would, if my candidacy goes the way I hope it is, that we are not doing things based on anger. We're doing things based upon a vision of what we want our kids to live in, five, 10 or 15 years from now.

IF: There was no galvanizing issue in the 1996 races, no SOS ordinance, no domestic partners insurance. What will be the galvanizing issues for the 1997 elections?

KW: I hope the galvanizing issue is vision and view of the future, and setting aside past polarizations, so we can address many issues, and address the future of the town.

IF: This is like deja vu, the same sort of things everybody was saying when I was interviewing them for the last council election, but when the council election got here, it didn't work out that way. Something got lost between the philosophy and the execution.

KW: Well, I'm going to try to do it different.

IF: Last question. I've asked you an awful lot of questions. What have I missed. What would you like voters to know that we haven't already asked you about?

KW: I think we ended up covering it the way I answer questions, probably gives you more than you were asking, so I think we've kind of covered it all. I hope that hasn't been a problem for you.

IF: No it hasn't. I enjoyed it. My only sense of anxiety, if I conveyed it, and I'm sure I have, is that I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to finish the damn thing because I ran out of time.

KW: You think we're done?

IF: Yeah.

TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF. RECORDED INTERVIEW TWO FULL HOURS.