

Q: What was your first introduction to politics?

CIBOSKI: “I was a young kid when WWII broke out. We were just coming out of the Depression. Franklin Roosevelt was president, and my father always had a radio, and he made sure we always got the news. His younger brother lived right across the way from us, and they’d get together and talk about Roosevelt and Churchill. So I grew up on the New Deal. My mother was so strongly confirmed as a Democrat, that when she died in 2000 she was still cursing Herbert Hoover for the Depression and voting for the New Deal. That’s been my political socialization.”

KAHN: “I have a similar story. When I was 10, I heard Franklin Roosevelt on the radio, and as effective as both Kennedy and Reagan were as communicators, they were not in the same league as Roosevelt. I had a little paper route that I’d go around and collect on Friday nights. In Miami, Florida, only the wealthy had air conditioners so all the windows were open, so wherever I went I would hear Roosevelt’s voice. I realized that Hitler posed a real threat to the world – the greatest war machine ever assembled – and Roosevelt, whatever failing he may have had, he and Churchill together were able to win that war. So unlike Ken, I was reaffirmed in my Democratic socialization, and to this day I might be called a yellow-dog Democrat. I don’t try to create miniature replicas of myself in my classes. I let my students know at the outset that I have my own biases.”

CIBOSKI: “I want to add, I stayed up all night and listened to the 1948 election. It was a very close election between Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey, who’d been a governor of New York and was running for a second time. It really wasn’t decided – I was up really late, listening on the radio, listening to the returns, and that sort of thing, so it was kind of exciting at the time then when it turned out Truman was the winner.”

Q: Is there a former student or students who stand out to you?

CIBOSKI: “Probably my most memorable one would be Mark Parkinson, who is a former (Kansas) governor. Another, Dennis McKenny, went on to become (Kansas) state treasurer and minority leader of the Legislature. Eric Sexton (WSU vice president for student affairs and executive director of athletics) took his first political science course with me, and he liked it so much he ended up teaching American politics before going on to KU to get a doctorate

in political science. Blake Carpenter, who recently graduated in December, is already the youngest sitting member of the Kansas Legislature.”

KAHN: “One remarkable student would be Jeff English, who was a tremendous organizer; built the WSU Young Democrats into a large organization and went on to become vice president of the Kentucky Derby Festival. I had one student (at another school) who unfortunately became a figure in history. James Brady (former White House Press Secretary and namesake of the Brady Bill) was my TA, and he was in the line of fire when Reagan got shot. He just died a few months ago, but he was very unusual. He was really a political animal.”

CIBOSKI: “And Nancy Reagan didn’t want him because she didn’t think he was good-looking enough. That’s true. She was upset. But he still served as the press secretary, and the press liked him – the press loved him.”

KAHN: “He told me he got some really good advice from a liberal, David Broder, who told him, ‘Under no circumstances deviate from the truth, because your credibility will be shot. If you can’t avoid the question, just don’t lie.’ He said once you do that, you’re finished.”

CIBOSKI: “Any politician who lies is finished.”

Q: What is it like to see your students go on to be so successful?

CIBOSKI: “I think that’s the biggest thing. It’s been said that if you get a professional piece published in a journal or something like that, that that’s the biggest thrill. I’m not so sure.”

KAHN: “Even though we come from different directions, I concur with what Ken said. You get more of a glow out of seeing your students succeed than even publishing an article.”

Q: What are your thoughts on low voter turnout for last year’s state elections?

KAHN: “I think in general we don’t have enough people who read and understand what is going on, and as a result they don’t take an interest. A lot of people don’t realize that even with the focal point of the electronic media on national politics, what affects them most in their lives are laws and the administration, or the lack of it, that goes on here in Kansas or in Wichita, and there’s a real ignorance on that. I attribute a lot of it to the fact that there are so many diversions now. The electronic media, for example, gives people snippets without any kind of in-depth understanding. People don’t read newspapers like they used to. In terms of local elections, in spite of the fact that it’s closer to the people, the voting turnout has been very atrocious.”

CIBOSKI: “I think also, particularly at the Congressional level, I think we read a lot about political conflict, which is what politics is about. The American people in general have the idea that Congress doesn’t get anything done; that all they do is bicker around, they’re just there. I think that the press plays up this business about conflict because that’s what makes the news – this group of senators versus this group of senators; the Senate versus the House; the House versus the Senate; issues with the president; that sort of thing – and I think people get tired of that. Let’s put it this way: Studies show people don’t want to be involved in politics. They don’t want anything to do with politics. They want to leave it to the elected officials.”

KAHN: “We also have a situation whereby people tend to complain about waste – excessive spending, higher taxes – and yet, they often judge their member of Congress in terms of their ability to ‘bring home the bacon.’ So I think that creates a lot of cynicism. Also, many people in running for Congress run against the institution, and we have a phenomenon now where most people are asked their opinion of Congress as an institution, it’s very low, but when asked about their opinion of their own congressman, ‘Oh, he’s a great guy.’ There’s just a lot of distortion that goes on.”

Q: Could you talk about your own political parties and where the Democratic and Republican parties are headed in the future?

CIBOSKI: “For the Republican Party, I think it’ll remain pretty conservative, there’s no question about that. Now you might think it’s gone pretty far to the right, some people argue that. Some people argue that’s happened here in Kansas. But I think that the Republican Party has a pretty good array of candidates to be possible nominees. Right now I think Jeb Bush has a real good opportunity to win the nomination. I think John Cassich together with Jeb Bush, Cassich as the vice president, Bush as the presidential nominee. Both are high enough in electoral votes – Florida and Ohio – that the Republicans could probably capture the presidency.

“Everybody says, ‘Are you ready for Hillary?’ Well, a lot of people probably say they’re not ready for Hillary, and I don’t know what her stance is probably going to be. But I think that as far as the future is concerned, with both parties, I think we’ve had a lot of partisanship in Congress, and that Congress is not so important as it used to be. It’s now about parties, and their positions on things and what they want to do, so the partisanship is really strong.”

KAHN: “We have sort of an irony, though. While the parties are stronger in terms of replacing the committee, which used to be the central factor in terms of eliminating legislation or giving it the go-ahead, when it comes to constituencies at large, the party has lost a lot of power. No longer do parties do the real nominations. We have candidate-centered contests for the nomination. The largest funders are individual interest groups. Candidates have to raise their own money. This gives Hillary and Jeb Bush a great advantage in terms of their prior contacts. So the party has lost a lot of its influence with the people in that regard. Many of the Republican Party’s previous stronghold states have become or may become two-party states. The Democrats have that momentum going for them in the future, and so the Republican Party will have to be able to get away from the image of being anti-Hispanic, and some of the vocal ones like Ted Cruz provide a real handicap to them. Also, with more acceptance, particularly by younger people, of gays and lesbians, I think that helps the Democrats.

“One thing the Republicans have been doing though that’s interesting this time is they’re more concerned with middle-class and about making a living wage, and they are not as bound to the idea of ‘trickle-down economics.’ They realize that more has to be done for the middle class, and that’s something that’s going to help the Republicans.”

CIBOSKI: “Also, I would like to add here, I know foreign policy does not, generally speaking, determine the outcome of elections on a general level in this country, but I really think we’ve got some significant foreign policy problems that have been around for a long time now with the Obama administration. A lot’s going to depend now on what’s going to be done about ISIS. They’re talking about a major campaign in Iraq. I think a lot of people have the idea that President Obama is not doing the best job when it comes to foreign policy and some of his decisions. I think a lot of things like this could really be developing in the future that will really favor the Republican Party as far as the presidential race is concerned.”

KAHN: “I think we have a real systematic problem too in terms of foreign policy, that in too many cases we get people who have to undergo on-the-job training, and it’s sort of ironic to me. George Herbert Walker Bush now, I think, historians and political scientists are recognizing, was a much better president than he was given credit for. He had been ambassador to the U.N., head of the CIA, plenipotentiary to China, had been a member of the House for four years – eminently well-qualified in the area of foreign affairs. He was defeated when he ran for re-election. And to be bipartisan here, with Clinton, with young Bush, with Obama, it’s been on-

the-job training for them, and I think America suffers as a result. So I think there's a strong argument that none of our past three presidents have been at the top of their game when it comes to this important area."

Q: What are some hot-topic issues that you see heading into the 2016 election?

KAHN: "I think that generally the economy does top foreign affairs, and I think a lot is going to depend on what kind of shape we're in. Right now there's been somewhat of an improvement in terms of the economy, and if this holds up, if we continue to gain jobs, it will be down to the Democrat's benefit. On the other hand, if we should falter and fall back so that times should be hard again, I think it's going to be to the benefit of the Republicans. So it's going to be largely a matter of perception.

"I think Hillary running will be perceived as a third term of Obama, and whatever the situation is at the time the election occurs I think is going to determine it. I myself think you're going to have two people who are highly capable of being president regardless of what their individual failings might be. I think it's an advantage in terms of dealing with Latin America that Jeb Bush speaks Spanish and is married to an Hispanic wife who gives him an 'in' there. He's also been very even-handed in terms of immigration policy, which helps his standing in contrast to a lot of the Republicans who have been perceived as anti-immigrant. I think he himself realizes that he has a better chance of winning the presidency actually than he does of getting the nomination. His one good chance though, is that there are so many very able young conservatives running for the presidency that they will probably be splitting the vote. With Romney out of the running and Christy faltering, I would be very surprised if he does not get the nomination, and once he gets the nomination he'll be more free to reflect his own even-handed immigration policy. I think a lot of the advantage the Democrats had during the last elections is going to be diminished because of that. I think it will be a very close election."

CIBOSKI: "The economy always plays a role, there's no question about this. People will ask the question, 'Am I better off than I was four years ago?' Is the shoe pinching, so to speak? It's always an issue. That was one of Ronald Regan's famous questions. When he was running against Jimmy Carter, he talked about what Carter had to say about the economy under Ford. He asked those kinds of questions, and I think that served us very well. I remember Dick Cheney, several years ago, saying it's just a matter of time, a matter of where and when we're going to

have another terrorist attack in the United States. If something like that should occur between now and the presidential election, it will make a big difference. And also I think this immigration issue is not settled yet. I don't know how that's going to turn out – people are upset about this issue. Those are going to be some of the issues of this campaign, and the budget.

“People don't realize this, but this idea of Federalism, as boring a topic as it is, it basically comes down to ‘What role for government?’ Democrats of course want a greater role for government usually, but not an overwhelming one. There are some differences here, though maybe they're not so measured as people think. The Democrats are willing to hazard a greater roll for government, the Republicans – no. Richard Nixon, in fact, pointed that out when he ran against John F. Kennedy in 1960. Kennedy was going on and on about all the things he wanted to do to ‘get the country moving again,’ he said. Richard Nixon listened, and on his turn he said, ‘Well, I agree with many of the things Senator Kennedy says, so you might be asking where I disagree. If you elect my opponent, he will emphasize the public sector. If you elect me, I will emphasize the private sector.’ It comes down to that in many ways. No matter how you talk about different policies and different orientations and so on, it's the public sector emphasis versus the private sector emphasis.”

KAHN: “I think a lot of it, too, is that we are subject to all kinds of turns and changes. For example, Obamacare, with its roll-out, was considered a disaster. In the last year, there have been many more people covered who could not acquire any kind of health coverage. You can no longer drop people off, and things are on the uptick. Just the other day, on the other hand, it came out that the government sent out hundreds of thousands of forms for use in the income tax returns that are bogus, so this makes the Democrats look bad. A lot is going to depend on what the perception is at the time of the next election. Things can change. We are not a static nation, and there are times when government action via the public sector is considered beneficial, like the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) was. Social Security was bitterly fought; it's accepted now. I think we're still up in the air whether or not Obamacare is going to go down as a positive legacy of Obama or a negative one, and a lot of this is going to determine where we are: the status of health care; the economy in general; where we are in the world. There are a number of things that will go into the mix, and in the Electoral College we could have a replay of the Gore/Bush election where the winner of the estimated popular vote is not the person who

acquires the electoral vote. We got through that OK – though many people predicted disaster – but there’s still a lot ahead in the next year-and-a-half that’s going to determine this.”

CIBOSKI: “As they say, 24 hours in politics is like a year in ordinary life.”

Q: Who is your favorite politician from the opposite political party?

CIBOSKI: “This may surprise some people, but there are some things about President Obama I really like. I know that he can be criticized and I know people raise issues about this, but I think he is concerned about our national security, so I praise him for that.

“President Truman has been my favorite president in some ways, because he was outspoken. He would say things he’d get bashed by the press on. He stood up for what he did. Obviously Franklin Roosevelt had a major impact on the country. His New Deal is still here, very effectively.”

KAHN: “As a Democrat, my favorite candidate would be Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker because I think he would be easy to beat. Among serious candidates, I think that John Kasich of Ohio, who had a prospering economy at the time when the Romney people wanted him to keep quiet because they wanted to show that the country was in bad shape under Obama. He’s a budget-hawk, makes friends across the aisle.

“A shade behind him I would put Jeb Bush, who I consider highly competent. Realistically speaking, among those who have a chance to get the nomination, I would say Jeb Bush. If I have my druthers – if it had to be a Republican as president of the United States, I would favor Kasich – but if I had my way, it would be Walker.”

Q: What’s your take on a recent bill proposed by senators earlier this year to ban university professors from using their professional titles when criticizing lawmakers in the newspaper?

KAHN: “I would say that’s a violation to the First Amendment of the Constitution. In practice I do not identify myself, although the media usually will, because I think I’m a private citizen and not representing Wichita State University. But I do think that a newspaper certainly should have the right to identify the position of a person, particularly if the media thinks you have some expertise in an area. I do not think that one should use their position with a university to advocate personal viewpoints – I think you do that on your own. I haven’t seen the bill to

know what the author has in mind, but to rule that a professor cannot comment would be violating the rights of an American citizen, which I think all of us should have.”

CIBOSKI: “I generally agree with that. It is a violation of the First Amendment to simply say that a professor can’t speak out. Now I don’t know about using the title – that’s another matter. I know that for years here, if a professor wants to get behind some candidate for office, and if that candidate asks you to write a letter of support for him or her the policy has long been that you cannot designate what your position is with the university, you just sign your name, and that’s it. Are we going to discount other people? What if the mayor of Wichita writes a column in support of something, which a mayor can do – should he sign as the mayor of Wichita, or just sign his name? Those kinds of things are in the same category, too, so I think this raises some very difficult questions.”

KAHN: “We have the right to give our best judgments on policies pertaining to our area of expertise. On the other hand, I don’t believe I should be commenting on whether or not we should have pro-choice or pro-life laws, or on evolution or creationism, because I don’t have any kind of expertise in those fields, so I don’t think it should be protected for professors to go outside their fields of expertise, and sometimes that is violated.”