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Interviewee: James Koch

Interviewer: David Brooks

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David Brooks: Mr. Koch, could you start out by maybe telling us a little bit of your personal and educational background and what brought you to Montana and the University?

James Koch: I'm the son of a Lutheran minister, one of four boys. I grew up in Illinois, went to Illinois State University as an undergraduate, studied economics and Spanish, went off to Northwestern University to do a Ph.D. in economics, earned that in 1968, while I was at Northwestern I did a lot of work for Harris Bank as an economist. Harris is a pretty large commercial bank in Chicago. After receiving my degree at Northwestern I went back to Illinois State as a faculty member and stayed there actually 11 years. I became chairman of the Department of Economics there. The department and that University were growing very rapidly at the time. When I came we had 25 economists, when I left we had 26 or 27, so it was a growth situation and one that I enjoyed a great deal.

From Illinois State I went to Rhode Island College as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences so that was my really first, more senior administrative post. That was a rather interesting situation because the faculty at Rhode Island College were unionized. I'll always remember my first experience with a representative of the union, who was not a faculty member, came in and leaned over my desk and in Rhode Island-eze sprinkled cigar ashes on my desk and says "Dr. Koch, [pronouncing it like Kotch] let me explain the way things are here," and then he proceeded to, in actually in good humor, explain that whatever I had learned in the Midwest or anywhere else just didn't apply around here and here's the way things were. To be honest, for the most part he was correct, most of the rest of the world's rules didn't seem to apply in Rhode Island. But that was a situation where I learned a great deal and was very valuable to me and while I was there, for example, we started a School of Social Work, offering a MSW degree. I learned a lot of things about a variety of disciplines there that, as an economist, I may not have known lots about.

I stayed there two years and went to Ball State University in Indiana, an institution of about 20,000 students. I was provost and vice president for academic affairs there. In some sense a provost may have a greater ability to influence an institution's direction than the president. That may not have always have been so, but presidents increasingly are external individuals; they are people who do things political and fund raising and lots and lots of external things. It wasn't always that way and certainly, when I was a provost, there you have your fingers on the academic buttons and who gets hired and what the standards are for promotion and tenure and a variety of things that really influence the things that students experience and the lives that faculty lead and really the standards of the institution, so that was a very interesting post and I learned a lot. It was, I think, the most difficult assignment I have ever had in my

administrative career, in that Ball State was a former teachers college, although it had grown big, and had lots of very strong traditions. I think that would be a euphemistic way to say it, that it probably impeded progress. For example, they had a salary structure, a salary system, that was very much like a K through 12 system, so that it didn't make any difference what discipline you were in or how well you did your job you all got paid the same thing and you were bumped up each year and that made it really very difficult to pay attention to issues of academic quality. And students would come in to me sorely disappointed about some faculty members but there was very little that one could do about it. Well suffice it to say, there were some battles royal over changing that, but we did and I think the institution is much, much better off as a consequence for this.

I left Ball State in 1986 to come to the University of Montana as president. I think I was the third president in a row to come to the U of M from the Mid-American conference. I 'm not sure it's the mother of presidents but at least for the University of Montana it was and of course President Dennison has had a background in the same area as well, so that's a very interesting set of coincidences. When I arrived at the U of M I thought that the major challenges were one, increasing enrollment—enrollment had been trending downward, the U of M had become smaller than MSU, which was a matter of some note to lots of people. The institution also very shortly was going to face fiscal problems. There was retrenchment on the horizon because the state was having severe financial problems.

Montana as a state after growing very well in the '60s and '70s began to stagnate in the 1980s, and in particular mining and forestry went down and tax collections went down, and that affected the funding of the University. As a consequence, at the U of M we actually had to go through formal retrenchment per the faculty contract. And that meant going through a fairly elaborate set of steps designed to give everybody a chance to provide input, but also eventually to generate to some recommendations to the Board of Regents about how to cut back entire programs as opposed to just cutting a faculty member here and there. It was my view that the U of M should not simply cut all departments across the board by the same percentage. I thought that was a recipe for mass mediocrity. I thought what we needed to do is try to maintain, even increase, our services and some programs but completely get rid of some others. Now that was a painful decision and of course it was very unpopular with the departments or area that got fingered. But I think ultimately it was probably a good one for the University, in that it really preserved what I perceived to be the core of the institution, and by the core especially I meant the College of Arts and Sciences and the major professional schools. There are many things that universities do that are nice, in fact valuable, but not necessarily absolutely essential to an institution and I think when you look at what we actually did in retrenching the institution we honored those kind of principles.

The other thing I alluded to was enrollment, and there I became fairly activist rather immediately. I decided that, based upon my going around the state, that the University of Montana really wasn't very well known east of the mountains, east of the Continental Divide, so I began to go around and visit high schools personally. Typically, some other individuals from

the University would go with me, but ultimately I gave lectures in more than 100 Montana high schools, you know, all the way out to Sydney and Plentywood and places like that. But as an economist I thought I had a little story to tell about the nature of what was happening to the nature of the economy and the world and how a college education mattered, why the U of M was a good place and so I would go out and do about 45 minutes of that and then sneak in quite a few U of M brochures and meet with the counselors and typically have an alumni event in the city or town there and visit the local newspaper and talk to the editor and the reporters and so forth and generally try to stir up dust. When you do enough of that, the local legislators show up. So it turned out that, typically it was pretty easy for me then to get session with the local or area legislators.

We began to broaden that out after a year or two and began to do bus tours. And there we actually got an old-fashioned school bus, put about 50 U of M people in it: faculty, staff and a few students and would make a week-long loop around one particular section of Montana. And rather than just the president doing what I just talked about, everybody did that. We had 50 people doing this and we would get to say, Forsyth, Montana, and we'd hop off the bus and we'd go in all directions and everybody would talk to the people in town who were related to what they did. For example the business dean would go and talk to the bankers and lots of faculty members would teach in the schools and the students would be with them and we'd hold alumni gatherings and student admissions gathering, and in general, what we were trying to do is garner attention for the University of Montana. Because I thought we had a terrific story to tell. We didn't have quite as many Rhodes scholars then as we have now but we still had 25 or so. I thought we were an unknown resource east of the Continental Divide. Well, long story short, it paid off and enrollment began to trend upwards. We had a significant increase in applications and that really has lasted through this day and you know I give credit to President Dennison and everybody who followed me for, not necessarily continuing the bus tours, which were maybe kind of a signature thing for Jim Koch, but for continuing the emphasis on trying to recruit students.

I also incidentally took some of this out of state. I went to a series of out-of-state locations where I thought we could recruit effectively and even went to several American schools in the Far East. For example, places like Tokyo, Taipei, and Singapore where I was fairly confident that there were some students who would be interested in coming to an environment like this but simply to know about us and that also turned out to be productive, and it turns out, as you probably know, out-of-state students pay considerably more tuition than in-state students. So you don't really have to attract a lot of out of state students to make a trip seem worthwhile.

So a long story short, I think we overcame the—if there was an enrollment crisis, we overcame that and very shortly the U of M was the largest institution in Montana and still is. I'm not sure we should always measure our prosperity on the basis of whether we're larger than Montana State but, to be honest, it's like the football game, lots of people do, they pay attention to those kinds of things.

I also, as a president, place some fairly strong emphasis on a series of academic things and I began the President's Lecture series and convinced Richard Drake to be in charge of that and he still is and I think that's a terrific thing that brings lots of very interesting people to Montana.

DB: Now Richard Drake is the University history professor? Just to—

JK: Yes, Richard Drake in History—

DB: How did that begin? That lecture series?

JK: Well it began by my saying to Richard, I'm going to give you some money, not a whole lot, go out and find some interesting people and tell them this is part of the President's Lecture series and surrounding this when they come in we will have a small, not quite press conference, but seminar in which students come and we'll have 15, 20 students there who can ask the speaker questions. And the emphasis there will be on their asking questions, as opposed to the press, who will also be there. We're also going to have a dinner at the President's house before the lecture and I'm going to invite a dozen to two dozen interesting people from around town who incidentally might be donors, people who are interested in supporting the University but we know are going to be interested in this particular topic. It was an attempt to do lots of things at once. One, to make the intellectual environment more exciting. Second, to get students involved in those kinds of things, but third, to bring people from the community into the University and to get them to experience some things that I thought were pretty good. I think basically the same kinds of things are occurring today. So I think while that isn't something that some people even know about, it's been a fairly important thing for a reasonable number of people over time.

I also stirred up a bit of controversy when I challenged the faculty on their grading habits. Specifically I looked at the grade distributions and found that the typical grade given out by a typical University of Montana faculty member, although there was great variance between faculty and departments, had gone up over time and was higher than a B. And in the catalog it says C is average but, like Lake Woebegone, everybody at the University of Montana was above average and getting more so, every semester. So, I challenged faculty on this when I gave my State of the University address at the beginning of the year and actually put out some numbers and actually labeled a couple of departments and said here are some departments where it seems all the students are unusually good. Well, some people were injured by that, but it provoked discussion that I think was highly desirable and I think it caused some people to ask, why are we doing what we are doing? Now I should say that as an economist, economists are notoriously low graders, not just at the University of Montana but nationally, so when we see some of the marks that other faculty members at other departments assign, we find that rather unusual. Indeed, I might say now, once a year at the University of Montana in the fall, I teach a History of World War Two course, which would require I guess some explanation, but the history students are always astonished at the low level of the grades, I assign but I explain to them ahead of time I'm an economist and this is how we do things and that I'm not accustomed

to giving lots of high grades and that I have fairly high standards. Well, I'd like to think that generally that's what most faculty members at the University do, because the University of Montana is not excessively rigorous in terms of admission standards. I think we need to be fairly careful of whom we assign credit to and to whom we award degrees. And that's in a sense what my message was, that if we had MIT's student body perhaps we could have MIT's grades but we didn't so we needed to be demanding of our students and have high standards and our grades probably were representative of what our standards were in some respects. I've always felt that when we honor everybody, we honor nobody, and we shouldn't give everybody high grades. Well, as you can imagine that wasn't a universally popular message, but similar to several other things I did academically, where we place a lot of emphasis on promotion and tenure standards, and on increase scholarship from faculty members, and increased research, I think ultimately this was a good thing for the University and it focused people's attention on some things that perhaps over a period of time some people had allowed to slide by.

Ultimately I left the University in 1990 to become president of Old Dominion University in Virginia, where I was president for 11 years. I'm still on the faculty there. I teach three courses a year, all in the spring semester. I just finished that semester now. I had about 200 students and I taught two economics courses and that I teach the World War Two course there and I'll come back to that in a moment. People ask me why I left the University of Montana and it wasn't because I didn't like the place or even love the place. Indeed, I think that should be evident because we came back to live here. We like the University of Montana, more than like, I think we love the institution and the like, but the sort of circumstance financially that Old Dominion placed in front of me was just something I couldn't ignore. And that's a perpetual story, for example, in Montana and one that I don't think we've solved yet. But we always said at the time we're gonna come back, and we did because we really like Missoula, we like the University of Montana and now that we're back, the course I teach here in the fall, I teach for nothing. I teach without pay and it's simply, if you will, a gift to the University and sort of an appreciation, or way to express an appreciation for an institution that I think is a very good one and also did good things for me.

I teach the history of World War Two. I've done this for about 20 years actually, going way back into my time in Indiana. As an undergraduate I did lots of history and actually one summer taught high school history at Arlington Heights, Illinois, right in the Chicago suburbs, so I was very interested in World War Two and had done a bit of publishing there and when I was in Indiana suggested to the history chair that I thought I could do a course like that. Well, he was a bit skeptical, of course, and said, "I'd like to see a syllabus," and "I'd like to see some of your publications." So I gave him all that and he said, "Yeah, you can try it." Well, of course he came in and visited my classes and looked closely at the student evaluations but it turned out to be a very popular class and now at the U of M, typically I'll have 80 to 100 students taking the course. And it's something I enjoy. I think World War Two is really the seminal event of last century and so many of the things we observe in the world today are due to that war. I do some lecturing, I show some videos from the BBC that I think are fairly good. I bring in half a dozen or so World War Two vets and there's still some around who are, for example Iwo Jima veterans.

Believe it or not there is a man here who served in the Luftwaffe, the German airforce and flew more than six-hundred missions in a Stuka dive-bomber and he lives in Missoula.

DB: Who's that?

JK: His name is Johan Sitte and this guy is remarkable. He's got to be in his high 80s by now, but he brings in his dress uniform from the 1930s that he got married in and it still fits. It's astonishing and he's alert and can talk about everything; of course he ended up a prisoner of war and escaped from the prisoner of war camp and walked across the Alps, but individuals like that give the students in my class, I think, a sense of what it was like to be there. And, for most of my students they were not even alive during the Vietnam War, so World War Two is truly ancient history to them. And when people walk in who were, let's say on Iwo Jima, that makes a tremendous impression on my students. So I try to do things like that.

The final thing that I do when I have time is to introduce some computer simulations where students can come in and do what I will call counter-factual history: what if? And they can with a computer change circumstances a little bit and then see how it would change the outcome of a battle. And turns out, when you do that you find that if you look at a battle such as Midway, which was a really critical naval battle in the Pacific, that if you replay that, redo it under realistic scenarios the United States loses that battle rather than wins it about 80 or 90 percent of the time. So it gives students a sense that history isn't something that is written in the clouds, fixed, that things have to turn out a certain way, but that individuals, and events and chance have a role to play and that's one of the lessons I hope they get out of that. I also hope that they, or one of the lessons that they get from me, is that history sometimes is written on the basis of things that really protrude into our memory and cause us to really think more about certain things than others.

I give them the example, in fact, I have them read a book call *The Forgotten Soldier*, which is a classic of the Eastern Front land warfare in World War Two, but one of the reasons it's most interesting is historians aren't completely sure if it is history or fiction. Whether it is similar to *All Quiet on the Western Front* in World War One, which was fiction but nonetheless a very, very useful way to look at that war, or if it is really coming from a man who was actually there. And it allows me then to talk to the class about well, what if this isn't really true? Is it still useful to us, and how do we know certain things are true, and why do we think we know certain things? And why is that our image of land battles in the Pacific and World War Two seemed to be shaped by movies such as the *Sands of Iwo Jima*, in which John Wayne is in the movie, and since a large proportion of the students in the class are history majors, are doing a lot of history, it's just a chance for me to get them to think critically about the nature of history and why again do we think we know certain things? How confident can we be in certain sources? Is someone who was actually there really a better witness and historian than somebody who wasn't there? And those are some fascinating discussions. So that sort of brings me up to 2006.

DB: Well let me rewind for a minute and ask a few specific questions about some of the things you mentioned. You've been through circumstances when you arrived here in terms of dropping enrollments, fiscal problems, faculty cutbacks or retrenchment. And that's where I want to start, is with that, and you mentioned that you thought that there were certain core elements to all universities that you had to stay strong in when you were facing these cutbacks and you mentioned arts and sciences here. Tell me more specifically about what you think are the core elements, why you think they need to be core for a university to prosper, survive or be strong academically and what situation those were in when you came here, and when you left.

JK: I think the University of Montana ought to broadly and liberally educate every student who comes here as an undergraduate, regardless of their major. That suggests then that the general education program, the liberal education program, was really critically important to what it is that we profess to be doing here, whether a student is majoring in pharmacy or business or whatever. We need to ensure that when they emerge from the U of M that they are ready to be a literate and capable citizen. That to me meant that many of disciplines within the College of Arts and Sciences had to be maintained at a level that was viable so that we can ensure that occurred. It meant to me that disciplines such as history or sociology, English, the sciences, chemistry, physics and the like had to be maintained at a level that we could ensure that students would have access to them. It didn't necessarily follow to me that students had to be able to major in a wide range of disciplines to ensure that all of them were liberally and broadly educated. So to me part of our task was to ensure that that core was there. I've always seen the professional schools at the University of Montana, such as let's say the School of Business or the School of Journalism, as things that build on the College of Arts and Sciences and I would say that the majority of U of M faculty members agreed with me—some didn't—but those are the kind of value judgments that a president has to make. So when we were doing retrenchment we tended to focus less on some of those core disciplines and more on some of the other areas of the institution. We tended also to say, maybe we don't have to have a major in a discipline, a minor would be sufficient. We tended also to say that in certain disciplines we might not have to have a graduate program in order to maintain the particular core that I'm talking about. So in choice-making, we held some of these things out of principles.

One other principle I can remember that we emphasized was that we were going to cut the academic side of the institution less than the administrative and operational side. And we did that. That's tough to do. I can remember there were faculty members who suggested to me we ought to stop cutting the grass and that would send a message to the legislature. Well it would send a message but not a very good one I'm afraid. And would send a bad message to students and parents and that's a recipe, I think, for a downward cycle of failure. There are certain kinds of tasks administratively that we have to undertake. But one of the sacrifices that I can remember making was in the President's office. There was an assistant to the president and we eliminated that position. Here was an individual who was really very good but in terms of saying well, what message am I going to give to the faculty and the public about what's most important. That was something I think we needed to do, to pare down a little more on the administrative side than we were on the academic side. When I left the University in 1990, the

state's financial situation had stabilized, hadn't gotten better but it had stabilized, so they were no longer saying we need to take more money away from you. Enrollment had increased to that we were generating more tuition dollars and we had more out-of-state students and that was doing well for us. So when I left we had turned the corner and I think we had in the process avoided what I would have viewed as irreparable harm to the center core of the institution. I regard that as a major achievement, that when I left, despite having significantly having fewer dollars than when I came, we preserved the, I think, the essence of what the University of Montana was all about. Budgets have gone up since then, but I think President Dennison could tell you, if you deflate those for the cost of living, that University of Montana has even less money to spend in real terms now than it did then. What the U of M has done since then that I really applaud is to bring in lots more money for research, for public service activities and has been really I think very successful in garnering gifts from donors and that's where the University is essentially balancing the budget and that is a very good development.

DB: Did you have a role in making some of that happen? I've certainly read that in your time here you did promote some private funding for the University.

JK: Yes, well the largest single gift I procured during my time here was a million dollars, which was really big money back then, for a chair in Japanese language and literature. And then we had several other fairly gifts. One of the things that I also had to focus on when I got here was finishing off the funding of Washington-Grizzly Stadium. It opened during my first fall here, the first two games were still down at Dornblaser. I'll always remember those.

DB: Why is that? Sorry.

JK: It's much better now than it was then, but Dornblaser was, to be very honest, rather dumpy and I'll always remember my wife saying, where's the women's bathroom? And somebody pointed about 50 yards away and there was this long line of women lining up outside a women's bathroom and it was snowing. I could go on and on but it was not the kind of scenario that we see at Washington-Grizzly stadium these days. But we had to finish off the funding of that and so I had to try to go out and raise some additional dollars and to find some funds to furnish several of the boxes and do some things that I guess are pretty much taken for granted now but were great struggles then. I remember when I came, or I had been appointed president but just before I came, I was receiving letters and telephone calls from people saying that I should just let the shell sit there and not finish it. That it was a bad idea and the University would never pay for it and Grizzly football was no good anyway.

DB: Who was advocating that?

JK: Well I won't mention names but I will say that there were some prominent people in the city, some alums and other individuals who said, "You know this a mistake; the University isn't going to be able to pay this off, your teams aren't much good, you're not gonna be able to fill it, and this is bad stuff."

DB: But that certainly has not come to pass.

JK: No, and I might say that, you know, I had a hand—I won't take credit for it completely, but I had a hand in hiring Don Reed and I can remember him talking about Harley Lewis, who was the athletic director then, and commenting to him that we might lose some games under Don Reed but they were gonna be exciting. I was confident that we were gonna score a lot of points and that people would enjoy coming to the game and besides he was an awfully nice guy and that I though this was the kind of circumstance that could revive Grizzly football. An the first year we went above 500 and scored lots of points and thereafter we really began to smoke our opponents and I still have the distinction, I guess, of being the only modern University of Montana President who'd never lost to the Bobcats. [Laughs]

DB: I haven't read that statistic before.

JK: Of course, I was only here four years, but the streak went 16, I think, but it started when I was president. And that's always a game that's good fun and something we enjoy all the more when we beat the Bobcats.

DB: Right. So I want to go back to one of the first things you talked about, which was your bus tours to promote the University. And you had come for, clearly, bigger schools. You know I don't remember the population of Rhode Island when you were there, but Ball State would have been over twice the student population as here. Was that something that was unique to the University of Montana, unique that you started and was that perhaps possible only because you were at a small institution in more rural less-populated state? I mean could you go out on a bus in a Midwestern or eastern state and hope to have any success approaching towns like that?

JK: I copied the bus tour idea from the University of Georgia, which did it only a couple of times, and they did it under a different context. They thought that their institution was losing touch with their state and they took their new faculty hires out each fall, the first year faculty members, on a bus and said, we want you to see Georgia and in the process reach out and talk to some people. I said, you know I think that would work in Montana. But in doing it up in Montana we don't want just first-year faculty members. In fact we want some our very best faculty members our there. The people who are really the best lecturers and the most exciting researchers and we want to put them on a bus and really give Montana a taste. And we also want some people on the bus that can talk to the people at the local newspaper and to the local attorneys and to the business people and the bankers and you name it.

DB: So who went with you? Recall some of those folks.

JK: Well gee, it was a revolving cast, but there were some people who went literally every year and you want to get some names you ought to call Bill Johnston because he was certainly

involved in a lot of those and I think it was successful. I mean we tracked admission applications in the places that we went to and found that they went up and increased our yield rate. It increased the number of alumni contributions because if you're going out to Malta or someplace and they haven't seen the U of M for years and you show up, all of the sudden the Grizzlies come out of the framework and they're proud to be there. They're really pleased to see their institution. Some times of course they had complaints, but that was also one of the things that we tried to do, to listen to people tell us about what they thought we should be doing and what things they thought we weren't doing quite so well, as well as the things they thought we did rather well.

DB: What were some of the complaints you remember that seemed to be common at the time, from the people in the state, Missoulians, students, faculty?

JK: Well, I do remember being out in eastern Montana in a city that I won't mention, and a legislator came up to me, and at that time I had a beard, although pretty well-kept I would say, and he looked at said, "You've got a beard," and I said, "yes," and he said, "The last person who came out here from that place, meaning the University of Montana, had a beard, was trying to get involved against the war in Vietnam." Then he went off on a tirade. There had been a University of Montana professor who had appeared on an anti-aircraft platform in Hanoi with Jane Fonda and that's sort of true but sort of false. There are some elements of truth to that, but anyway, he felt it was true and lots of other people did. And basically what he said is "your institution is full of left-wing hippies and you name it." And one of my functions, of course, was not to deny the diversity of the institution, but also to point out that there were lots of other things going on there and that we had the largest school of business in the state and lots of other sorts of things that he would find attractive and that he could be proud of. And also, to get in to very delicate discussions about the nature of academic freedom. It was also, though, an opportunity for me to be out there and talk to people who otherwise simply tended to bubble over in their frustration, but when someone came out and actually talked to them that was really very helpful. Because the things they were talking about realistically had happened in the '60s and this was 1986 or 1987 but they had long memories. So that was one kind of complaint that I would receive. I'd also receive complaints from time to time from parents who would say, "My son or daughter is over there and this or that happened to them or they had a bad professor or it's too expensive or their roommate in the dorm is too loud or you allow too much drinking or whatever." Occasionally they'd tell me the toilet on the eighth floor of Aber was stopped up or something like that and I'd say, "Okay," and I'd write those things down and we'd try to get those sorts of things taken care of. We were an open forum for problems but the truth is that people were so astonished to see us there that for the most part we simply received compliments and people were just very pleased that we were taking the time to go out there, talk with them and to bring the University to them.

DB: Now you sound, you know, a president being told about stopped up toilets or a single student's poor grade and your involvement in sports on campus, very hands-on involvement, your interest in academics, volunteering at this point to teach, being interested more in student

grades and academic standards then, and not cutting from academics but cutting from administration. You know many lay opinions would be that you sound like a very hands-on President, if that term can apply, and I wonder if that's something, you think is just part of the force of your personality or was that a model that you had been following and brought to the University, similar to the model of the bus tours that came from Georgia?

JK: Well, I think I was hands-on in lots of ways, but in other ways not so. I think the essence of good administration ultimately is that you delegate responsibility but demand accountability. I didn't try to go into the business affairs area and tell them how to balance their books and what their financial standards would be. And similarly, while I'd have lots of discussions with the vice president for academic affairs, the provost, about academic things ultimately I had to take his judgment and trust his judgment. I think the role for president in circumstances like this is to provoke discussions, to get people to think critically about issues, to focus people's attention in an institutional sense on what some of the major tasks are in front of us. So when I was talking about grading standards I didn't go to Professor Jones and say, "Hey, Jones, change your grades." I never did anything like that, and I absolutely never went to a specific professor and said, "Change your grades." But what I was trying to do was get all the professors together collectively to think about, why are we doing what we're doing, and are we grading appropriately, and what should our standards be, given the nature of the students who come to us. So my hands-on was more a matter of inserting issues in front of people or focusing attention and I didn't tell the Admissions people to go to a certain high school in Spokane or go to Kalispell, but what I was trying to do was to engender a sense of excitement and movement and momentum that they could say, "Gee, you know there's some energy here and there's some things we can do and that we really do have a good institution here that we can be proud of. We ought to be out there talking about it."

DB: So I've read about two different controversial things that happened while you were here that you had to deal with. One, being the issue of racism on campus, and the other reflecting back when you mentioned the fiscal problems of the University and how some of those were tied to a dying extractive industry and a change in the economics of Montana as a whole. And that you had to deal with some issues about environmentalists on campus in opposition with the Forestry School or extractive industries. Could you talk a little bit about those two situations?

JK: Let me talk first about the School of Forestry and the extractive industries and the like. Then and now Montana seems to be almost split down the middle between individuals who would like to use, exploit and make a livelihood from our natural resources, and that's been true for a long time and always will be because the natural resources are here, whether we're talking about wood or copper or whatever. Then there are lots of individuals who are in Montana who say, "Don't touch that; the reason I'm here is because of the natural beauty and I don't care if it means we don't have as many jobs and our incomes are lower I want to preserve and protect those kind of things."

If anything, the drift in terms of the state's population over time, and economically speaking as well, has been in the direction of the second group. More and more, the individuals who come into the state these days, especially those who come from California, or some place like that, are interested in protecting and preserving. I see that even here in Western Montana which politically, maybe, has become a little more conservative over time. But I can tell you relative to 1986, the conservation and environmental strain is much stronger now than it was 20 years ago. These people may be conservative politically but they want to preserve and protect the environment and I recently saw that in the issues involving the Rocky Mountain Front, where some fairly conservative political people said to the Bush administration, "Don't touch that," and that division has always been there.

Well, one of the front lines of this is the School of Forestry: what should the School of Forestry be all about? Should it be about utilizing those resources for business purposes or should be more directed at preserving and protecting and talking about sustainable kinds of things? And when I was president I had representatives of industry and some legislators and other individuals and employees and citizens of towns that were dependent upon the business aspects of this, really flogged me. To say, "If you don't support what we're talking about, you're anti-business and we're gonna lose our jobs. And the University shouldn't be talking about some of the things you're talking about in terms of preserving and protecting and looking at the environmental costs." There have been a couple of academic programs at the University over time that have always attracted a lot of attention in that regard and even in just the last few years. Then there were a pretty large number of individuals who took the opposite tack and said, "Don't bow to the corporate interests, to the people who simply are interested in profits. You need to be thinking longer term about what western Montana is gonna be like 20 and 30 and 100 years from now and what we're gonna be giving our children, and these people are shortsighted." And that contest has been constant. Again, though my perception is, throughout Montana as a whole and especially Western Montana, is that there has been a movement, not a huge movement, but a movement in favor of the environmentalists. I think they are winning the day, at least partially because the wood products industry continues to decline in size. It's just not as important as it used to be. And then also there have been some fairly notable environmental problems that have arisen, such as in Libby, and put some of those people a bit on the defensive.

DB: Where did students fall and faculty in terms of that movement, the conservationists?

JK: A massive number of students, a massive majority were environmentalists and it's particularly true if you look at the students who come to the U of M from out-of-state. For the most part they are not coming here to cut down tree, they are coming here to save trees. I'm reminded that while I was here there were several circumstances where U of M students were involved in chaining themselves to trees and putting spikes in trees, that in the latter case, the spikes could be very dangerous to somebody who goes into that tree with a saw because it's gonna fly in all directions and you could get killed pretty easily and some people did get injured from that. So there was a real contest on campus at that time between points of view, not so

much in terms of faculty and students, but in terms of these outside influences trying to determine what it is that we were doing. The Environmental Studies program then and now was a target for some legislators.

And you asked me something about—

DB: I asked about the issue of racism on campus that you faced.

JK: Oh, yes, yes. Well Montana, outside of Montana, when I came—and I think it's still true today—had a reputation of being a place where there were racists, skinheads, people who were intolerant of nearly anybody who wasn't a light Caucasian, and I really didn't find that to be true. I think that particular image was overdrawn then and now. Although, I spend about half my life in Virginia these days and lots of Virginians still have that attitude. Of course there have been a few things, whether it's the guy out at Lincoln, the Unabomber, or the Freemen that perhaps have encouraged that, because for some people that's the only Montana, virtually, they know about. Well long story short, though, I felt that the University should stand for the kinds of things that were outlined in the Montana Constitution concerning civil and human rights and for the traditional values of this university that are stated in the catalog. Thus, when individuals came on the campus who were spouting racist things, I wanted to make sure that the University took a stance against that even while we defended their right to say these things. That's a thin line to walk or at least a difficult one because some people were of the view that we shouldn't allow those people to speak at all. I said, "No, they have the right to say what they wish but we also have the right and perhaps even the duty to make it clear that's not what this University stands for and that's not what we stand for and it's not what I as the President stand for." And so harkening back to my own background in Civil Rights times, I said, "We will organize a march." So we organized what 30 or 40 years ago would have been called a civil rights march, and we got signs and did other kinds of things, and some bullhorns and some microphones and we organized a march that started on campus and went through downtown Missoula and came back. Basically what we did is provide people of good will the opportunity to make themselves heard and to make it clear to the racists, who were from Idaho anyway, that this wasn't going to be a very fertile ground for them. And shortly they disappeared because we had essentially mobilized public opinion in a fashion that made it clear that no, this isn't going to be a very good place for us to be. And I found that fine. In fact that's what I really hoped would occur but I did want to assert their First Amendment rights and their rights to say unpopular things. The Montana Constitution, I think, makes it clear that Montanans have the right to espouse any view, providing they're not, for example, yelling "fire" in a crowded theater. And there are a few minor exceptions, but unpopular political views, however obnoxious, are permissible in Montana. And just in the last couple of months we've seen the governor grant pardons to individuals who espoused unpopular views back in World War One. And in no way do I want to equate opposition to World War One with racism, but both are protected by the First Amendment, or at least statements are, providing they don't physically attack someone.

DB: So tell me what your toughest decision or action at the University was in your time here, if you can single one out.

JK: Well I think the toughest decisions were those involving retrenchment and cutting programs and people. We don't, then or now, pay individuals a lot of money. When some of these people lost their jobs, there weren't jobs immediately sitting around ready for them to take and that was really a wrenching situation for them. And, I can tell you I lost lots of sleep over those kinds of decisions. But intellectually I could justify them very easily and say, "Yes, logically this is what we should do," and that really is sensible. But when it comes down to it essentially forcing somebody to move or placing them on the unemployment lines, that is tough. So those were the most difficult things I had to deal with.

DB: How about most enjoyable or lasting memory you have from your time here?

JK: My most enjoyable memories are first on the academic side, teaching Montana students. I always taught at least one class a year and I remember one of the first classes I taught here I had an MD in the class who went on to get an MBA and now I think is pursuing a doctorate in mathematics. Dr. Stephen Johnson is his name; he's still in Missoula. What a delight to have a student like that in class, but it's a special delight also to have Montana students who come from places like literally, Two Dot or wherever, and I have the opportunity, and other U of M faculty members have the opportunity to open intellectual doors for them. I mean they're smart people and they are ready to go and they're excited and all I have to do is sort of direct them and push them in the right directions and take advantage of that excitement. That is a pretty neat experience. Non-academically I'd have to say the Grizzly football team. That was fun. I mean all of a sudden we had something around which nearly everybody could unite. And we began to win games and people began to attend those games and, you know, we went off to the Final Four and did some things that now have become a tradition or almost expected. But I'll tell you in the late 1980s nobody expected those things, it was very new and so people were absolutely thrilled by what had occurred there.

DB: Well, President Koch, thank you for answering my questions here. Is there anything else you would like to finish up with or that we haven't gotten to that you would like to have on the record?

JK: I don't think so.

DB: All right, thank you.

[End of Interview]