

"Service Is the Most Gratifying Work": Governor George A. "Bud" Sinner

Edited by Robert Jansen

This article is based on a series of oral history interviews with George Sinner conducted by Robert Jansen, who served as Governor Sinner's press secretary during his administration. Jane Sinner's account is excerpted from a longer version she prepared for family members and friends. Brief editorial explanations, in italics, are scattered throughout the text. All punctuation is that of the publications editor.

The space limitations inherent in an article for North Dakota History have required that only portions of the full interviews can be introduced here. A complete version of this memoir will soon be published by the Dakota Institute Press.

This is not intended to be a balanced historical account, but rather a personal perspective based on the narrators' own words. Although space constraints permit publication of only a portion of the interviews, we hope that the "voice" and personality of the narrators will be apparent.

Governor George Sinner greets the crowd at his first Inaugural Ball on January 9, 1985.

Courtesy of The Bismarck Tribune

My Ancestors Arrive

John B. Sinner, my grandfather, came from Luxembourg in the early 1880s. He worked first as a saloon bouncer and then was employed on Bonanza farms before later renting, and ultimately purchasing, land. In 1889 he married Josephine Ries, who had also come from Luxembourg. They had twelve children.

My father, Albert Francis Sinner, was an extremely bright man who overcame tons of debt and survived the Depression. He was able to save the farm when Governor Bill Langer declared a moratorium on farm loan foreclosures. Getting through that era made my father tightly wound.

My grandfather had become ill and asked my father to take over management of the family farm, which includes some of the original Dalrymple Bonanza operation. Dad had a couple sessions of a special accounting course at St. John's University in Minnesota. Other than that, his education was just high school. He loved bookkeeping and he was good at it. He gave up his job as a bookkeeper at the Ford Motor Company in Fargo when his father got sick and then soon died. That was in 1920, when Dad was only twenty-one. He was the third oldest among ten siblings but the heir apparent to the responsibilities of family finance. In the end Dad was able to get one of them through medical school and two through pharmacy; two became nurses and there were also business majors.

The Wilds on my mother's side were Germans who came through Canada, from Edmonton. Katherine Augusta Wild, who grew up to be my mother, had only a high school education but she was a tender, sensitive, wonderful teacher. My mother was an absolute saint—a Wild saint; after her marriage she became a Wild Sinner.

My mother was one of those wonderfully sensitive, loving, always understanding, always attentive people who worked unbelievably hard. Patience was clearly her strength. Even in spite of her incredible busyness and total absence of vacations, my mother never complained. She was long-suffering in fulfilling her obligations as she saw them to her family, her marriage, and her station in life. In those early years we often had eight to ten or more

men who she fed morning, noon and night. She usually had someone there to help her, but it was a nightmarish amount of work. They also had to clean the bunkhouses. She had a large garden and canned much of our produce. She saved all the leftovers from the meals and would never throw anything away. My mother taught us softness. Dad's influence on us was confidence. The kindness and generosity of my parents is so memorable—it must have had an effect on me.

My father and I had an interesting relationship. He supported Democrat Franklin Roosevelt two terms, but after the early 1940s became very conservative, kind of led by my uncle Leo, who was an activist in the John Birch Society. By the time I got involved in politics Dad was already himself a Bircher. Dad tended to get exercised about economics and social issues, in the later years concerned that the liberals would over-correct. He found my politics difficult.

Dad had been a close friend of Senator Bill Langer; in fact, I remember Langer being at our home quite a bit when we were little. I don't know how Dad felt or voted during the war years, but later on he became upset with government programs during the Depression like the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. He began to get some financial security in the later forties accompanied by the fact that he struggled



Sinner family photograph by George Tise of Casselton. Front row, left to right: Katherine, Jeanne, and Albert. Second row, Dick, Bill, Bud. Unless otherwise indicated, photographs are courtesy of George and Jane Sinner.

so damn hard to get out of debt—maybe that engendered a little greater concern that his money might be taken in social programs that he thought were doubtful.

I was a child of the Great Depression, the youngest of four children born to a couple who had married quite late in life. In fact, my mother was over thirty-five when she was married and approaching forty-five when I was born. [My oldest brother,] Bill, was born January 8, 1922, and then Dick on October 12, 1925. Jeanne was born March 5, 1927, and finally I came along May 29, 1928. It was my mother who started calling me “Buddy” the day I was born. I’ve been Bud since I was an infant. *Bud*. That’s what I prefer.

Life was difficult even in the rich Red River Valley. The Depression had taken a heavy toll and debt was everywhere. The struggle to keep from losing the farm was an omnipresent and pervasive threat. So, we grew up to be frugal. Although we didn’t engage in a lot of family activities, we did play cards at home. Whist was the family card game. Also some euchre in the early years, but it was mostly whist that I remember. We didn’t play that often, though, and Mother played more than Dad did. Despite all that she did, she was the one that attended to us. That was the way it was—the old-school way—the father was the provider, the stern one who ruled the roost.

Christmas was always a pretty big deal. Those were lean years, and I have one memory of coming down and walking into the living room and there was a new bicycle with lights and all the gear on it, fancy things. Extravagant gifts were unusual; we had one bike for the four of us. Those were times not at all like today. We treasured things more than kids do now.

Then the war overwhelmed our lives. Gas, tires, and sugar

were rationed, and there weren’t a lot of things going on. One of the memories I have of that time is of Jeanne and I often sitting together at the piano—she would play popular songs and we would sing together. She could carry a tune; whether I could or not is debatable. My dad’s office was right behind the wall where we sat at the piano. Even though he was a pretty irascible man, I remember hearing him humming and singing along in the other room while the two of us sang and played the piano.

I started running all the equipment on the farm early. I operated the bale sweep, the bucket—a great big wide thing that you pushed with a tractor, and it had a lift on it. The back end ran about ten inches off the ground and the front would drop down when you wanted to pick up a shock of bundles. Binders bundled the cut grain. We’d pile the bundles by hand in shocks that would sit with the kernels up and the straw down so the grain would not lay on the ground. When they were dry enough we’d pick them up and haul them to the thresher. The bucket had replaced the old hay wagons, the bundle wagons, in the early days. It was a dirty, tough job, but I was good at it. There were two guys—spike pitchers—shoving all of that into the machine, the thresher. We had to be careful we didn’t drive up and have them not see us and get pushed into the machine. I never did hit a spike pitcher.

I also ran a boom and shovel that mounted on the back of the tractor. It had foot and hand controls that you had to coordinate. I remember being young and doing that and being good at it. I was well coordinated. It was a dirty job. I’ve often marveled that I didn’t suffer lung damage from all the dust. When I’d get home at night I’d be as black as the ace of spades because of all the dirt. Then we started



The Sinner children haul manure near the original farmstead, 1935. From left are Jeanne, Bud, Bill, and Dick.

getting combines later on and that was dirty work too because there were no good cabs in those days. It's a wonder we don't all have emphysema from the dirt we ate.

Our parents emphasized school. I was fairly high up in the rankings, but I wasn't the brightest of the bright in my class of thirty-five or forty kids. My grades at Lincoln High School in Casselton were probably B average—a few C's or D's and probably not a lot of A's. Math was always easy for me, though. In my freshman year I helped the senior girls with their math.

I was a relatively good athlete and we started sandlot sports early. The kids from the two ends of town—the north side against the south side—made up games we played Saturday mornings. Then we had baseball and football from my earliest years in school. I remember several black eyes. My close friend and future brother-in-law Ellery gave me one of them in football—I tried to tackle him and got his knee in my face. Ellery and I were closer than brothers since we were six. We started school the same year and became wonderful friends, even in grade school. Ellery played all the sports. I think he still owns the state football scoring record.

Dad didn't appreciate the love my brothers and I had for baseball but he tolerated it. He liked to play a *little* baseball with us, but it was pretty rare. Casselton had a pretty good team and sometimes we wanted to sneak away and join them on Sunday when we had a major game. Dad complained about it sometimes if we had a game during harvest when we should be out driving a combine, but I don't remember that he ever interfered. I was a good baseball player—a pretty fair shortstop—and in demand with the local team. Some people suggested I try for the majors, but I wasn't interested and didn't consider it.

Playing baseball was one of those fun times in my life. Later, I played baseball with my own kids. A lot of them have also been good hitters. Dad didn't come to my baseball games. It was such a different time and life was so full then but he probably regretted not seeing me play. I remember him attending only one athletic event I was in, a football game at St. John's. Those were different years and a lot of people, including my father, were confused about whether we should really work or play sports on Sunday.



Albert Francis Sinner is seen hunting with his sons Dick and Bud.

For our parents, religion was more Christianity than Catholic Church. Dad rarely talked about controversies in the church; he wasn't trained in the arguments or the issues. Nor did Mother, but they were profoundly Christian.

Both my brothers were gone to St. John's during some of [my] early years, and I followed them. [My brother Bill] had taken business courses at St. John's but had to come home in 1943 after three years there because it was so difficult to get help with the farm. Dick went to St. John's Preparatory School in 1941, his sophomore year of high school. I was in eighth grade then. He graduated as valedictorian and president of the school council. After two years as a seminarian at St. John's, Dick transferred to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He was ordained a priest in 1952 at Fargo's St. Mary's Cathedral. In the early years of his priesthood Dick was at the forefront of the movement away from Latin. In fact, long before it

was officially allowed he started saying Mass in English. To his credit, he was constantly in trouble with the bishop—I learned to respect him for that early.

I was an altar boy, not particularly pious, but not causing a lot of trouble either. I followed Dick to St. John's Prep School my junior year of high school and did fairly well in all my studies.

I went to the seminary at St. John's University probably because even then I was sort of obsessed with helping others. My mother and father emphasized that service is the most gratifying work there is. My dad was a man who didn't tolerate fools easily; he expected honesty from other people and was absolutely, totally intolerant of compromises in that regard. He had absolutely no patience with deceitful people or deceit by itself. Both of my parents honored the truth with a passion. If you didn't tell the truth, it would be found out anyway.

My time at St. John's University gave me an intense commitment to public service, to working for and with other people to improve society and life of people. I grew interested in the inequality of racial minorities in this country and developed a strong desire to make society and our communities better places for people to live.

I was in the seminary for six years and actually wore a



George Sinner played on the St. John's Preparatory School football team in 1942 and 1943. In the back row is Tom Sinner, fourth from left, and Bud Sinner (81), fourth from right.

Roman collar and cassock for two years. You didn't get to be a sub-deacon or a deacon, which are the only names I can remember, until your second-to-last year, when your sub-deaconate came. In 1950 I got my Bachelor of Arts degree and went home for the summer before starting my graduate work. But the approach of this even more major commitment spurred me to take a serious look at the growing doubts that I'd been having about going on to the priesthood. Through the years I wondered whether I could deal with celibacy, but I had just put it out of my mind and kept on going.

I had been at a liturgical conference in Missouri and stopped to visit relatives in Illinois. While there I met a young woman, Rosie Fuesting, a niece of my aunt, on the other side of the relationship. We became pretty good friends in four or five days. She attended Webster College, where my future wife Janie went.

After I had met Rosie Fuesting I knew I didn't want to go on into the priesthood, but I was having a hard time finalizing the decision. So I went to a Trappist monastery outside Dubuque. I was there for a week, praying and thinking and being counseled by an old priest whose family name was Smith. At the end of the week I remember sitting in his office with my packed bags beside me. He told me to go home and forget about the priesthood, and that God would give me other signals if I should be a priest. He encouraged me to remember one truth, that whatever happens to me in my life, even things I choose sinfully, God will make it work for my good.

St. John's Prep School was associated with St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Founded by the Benedictines in 1857, St. John's is one of the oldest colleges in the Midwest. Sinner was considered a seminarian, although to become a priest, a graduate degree in theology and taking higher

orders would be required.

Steps along the path to priesthood include the offices of sub-deacon (which Sinner became as a college junior), deacon, and priest. After ordination, a sub-deacon assisted the deacon or the priest with Mass and was permitted to wear a cassock and collar, as Sinner mentions. Pope Paul VI abolished the office of sub-deacon in 1972, decreeing that these duties could be assigned to lay Catholics, not just reserved for candidates for higher orders. Ordained deacons and priests still serve the Catholic Church.

It turned out that Rosie was almost engaged to, believe it or not, another ex-seminarian, from Notre Dame, who became one of the foremost CPAs in the nation. She finally decided she wanted to stay with him so she told Janie that I was hers, something to that effect. Janie and I had a couple dates and started exchanging letters. It wasn't too long and we decided to get married.

After finishing my philosophy degree and deciding against pursuing the priesthood I was eligible for the Korean War draft. On September 20, 1950, I enlisted in the Air National Guard 178th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, at Hector Airport in Fargo. I joined along with a large contingent of people from the Casselton area, including my cousin Tom Sinner and Ellery Bresnahan, who would later become my brother in law. I was called to active duty status in April of 1951 for the Korean War and assigned to the Strategic Air Command at Moody AFB, Georgia. Our unit was later transferred to George AFB, California.

I ended up with the rank of airman first class. I was supposed to go to officers training camp but I had no interest in it. I was in the motor pool when activated, then went into headquarters squadron, did secretarial-type duties, then was in medics for awhile. Finally I was asked to take over the Information and Education section, which was officially headed by an officer, usually a clueless second lieutenant.

More than anything the Air Force gave me an independence that seems to accompany an awful lot of veterans who go away as young kids and suddenly have found there's a mystique of respect and maturity that is accepted and expected that you don't have otherwise. You can see it in some of the politicians. You can see it in John McCain and you can see it in John Kerry. Lot of people have it and get it from different sources. I felt that maturity, the confidence to say *I disagree* and not be uncomfortable doing it.

Ellery and my sister Jeanne had been married four or five months before we were called up. Of course, the highlight of my military time was when I got married to Janie; we had our first child, Bob, while I was on active duty.

When the decision was made to get out of Korea, they started releasing us guardsmen and reservists. I got home a month ahead of Ellery and started right away at the farm once [Janie, Bob, and I] got settled. But we didn't know what I was going to do, how it was going to work out. Then when Ellery got here, he had absolutely no farming background. His father was a grain dealer. He decided he would help out on our farm until he got his feet on the ground and figure out what he was going to do in life. One day in 1953 Bill said to us that he would like it if we would join a farm partnership with him and stay together in Casselton. We were so grateful we couldn't say yes fast enough. I have had two absolutely wonderful partners, my older brother Bill and my brother-in-law Ellery Bresnahan.

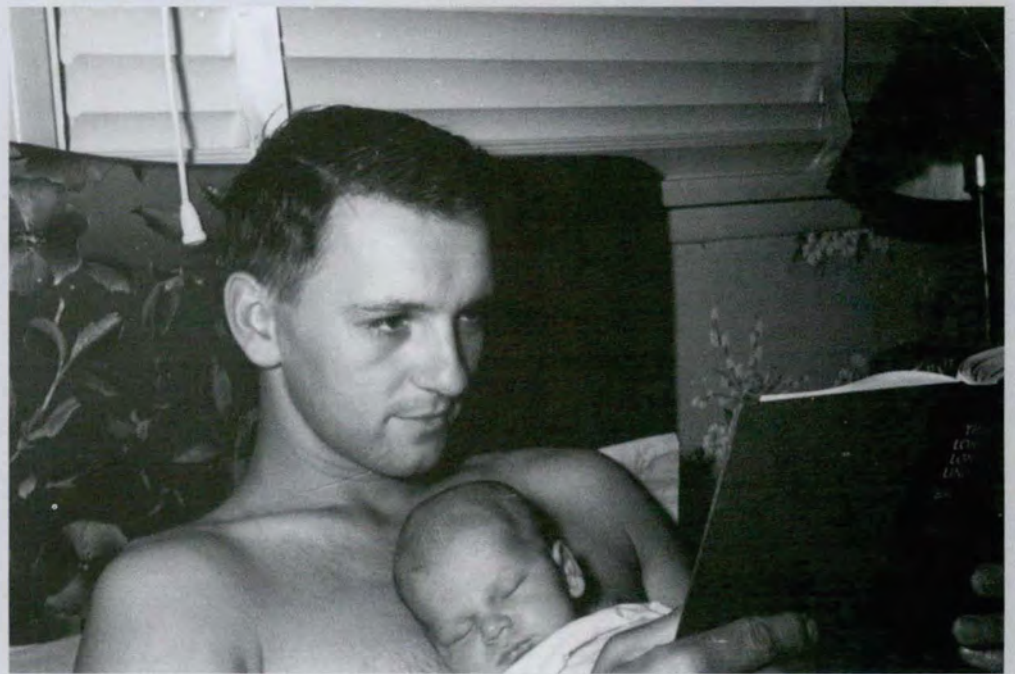
Bill and his wife Jane had twelve children—five boys and seven girls. Ellery and Jeanne had eight. And we had ten. So there were thirty children in this mix.

Our children came fast, and life was pretty crazy busy. Lots of things were taking place at the farm, and changes were happening regularly. There was too much going on, and I wasn't always a good father when I should have been. Janie filled in a lot of the blanks for me. She was extremely attentive to birthdays and all the things that were highlights in their lives. Janie has an incredible mind. People used to say she was the most organized mother they had ever seen. Here she was with all the children and she had to organize clothing . . . I don't know to this day how she did it.

My time with the kids in the summer was probably the most enjoyable part of my life. Always



George Sinner and Elizabeth Jane Baute were married on August 10, 1951.



*Sinner reads noted Catholic activist Dorothy Day's autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, with his son Bob asleep on his chest.*



A Simmer family picnic in 1964.

smart remarks, always laughter, on occasion one of the older kids hung over. We poured cement in feed lots, we threw bales, and it was a fun time for all of us. Plus, there was a little teaching along the way. But there wasn't a lot of time; I couldn't get to all of these kids' athletic events. I went to basketball games but I remember missing football games because I couldn't get away. Our oldest boy, Bob, got hurt, broke a collarbone. It happened out of town, and I was not there. I always felt badly about that. We were not rich but had enough income to live a happy life, however busy.

We used to put up about 25,000 bales of straw. So we'd be out loading bales, sometimes two trailers in tandem behind the tractor. One of the boys had been out partying the night before and he'd been half asleep all morning. We had a double load and he was asleep on top of the bales on the back trailer. I was driving the tractor and probably going too fast and the back section of the load fell off. I didn't see it until I turned the corner and looked behind me and here comes my nephew and behind him is a big pile of bales. It was riotously funny and of course the rest of the guys just gave him the what-for of shaking the load loose. There were

lots of episodes like that.

One time son George backed a combine out of a Quonset and rammed into a utility pole, bending the back of the combine pretty severely. My brother Bill, who was under a lot of pressure and a bit short tempered, came running out: "What the hell are ya doing . . . look what ya did!" As Bill continued to express his frustration, George said to him, "I did it on purpose, of course." Later on it became kind of a standard line—I *did it on purpose, of course*—whenever some accident happened. It became of source of a lot of laughter, and also some learning.

The farm also gave me an ability to turn around and say *oh-oh, I've made a mistake*, and stop it. That was part of a philosophical background, my belief that somehow things would work out, even mistakes would be all right if you weren't afraid to make the judgment in the first place and not afraid to change it.

Life was truly good in those years on the farm, nothing I ever left easily. In fact, when I decided to run for governor, the sons of all three of us were getting in position to operate the place and it was time for one or two or all three of us to

My Beginning in Politics



The Sinner family helps George campaign for the U.S. Congress in 1964.

get out of the way. I was free to campaign.

My own earliest foray into the political scene was very weird. Janie and I remember a bit differently the specifics of how it actually happened. I recall that sometime in 1962 a man named Johnny Murphy, a friend of Janie's and mine, came to see her one day and asked whether we were going to the [Democratic Party] district convention. She said probably not, but he had an idea and asked Janie about seeing if the party would draft me to run for the legislature. She thought that sounded like a good idea, which was crazy because we had nine kids already. Janie conspired with him; I didn't know about it and wasn't at the convention but was drafted. The incumbent senator, John Yunker from Durbin, wasn't running for re-election. The district apparently wanted competition to generate interest, so the delegates endorsed two candidates—me and a former House member, Milton Myhre of Kindred. They also endorsed three people for two House seats. I came out ahead in the June primary election and then won the Senate seat in November when I beat a

Republican incumbent House member who was running for the Senate seat.

I was thirty-three years old at the time of the district convention and don't recall now whether I had even attended one before that. I did a lot of door-to-door campaigning and liked it. People were good to me. That campaign was probably my first significant organizational work—winning the election was a surprise.

In 1964, during a moment of weakness, I agreed to run for the United States Congress. *In 1963 Mark Andrews was elected a member of the U.S. House of Representative from North Dakota's 1st Congressional District following the death of Hjalmar Nygaard. Andrews ran for reelection in 1964, and Sinner ran against him.* A stupid idea. I didn't win but was doing well, gaining rapidly on Mark Andrews, the sitting congressman. Even though my campaign had almost no money, Mark won by only about 6,300 votes. Just going around and talking about some of the national issues was gratifying—losing the race was OK.

Making Laws

In 1963 the North Dakota House and Senate were controlled by Republicans. In 1965 Democrats obtained control of the House, but not the Senate. The governor was a Democrat, William L. Guy. I was involved with huge issues in the 1963 and 1965 legislative sessions. Few legislators were eager to speak on the floor, so Senator Gail Hernett (R-Ashley), the committee chair, asked me to carry half the Industry, Business, and Labor Committee bills, even as a minority member. They weren't partisan bills at all; they were just concerns that people tried to address.

Some unusual things happened that first year. An effort developed on the House side to amend the anti-corporate farming law. I knew enough about it to realize the existing anti-corporate farming law had some bad effects, so I went over to the House and testified on behalf of an amendment that would have allowed small farmers to use the advantages of incorporating for their own operation. Can't remember details of the amendment but it caused consternation among some of the traditional supporters of the anti-corporate farming law.

Senator Lee Brooks (R-Fargo) sponsored the repeal of the food and liquor divorcement law and I testified for it. The antiquated law prohibited the sale of food where liquor was sold. Frank Knox of Fargo, an attorney who represented the hospitality industry, lined up a Lutheran bishop and a minister, among several others, to testify in favor of changing the law. The hearing was set for one o'clock in the Capitol's Large Hearing Room, now called the Brynhild Haugland Room. When this bishop and minister got there they saw hundreds of people, a packed house, so they told Frank they were backing out. He came and asked me to answer the opponents who quoted the Bible. I'd promised myself I wouldn't do that, but he said it was an exceptional case because they would be reciting scripture ad nauseum in there. After finally agreeing, I worked over the noon hour to put together three quotes from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament.

I was the last proponent of the bill to speak. I noted that everything can be abused, alcohol can be abused too, but it's not a bad thing, and if it's used properly it's a good thing. But people abuse clothing, they abuse cars, they abuse food. Then I offered some scriptural quotes that speak admirably about the use of alcoholic beverages. One of them was from Psalms, in which David praised God for giving us

wine to cheer the heart of man, and also, of course, there was the wedding feast of Canaan. The silence that fell over the room after my quoting scripture was deafening because a lot of people had their Bibles. Lee Brooks asked if there were any questions.

Judge Sathre was the spokesperson for the WCTU [Woman's Christian Temperance Union]. *P.O. Sathre was a former North Dakota Supreme Court justice.* He said everyone there knows that the wine that was spoken of in scripture was really grape juice, and that it was serious for me to be quoting these passages and telling everyone that these were really alcoholic beverages when all know they weren't, they were really grape juice. He made a sermonette out of his statement, but never asked a question. The ladies all clapped. When it got quiet I said, with all due respect I would defy him to quote a single scripture scholar to support that position. He got red in the face and said not one more word. That was being listened to all over the state, broadcast statewide.

Another bill that comes to mind from 1963 got my attention as I was sitting at my desk on the Senate floor and heard Al Doerr, who represented the pharmacies as their lobbyist, talking to the president of the pharmacists, whom I knew from having a couple uncles in that profession. They were discussing who they might get to sponsor their legislation because nobody would take it. I knew a little about it, had studied medical ethics in college, and didn't



State Senator George Sinner of Casselton.

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like what was going on with physicians taking over the pharmaceutical business. So I got up and went back and asked whether they would consider me taking their bill.

Al looked at me and said I was kind of young and pretty new. But I said I didn't have any other bills and would work hard on it. Their bill would simply require that the ownership of any pharmacy in North Dakota must be 51 percent pharmacists. They wanted to think about me as sponsor and said they would let me know the next morning.

When they asked which senators were most likely to oppose it, they named off about a dozen. I went to each of those twelve senators and asked them if they would cosign it and help me. To a man each of them said they couldn't sponsor the bill but they wouldn't oppose it.

So I introduced the bill and told the pharmacists to call the home-town pharmacists of every one of the committee members and tell them to call their senator and ask for their help with the bill. Then, if it panned out in committee, they should do the same things with the other senators on the floor. Finally we passed it in committee and then on the floor with few dissenting votes. The House did exactly the same thing, passed it with about ten dissenting votes.

I came to the Senate during a period where many people didn't care which party you were with, they wanted to solve the problems. Activity during those years was much more nonpartisan. Jud (Aloys) Wartner (R-Harvey) was one of those people to whom political party was not a big deal. He wasn't intent on embarrassing Democrats. I loved learning so much about so many issues and found there was continuous opportunity to add some input that was meaningful. I loved carrying bills on the floor and being able to do so and to say what to me seemed right, not what would serve the party.

The following session I co-sponsored twenty-seven bills with George Longmire, a Republican from Grand Forks who was a pretty darned progressive senator. One of the pieces of legislation that we handled was the bill to set up the legal provisions for regional mental health clinics, now known as regional human service centers.

The 1965 session of the legislature reapportioned the legislative districts and gerrymandered me out of my strong areas in Fargo and West Fargo. The new district was carefully redesigned to be hard-line Republican. I liked campaigning, but we knew it would be a tough re-election race in 1966. Ernie Pyle beat me by eighty votes.

The 1964 "one-man, one-vote" principal enunciated by the U.S. Supreme Court in Reynolds v. Sims changed legislative apportionment in North Dakota when, that same year, a federal district court ruled that North Dakota's apportionment provisions were unconstitutional—at that point legislative seats had not been reapportioned to reflect population changes since the 1931 session. Through the Legislative Council, a bipartisan subcommittee of legislators and prominent citizens proposed a reapportionment plan to the 1965 legislature, which

instead enacted a different apportionment plan that was again challenged in federal court; the court struck down the enacted plan and ruled that the earlier proposed plan must be adopted. This was the plan in effect at the time of the 1966 election. It remained in effect until 1973, when legislative districts were reapportioned in light of the 1970 census results.

Guiding Campuses

In January of 1967 Bill Guy asked me to be on the Board of Higher Education. When the legislative session came around I'd been defeated for re-election to the Senate and they were going to reject my nomination for the board. Finally I was approved by a 27-26 vote. Landslide Sinner!

A fire at the Ellendale college in January 1970 sparked a hot controversy. That winter blaze destroyed Carnegie Hall, the college's main facility, which contained classrooms and an auditorium. It also leveled the home economics building. Ellendale's enrollment had been declining. I moved that we not rebuild the college, and I got three other votes. Then we had to go to the legislature because we didn't have authority to close the college. We would have lost it if it hadn't been for two tough legislators, two Republican Appropriations Committee leaders, Bob Reimers and Clark Jenkins.

Following our board's decision not to rebuild, the legislature was petitioned by everyone from the Ellendale region to fund reconstruction. Had the legislature done that, we would have been bound by the state constitution to maintain the school. To their undying credit, Reimers and Jenkins stood strong beside me and the other members of the board who had made the decision to not fund it.

The Ellendale closure was an extremely difficult issue for the State Board of Higher Education because colleges in a town are like cornerstones; they mean so much to the community that losing one becomes a huge civic issue. One side effect of closing Ellendale was political when, in the summer of 1972, I lost the party's nomination for governor on the seventh ballot to Art Link. No votes or few votes came my way out of the six counties around Ellendale.

That episode turned out for everyone's betterment, I think, because Trinity Bible College bought that property for the price of one dollar, moved from Jamestown, and started classes in the fall of 1972.

The other big issue that year was UND's proposed expansion to a four-year medical school. Supporters had politicked with the doctors around the state. I just didn't believe it because a lot of people I knew said there's no way we even have enough patients so we can train doctors well enough about some of the sophisticated rare diseases they might run across. The case for the four-year program was sold on the basis of federal capitation grants. That meant the federal money was based on a per-student grant. I knew, and

everyone else knew, those grants weren't going to continue long and suddenly the state would be left with a hell of a budget item. The board voted four-to-three to approve the four-year program, and as chair I went before the Legislature to oppose it. It was approved and funded. Needless to say I wasn't elected board chair the following year, which was fine because I kind of asked for it.

In retrospect, the medical school has served the state pretty well. I wasn't wrong about the high cost because it is expensive, but I was wrong about the quality of the doctors because UND has produced a lot of very good physicians.

In 1972, after my time in the state Senate, I was elected a delegate to the state Constitutional Convention. That was a great learning experience, because there were so many things I saw from a constitutional point of view that constantly took me back to my experience in ethics class at St. John's. All the issues we talked about so frequently in terms of governmental ethics—the separation of church and state—kept coming up.

One episode at the Constitutional Convention became highly public. A problem that existed in the constitution then, and still does, was the provision that exempts from taxation principally property for the churches, but also for non-profits and fraternal organizations. Abuse was pretty widespread. Restaurants and other operations escaped taxation because they traveled under the guise of non-profits. In an attempt to provide for some discipline, the tax committee, which I was not on, voted to change the constitution so that it read that the legislature may grant tax exempt status to certain kinds of organizations, instead of the constitution mandating that they be exempt. The committee brought the measure into the convention and by the time the delegates—including several who were Catholic—got home that weekend, many of them were chastised from the pulpit by church leaders. Buckshot Hoffner was one who got blasted by the clergy back home.

I was angry about what happened. Back in Bismarck Monday, on a point of personal privilege, I got up and read a statement that I had handed to the press in which I said I was embarrassed to be a Catholic, that the convention had talked about a whole host of social issues including legal aid to the poor, capital punishment, corrections versus imprisonment and punishment, and we'd heard not one word from the churches. I said the convention takes one turn into their tax exempt status and they descend on us like wolves.

After losing the Senate seat I had taken kind of a hiatus from political activity, didn't even go to the political conventions a lot of times, concentrating instead on what I was doing in other areas. One area was from legislation we passed when I was in the Senate. The committee that had been established to begin the Southeast Region Mental Health and Retardation Clinic came to me and asked if I would chair the board of directors. Paul Beithon, a physician



After his term in the state Senate, Sinner concentrated on other activities, including farming. Here he inspects the soybean crop.

from Wahpeton, became board vice president and a close friend. He and I hired the staff. That was very difficult, but a whole new experience for me in hiring professionals and helping manage a sometimes difficult place to manage. It was a great board. Our efforts turned out pretty well.

The Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association was formed in 1926 to represent growers for the American Beet Sugar Company, later the American Crystal Sugar Company. In 1973 the association members purchased American Crystal and formed a cooperative. When the sugar beet growers were buying the company, I offered a motion at their annual meeting that I thought we should abandon the growers association because there was a danger if we kept it we would end up being a two-headed monster. A good friend of mine, Hank Schroeder, got up and moved that the issue be referred to a committee that would report back at the next convention. I ended up on the committee and became convinced in the discussion that maybe that was the wrong idea, that there were certain areas of grower activity—such as migrant labor and farm—that didn't lend themselves well to corporate handling. Grower production research, for example, was also probably better handled and understood by a growers association that concentrated on it.

The next meeting I became president of the growers association. The language outlining the structure was part

of the motion to adopt the new format and elect the new officers. Basically the old officers became the corporate officers. I was president for four years, nominated and elected by secret ballot of sixty-five growers. It was my first episode of designing a structure where nominations and voting for all officers and board members were by secret ballot. It was extremely reassuring to be elected that way; you knew darn well you better do your job because people trusted you. That system is still in place.

One of the first things that happened was a grower named Alvin Hanson proposed a significant change—that we set up a growers research plan and that we check off grower money and have a grower research board to define what needed to be researched. It became an almost classic research effort. *A check-off program diverts a small portion of the growers' payments to research or marketing efforts.* That research, generally speaking, has been given credit for reducing the cost of production in the Red River Valley, and for getting the growers to go to payments based on extractable sugar content (actual sugar produced), not tonnage. There were more facets to it, but it was an almost unparalleled example of research sponsored and paid for by farmers producing huge advances.

Later, during the years in Bismarck, I insisted on starting a lignite research council and I modeled it after the sugar beet growers. It involved professional researchers and members of labor organizations, but it was dominated by people who paid for it. I cited the sugar beet growers to the lignite industry and I tried to get other organizations to do the same thing, but not with any success. It was a new idea that still has not really caught on. It's a powerful tool. That was one of the great developments of that period.

As president of the beet growers I wanted to bring together leaders of the various commodity associations so they would talk to each other and understand the importance of research. In doing so, we realized the need for a new greenhouse complex at NDSU and were able to obtain the necessary federal and state funding. NDSU President Laurel Loftsgard wasn't aware of the project until it came to the 1979 Legislature, which changed higher education's building priorities to include the greenhouses.

That led to establishment of the Northern Crops Institute, which was approved by the 1981 legislature with the groundbreaking in December of that year. *NCI is a collaborative effort among the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Montana to support the promotion and market development of crops grown in the region.* I was the first chairman of the Northern Crops Council, NCI's governing board, and served on it for several years.

Then came my election to the state House of Representatives in 1982. The House was evenly divided among Republicans and Democrats in the 1983 session and I was chosen to chair the tax committee. It was the year that Chuck Goodman, the chair of the Senate committee, was very sick with diabetes, and his committee wasn't functioning well. We did tons of work on the House side. That great committee rewrote practically everything in the tax code. We got Governor Olson's budget out of trouble and the following year *U.S. News and World Report* ran a feature story on state tax structures and called North Dakota's the most fair, most even-handed tax structure in the United States. And we were all proud. The following year I ran for governor.



SHSND 0075-0733-1

Workers harvest sugar beets in Albert Sinner's field during the 1930s.



George Sinner delivers his acceptance speech for the nomination for governor at the 1984 North Dakota Democratic-NPL Convention. Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune.

Winning Campaign

Looking around, it seemed me there weren't a lot of people who knew all the facets of government that I did. Even my knowledge amounted to very little when you get down to it because there was such a huge volume of things to know, but I thought I understood education and the economic factors and the different things in the business community that were going on. That prompted my decision to run for governor. I didn't agonize over it and announced my candidacy early.

Along with Buckshot Hoffner and Lloyd Omdahl, Art Link and I ran for the party's gubernatorial nomination in 1984. Having four of us trying to get the nomination was a good thing. While we rarely traveled together, we all appeared at the same political meetings and district conventions.

After winning the party nomination, I didn't try to influence the convention on selection of my running mate. A substantial movement supported Ruth [Meiers], and Dick Backes was also a candidate; either would have been acceptable to me. Ruth became North Dakota's first woman lieutenant governor and was absolutely wonderful.

There's no way that I would ever have won had it not been for Chuck Fleming. He thinks well, he has a mind like a vacuum cleaner and he has the perseverance and drive to get things done. And he doesn't do it deviously—it's all right head on, all honest and above-board stuff, no dirt. Sometimes a chuckle or two; his sense of humor carries him. When he has something to say you listen. Who could ever equal Chuck Fleming when it came to organizing at that 1984 state convention? Chuck was the campaign's chief of staff and manager, as well as a friend and confidant. He had been in the legislature and had a vision that was hard to copy. He and Jim Fuglie were just tremendous helpers during the campaign. My kids, along with my wife, were also tremendously helpful. A woman named Carol Siegert worked for us, as did Bob Jansen.

I knew we were in the race but when the election came it was much to everyone else's amazement that I ended up victorious, with 55 percent of the vote. Before the night was over I received a call from Dick Rayl saying he wanted to help me. Dick was the CEO of the Mayrath Industries, an Illinois farm equipment manufacturing company (and was vice president of administration and finance at NDSU after



Ruth Meiers (1925–1987) was elected the first woman lieutenant governor of North Dakota in 1984. Born in Parshall, Meiers graduated from high school there and went on to complete a B.A. in social work at UND. Her father, Axel Olson, was a long-time member of the state legislature in North Dakota, and she grew up listening to political discussions with Usher Burdick and Bill Langer around the kitchen table. She married Glenn Meiers in 1950, and they raised four boys and a foster son on their ranch near Ross. Meiers also worked as a child welfare worker and was director of the Montrail County Welfare Board for a time.

First elected to the North Dakota House of Representatives in 1974, she served four terms before she was drafted by the Democratic-NPL women's caucus at the party's convention to be George Sinner's running mate in the 1984 election. In September 1986 Lieutenant Governor Meiers was diagnosed with brain and lung cancer, and she died March 19, 1987, at age sixty-one.

we left office). I told him to come on home as fast as he could. So, almost within days he was back and working on the budget, trying to sort what we could really afford as a state. He remained throughout the years there as one of my top advisors. Dick Rayl was always there with me—no one will adequately recount the work he did.

The second person I called on immediately was Joe Lamb. He was a lifelong friend and totally unselfish when it came to what he wanted out of anything. I asked him if he would come and help me with the transition into the office. Joe led the team that analyzed the qualifications of the sitting agency heads Governor Olson had in place. After Joe's transition team professionally analyzed sitting department heads of Governor Olson, we kept almost half of them. Joe and Dick provided the leadership. Governor Olson's appointees proved to be professional people who didn't have a political ax to grind so much as they saw themselves as having a job to do. For the most part, the people I kept were wonderful administrators and became great friends. I wanted them because they were professional staff, not necessarily because they were party loyalists or because they were even supportive of me with their dollars. In the end I think most of them—at least from what I heard from them—were grateful for the way we ran the government and we let them run the agencies; we didn't try to do it either by intimidation or too many suggestions.

Chuck Fleming and I argued some because I wouldn't

let him ask the people who worked for me for a political contribution. It seemed to me that can be the source of an awful lot of ridiculous intimidation that disrupts the relationship between a sitting administrator and staff. I didn't want to compromise their independence, and suffered for it because I was always short of money for campaigns, but I was willing to live with that because I was so pleased with the honest, aggressive involvement of the agency heads.

I knew enough to know there was a lot I didn't know. So I divided up the major responsibilities. I remember telling Chuck one day there were two areas where I would probably want to keep a leadership role—one was agriculture and the other was energy. In energy I had a lot to learn, but nobody else in the office was expert in that area either.

Joe Lamb was a banker and advised me on myriad things. I soon discovered that I had to have someone that I completely trusted as president at the Bank of North Dakota so I asked Joe to take that position. He worked to straighten out the bank by identifying some of the inaccuracies and where we were with loans that were bad. As a result we were able to get the state moved from a B grading with Moody's and Standard and Poors' grading agencies up to an A-minus. The state was then able to borrow at less cost to our citizens. We eventually set up a bonding agency for the state to help the smaller communities handle the technicalities of their bonding authority. The concept was developed by Joe and Dick, both of whom were constantly a source of good ideas.

We Had a Two-headed State

North Dakota then made headlines when we had two governors at the same time—or at least two of us who claimed to be the governor at the same time. But two heads of state aren't always better than one. Of concern with Olson supporters were appointments to fill two seats on the Supreme Court. Justice Paul Sand died on December 8 and Justice Vernon Pederson had announced his retirement effective January 7, 1985. Names of the nominees from the recommendation committee were about to come in, and the governor in office at that time would make the appointments.

Newly elected state officials had long taken office when the legislature convenes on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January during a ceremony established by Legislative action. In this case, that would have been January 8, 1985. But in December, Governor Olson's chief of staff, Bill Wright, acknowledged in news media reports that I could take office as soon as January 1 if I choose to. He also told Chuck Fleming that over lunch, as I recall. I have always believed that Bill and Allen Olson initially wanted me to take office early, but that they changed due to outside pressure.

But Chuck reported to me later that they said they can't give up the office. I knew something had to be going on, so I called Secretary of State Ben Meier and asked him to swear me in on Monday morning. I went ahead and played out my hand on Monday, December 31, when I was administered the oath of office by Meier. The news was out and Governor Olson announced that they would not surrender the office because he was still the governor.

Dick Gross worked night and day on the legal research and processes to assert my position. Dick flew to Fargo on New Year's Day to meet with me and we consulted with the newly elected the attorney general, Nick Spaeth. I also talked with other leaders of the Democratic-NPL Party who had legal backgrounds. We decided that day to ask for an attorney general's opinion, and had a Bismarck legislator, Serenus Hoffner, sign the request. The following morning we received Spaeth's opinion that I was governor.

But Olson claimed he wasn't bound by that opinion or one he himself had issued four years earlier as attorney general. We asked the North Dakota Supreme Court to take original jurisdiction over the case and the court required legal briefs be submitted by five o'clock p.m. Thursday, the following day. Both sides met that deadline.

I'll not try to summarize the legal arguments and other details except to say it was Governor Olson as attorney general who first pointed out that elected officials are qualified to take office, according to the state constitution, on January 1 in his attorney general's opinion, dated December 24, 1980. However, one of Olson's arguments to the Supreme Court a little over four years later was that since



Joe Lamb, president of the Bank of North Dakota, inspects North Dakota's state-of-the-art computer processors.

he filed his oath of office on January 6, 1981, he was entitled to serve through January 5, 1985, to complete four full years in office.

The court heard arguments in the case on Friday morning, January 4, and delivered its unanimous decision that same afternoon. I was represented in court by attorney Malcolm Brown and Dick Gross. Dick was prepared to give the rebuttal to Olson's case, but that didn't become necessary. *By the end of the day, the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court concluded that the term of office for which Olson was elected in 1980 commenced on January 1, 1981, and terminated on December 31, 1984.*

I don't remember well my first day in the Governor's Office. I do recall one of my first decisions, though. We didn't have nearly enough space for staff and I believed that the back office, which had been used before as the governor's office by my predecessor, was way more than I needed. So we made that switch immediately and I moved into the traditional, smaller office up front.

In the Governor's Office

I've tried as hard as I knew how to be candid and open. We gave interviews to virtually everyone who asked and we tried to tell them as much as we could tell them. I also didn't want my office door closed. For the most part that was honored, but one day a heavyset man came in. I went over and sat with him at the small table in the corner of the office. He began to say something, and then he got up and started to close the door. I told him I didn't ever close my door. I hated the aura of secret meetings, so I got up and opened the door again. He really had nothing whatever of importance to say, although maybe he would have if the door were closed. I have no idea what he had in mind, or even what his subject matter was. My open door was almost an iron-clad rule even though at times it got to be a bit of a free-for-all.

Time for visiting with people was always too short. It struck me many times in the first year or two that I would so often just be getting to the nub of a problem and understanding it and seeing possible solutions, and then someone would come and say my next meeting was waiting. In the early years I made up my mind that I'm not going to do this; I'm almost done—I'm going to finish it. Otherwise I had to go back and do it all over again to learn it.

I loved having children visit, having them sit in the governor's chair or on my lap. They could fiddle with my desk, I didn't care. Children brought a wonderment that was special to have around. Sometimes they had their picture taken. To this day I bet once a month somebody says they were in the chair and had their picture taken when they were five or eight or twelve years old. Several other groups have told me that somehow I seemed vitally interested in them when they were at the Capitol—bands and groups that came in. I do love children—couldn't have ten of my own and not love them.

From the beginning I wanted people to be happy and in good spirits and not be bashful about laughing and singing and doing the things that make life better for everyone. I had a passion for having people happy and comfortable in their work. I hated the quiet offices where people shut doors for fear they will upset someone. We did have

a wonderful staff—everyone was usually in great spirits. It meant so much to have happiness around. There are plenty of things that make life difficult, so if you don't enjoy every minute you can it's sometimes pretty grim.

I have learned to not doubt my own judgments and to be unafraid to express them. I came to the conclusion that the art of politics is the art of finding the truth and making it understandable and acceptable to the people. Anyone who wants to influence people cannot bludgeon them. There are lots of folks who understand issues and understand the positions, but somehow can't make it acceptable—they want to hurt people with the truth. Making the truth acceptable is more of the art of politics than is the traditional thought that politics is the art of compromise.

At the same time, I had to be careful myself about speaking strongly about things I did not understand, and that often happened at press conferences. Reporters would ask, "Governor, what is your opinion about such and such an issue?" Some politicians say you answer the question, don't have staff handle it. I rejected that out of hand and tried to have experts there so we would get the story straight.

Most people would be shocked to know the amount of time I spent on the budget. It was hundreds of hours, especially when we did the makeover when we first took



Chief of Staff Chuck Fleming and Governor George Sinner.

office. Chuck Fleming, my chief of staff, was also huge in that. Chuck and I did hour after hour after hour of late-afternoon work on the budget up in the Office of Management and Budget. Even with all the time Chuck and I put in, Dick Rayl handled most of it. He really empowered his Office of Management and Budget staff—man, they were good to work with. I had fairly good ideas about what programs were critical but there was so much I learned. Dick told me I had no idea how much it meant to Chuck and him in their appearances before the Appropriations Committee because they knew exactly what I thought. It was always the merger of their ideas with mine so they never had to worry about coming back and wondering if they'd said the right thing. I didn't pay any attention to what they said; I just let them do that.

I loved the issues. I hated it when we'd go through an issue and then be expected to turn around and re-discuss it in terms of its political implications. You can't in good conscience decide an issue on its merit and then turn around and re-decide it on a political basis and end up with what is right. It was important to help people understand—that's what I loved. I suppose that desire to teach was what made me write papers on some issues and be willing to discuss them with lots of people. I just loved the learning periods over big issues. One of the things I had cherished about chairing the House tax committee was how much I learned, and it was useful stuff.

Somebody used to ask, "Why are you always leading with your chin?" I had watched one of my predecessors take forever to make appointments and it was dragging a lot of people through a murky course of campaigning and soliciting support from others, so I determined right from the beginning that I was going to study the candidates in the best way I could—and then move!

For example, I interviewed candidates for judicial appointments. I discussed the interviews in the evening with Dick Gross, who sat in on all the interviews. I made the decision that night and before I went to bed I called those who were not going to be appointed, I thanked them, and I told them the announcement would be made the next morning. I suppose there's the possibility you make a mistake, but I don't think you make any more mistakes than if you wait, and wait, and hear from a zillion people and from campaign teams that are built up for the candidates. I've always thought that waiting was unfair to the candidates, unfair to the public, and unfair to the organization.

I believed ardently in candor and transparency, and hated trying to hide things from people or doing them in a sneaky way. We wanted everything in the open as much as we possibly could, sometimes to people's aggravation, I guess. That came from working on the farm, where I was with

all the employees every day. It's easier to change an honest opinion than to say oh, I was really waffling.

The other main principle that I tried to follow—as ardently as I supported women's rights and gay rights—was choosing qualified people. There were some situations where I had to follow certain prescriptions of the code, but there's just no replacement for professionalism, and that's why my staff and agency heads were so superb.

Heidi Heitkamp used to call me the fire-truck governor because when there was a crisis someplace I moved pretty fast. The day she called me the first time was in August 1985, when a semi-trailer-load of radioactive uranium oxide hit a train at Bowdon, N.D. As a former president of the fire department at Casselton for a time, I knew that if you didn't go right away you might as well not go. So I grabbed the phone and called for a helicopter. I think they landed on the Capitol mall, picked me up, and we flew to Bowdon.

What was amazing to me when we got there, and still amazes me, was that the rural fire department volunteers from Bowdon not only had kept people away, they had roped off the area, they had stopped and rerouted the traffic, and they had done an absolutely masterful, professional job of protecting the crew of the train. Everyone was taken right out of the way; they got people washed who were exposed; wonderfully demonstrating what ordinary people can do when they are serious public servants.

I went there thinking about sending National Guard people to help them. Turned out I didn't really accomplish much there, but if there had been a crisis I was ready to move. Another time, when range fires became a threat, I insisted the Guard buy aerial water buckets for firefighting. I had fought grass fires when I was with the fire department at home and it is a hellacious undertaking. People who try to do it better be in shape because it's fiercely difficult.

One thing that I learned in ways I had never realized before was how good our state employees are. Even though I probably knew as much about state government as any new governor before or maybe since, I discovered I really didn't know much at all. Yet state government goes on, operations and services go on when a governor leaves office. The agencies continue operating for a long time before the governor figures out what the problems are and how to help. Many times the other elected officials are changing at the same time. State employees are wonderful servants, and if you don't listen to the agency people you won't understand anything.

As just one example, what Warren Emmer of the parole and probation division did for us was also symptomatic of the importance of competent state agency heads. Warren taught me and everyone how to deal with prisoners. For many of them, even if the correction mode has a dim outlook



Sinner addressing the legislature in February 1987.

Courtesy of The Bismarck Tribune

in the case of a prisoner, you absolutely must take on the corrections philosophy and role because a high percentage eventually get out, some of them sooner rather than later.

When we left there, we had the lowest percentage of our people incarcerated of the fifty states, and probably most importantly, we had the lowest rate of repeat criminals. It was due to the fact that Warren Emmer and his staff monitored the clientele regularly; they tracked people who were going to get out in the next three or four years, made sure they had release time for work, that they had special training as well as counseling. And he would often recommend they be let out a little early so they got out with a good attitude, because attitude was huge.

That was a highlight of my management style—I wanted professional people and I not only paid attention to what they said, I let them run the agencies.

That's most amazing in a place like North Dakota, where few of the governors have had much state government experience. Of course Art Link spent a long time in the legislature and one term in Congress, and Bill Guy was also a legislator. Al Olson certainly had a lot of state government experience, as attorney general and working for the Legislative Council earlier, but many governors do not, and yet everything runs during the long learning-curve period.

I'm The Governor

I remember Montana Governor Ted Schwinden called me one of the first days we were in the governor's office. He introduced himself and asked if Democrats owned the legislature. I told him no, we controlled one house. He said I should thank God, because that's the bane of governors: to own the legislature and insist that you do things their way. He said you lose your ability to be an intervener and sort through the issues and do what's right, rather than what the party wants.

As governor, I never professed to know how to deal with the legislature. For the most part I stayed out of the way. I made one stupid mistake at the beginning and sent a letter to the party and said by God, I wanted a certain thus and so. It was not well received, it was not well done. I learned early on that it was stupid of me to write a letter to all the legislators telling them what I wanted on an issue—they resented it.

In that regard, when the telephone service deregulation issue began to surface in 1989, Nebraska had already deregulated and as nearly as I could tell hadn't done a perfect job because there were some details in the Nebraska plan that weren't working out so well. I relied on Bruce Hagen for advice on what to do. He thought the bill under

consideration was pretty good, an improvement on some of the mistakes made in Nebraska, and advised me to support it.

Meanwhile, a partisan battle was developing in the legislature. By this time I'd learned to be careful how I spoke to legislators. A couple or three Democrats were supporting the bill when it got to the Senate; one of them was Joe Satrom (D-Bismarck). But on the Republican side it wasn't clear at all that they had enough votes. I knew quite a bit about the whole issue of public utilities and cooperatives. I read through and studied it and I discovered a terrible flaw in the compensation for rural telephone companies when they had to give up an urban franchise because a town grew to be bigger than the 2,500 population limit for cooperative franchises. Because I had dealt with that in the legislature years earlier in a territorial integrity bill, I understood it was grossly unfair to the cooperatives.

So I wrote a letter to Satrom, telling him I couldn't support the bill unless they cleaned up the section that was patently unfair to the cooperative telephone companies. Then I called Joe. I told him I'd written the letter and I wanted him to quietly pass it around to the Democrats. Fixing that section became the battle cry in the Senate.

The same process came into play a couple other times where, rather than send a letter to a whole chamber, I simply wrote to one member and said pass it around. It came off as a lot less offensive and yet got the job done. At the beginning of the 2007 session Tim Mathern (D-Fargo) asked me for a letter describing the pain that property taxes are causing fixed-income people. So I wrote a pretty straightforward comment on several facets and Tim handed it all over the place. I told Tim that that's how I had approached the Legislature when I was governor.

Wielding Clout

I made a practice of moving quickly to deal with any kind of crisis. One example happened in late summer of 1985. Brian Berg was head of the highway patrol and he came into my office one afternoon and told me that there was a crisis brewing up on the Fort Berthold Reservation. A federal court decision in 1972 had enlarged the reservation from its traditional size and in so doing took onto the reservation several farms that were owned by white settlers and white landholders. The tribe had begun requiring license plates issued by the tribe, hunting licenses, and several things which they had just gotten jurisdiction to do. They were beginning to impose those requirements on those white people as well as Native Americans. This was producing some real tense feelings on the reservation between the whites and Native Americans.

Brian told me the sheriff was reporting that people were carrying guns and bandying some pretty violent threats

back and forth. He said frankly he didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't know either, but an acquaintance of mine, Governor Bill Janklow of South Dakota, had a history of working with some harsh things on the reservation and with some offenses by both sides. I suggested we call Janklow and see what he says.

Janklow answered without hesitation. He told me I couldn't fix that problem because I didn't create it, and it was not going to go away. But what you can do, he said, is go up there with a show of force and let everyone know that the first side that steps across the line is going to get it. He advised me to take my adjutant general, take the attorney general, take the head of the highway patrol, take the sheriff, then go up there and get as many people as I could into a room and tell them I was sorry about the problem but that I can't fix it and that only time was going to take care of it.

This is what I did, I went up a couple of days later and had a meeting arranged. We went to a big restaurant near there and got everyone in the room and told them what Janklow said to me, that I couldn't fix the problem but I wanted them to understand that if anybody on either side



Sinner and South Dakota Governor Bill Janklow engage in a friendly basketball competition. Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune.

violated the rights or property of someone else, we were not going to ask a lot of questions, we were going to come in with every ounce of energy we had and every force we had and there was going to be justice, so help us God. My staff was just aghast as to how tough I was—everyone was who knew me. I was surprised too. *Jurisdictional issues between the state and the various reservations remain fluid. Several reservations issue license plates that are recognized by the state, and a 2005 state law recognized tribal licenses as valid on tribal lands.*

Janklow and I became good friends. I respected his judgment, it was sound, it was mature and sophisticated, and it worked. It wasn't an overstatement of the fact because we were going to do that—we were going to make sure that people's rights weren't abused and we were going to resolve this issue peacefully.

I put that advice to work one time several years after that incident. I was flying back from Washington, D.C., on board a Northwest flight out of Minneapolis, we had just gotten up to altitude when all of a sudden the pilot came back out of the cockpit and asked one of the cabin crew where I was sitting and came to me and said that he had just had an emergency call from the state that four murderers had escaped from the penitentiary. They wanted me to release an army guard helicopter to help in the search for them. Choppers had big lights and they could do more. This was in early October 1992.

I told them to take *two* choppers. As soon as I got on the ground, I found the officer in charge because the adjutant general was gone and I told him I wanted twenty-five military police just as quickly as he could get them out to the pen.

So, I went to the penitentiary and I went into the office with the warden, and the Burleigh County sheriff was there too. I told them that I had these people coming and that they were going to be in charge of them and to use them in whatever way they could in their search. I told them I was going to leave, as it wasn't my job to direct traffic.

They thought these prisoners had escaped just before they discovered they were gone, so they thought they might be close by, perhaps in a high, weedy field of probably about twenty-five acres, just south of the penitentiary. They decided to walk that hoping maybe they could find these people out there. All these military police were walking about eight to ten feet apart. They didn't find them that night, but the next day they caught one; they ended up nabbing three, but one was never recovered.

The prisoner they caught the next day told them that he had nearly gotten stepped on by one of the walkers and that they were all in that field, they just didn't find them. I overcorrected, but didn't overcorrect enough; if they would have had fifty walkers they would have found them. It's an interesting story and a good principle for governors to remember.

Helping Farms

I don't think anybody questioned that this state was way too production oriented. The production economy brought the closeness I had with similar states. Four of us governors were good friends: I and Republicans George Mickelson of South Dakota and Norm Bangerter of Utah, and Democrat Mike Sullivan of Wyoming, were all elected about the same time and all had exactly the same set of problems. Bangerter and I, in particular, spoke out about economic issues.

After my first two years in office I became the National Governors Association's lead governor on agricultural issues. By the middle of 1987, I followed Gov. Terry Branstad of Iowa and became chair of the governors' agriculture and rural development committee. The farm programs at the time were not adequate, and we were losing a lot of farmers.

A terrible drought started in 1986 and continued through 1987 and into 1988. It almost devastated us, and were it not for the huge helpful response of Agriculture Secretary Richard Lyng and the work of (U.S. Senator) Kent Conrad and the head of the House Agriculture Committee, Kika de la Garza from Texas, we would have experienced an even worse disaster than we did.

While talking to other governors at a conference in Idaho, it became evident that about eight states were going to get killed by the drought, which was getting worse and worse and came to be called another Dirty Thirties dust bowl. Back to my office, I called Lyng. I told him I had just come back from a governors' meeting and that there are about eight states that are going to get blasted by the drought. I asked Lyng whether he would come if Governor Branstad and I got some climatologists and some economists together in Chicago.

After a brief pause, Lyng said just tell him when and where, and he would be there. That's exactly what happened. We met in early July of 1988. Governors Mickelson, Rudy Perpich from Minnesota, John Ashcroft from Missouri, and Jim Martin from North Carolina joined Branstad and me there. Climatologists forecast that the drought would likely extend through 1988 and maybe beyond, and the economists told us it was going to decimate the farm population if something wasn't done. After agreeing on an approach in the Chicago session, we met in Washington with de la Garza and Pat Leahy, who chaired the Senate Agriculture Committee. Conrad was probably the foremost brain on that committee, and he and the rest of the staff who understood the numbers put the thing together. In early July, prior to our Chicago meeting, Lyng had been quoted saying drought assistance was premature. But he was now a strong believer and made our case to Congress. North Dakota farmers ended up with \$488 million out of the \$3.9 billion authorized in the Drought Relief Act. President Reagan signed the legislation in August. The bill had amazingly passed in six weeks and saved a ton of people from bankruptcy.

My brother Dick was a huge influence in my life, and spending a lot of time with him the last ten years before he died in early 2004 became important to me. In breakfasts with him during those last years, I learned how completely dedicated he was to giving himself to people in need, and how wrong it was to ever have judged him.

Dick was ordained in May 1952 at Fargo's St. Mary's Cathedral. In the early years of his priesthood Dick was at the forefront of the movement away from Latin. In fact, long before it was officially allowed he started saying Mass in English. Even the more progressive bishops didn't want to tolerate that. And he went against church rules in performing marriages for people who had been divorced. He also allowed a suspended, married priest to speak and administer communion. To his credit, Dick was constantly in trouble with the bishop—I learned to respect him for that early.

Dick played a large part in my feelings toward church bureaucracies. He and some other close friends from the seminary saw the church pretty much as I did. I didn't always understand what Dick was teaching and what he was doing, but he lived Christianity the way he believed it should be lived, and broke rules that he thought were stupid rules.

At some point Dick started helping smuggle immigrants from Central America into Canada. My first years as governor, he was in the newspaper more than I was because he was getting arrested all the time for taking illegal immigrants across the border. The feds took a couple of cars from him, and I always wondered when I would get asked about it. The media didn't bring up Dick, even when he was in the news or arrested. I was pretty sure that was because they knew darn well he was doing what he believed was right. Finally, after one time when Dick was in trouble, a broadcast reporter, Mike Kopp, asked me about it. The news conference sticks vividly in my memory because that fall we had to slash the budget and Dick Rayl and I were explaining the cut to the press. We'd gone through all the numbers, explaining and fielding questions for over an hour. Looking at my watch and trying to bring it to a close, I finally said to the reporters, "I need to get back to my office. People are waiting up there; are there any more questions?"

Mike, who was sitting on the left side of the conference room table, about three feet from me, jumped up with a hand-held recorder and blurted, "What do you think about what your brother's into?" Dick was far from my mind that day, even though I had sent him money to support his work. Fortunately, I always prayed to the Holy Spirit when I had major issues going on. And I had prayed that day. I looked at Kopp. "Mike, let me tell you something about my brother. He is one of those people who believe that when Jesus said harbor the harbor-less, he meant harbor the harbor-less." I will never forget Mike with the microphone up to his mouth, starting to say something and just standing there with his



Father Richard Sinner

Governor Sinner's older brother was a priest with a passion for social justice. Father Richard ("Dick") Sinner ran into difficulties with the Catholic Church early in his career. He advocated for English rather than Latin in the liturgy of the mass in the U.S., for priests to be allowed to marry, and for women to be ordained as priests. He worked for civil rights and marched in anti-war demonstrations, often without the blessing of church leaders, from the 1960s until the end of his life. In 1972 he was dismissed from his priestly duties after he allowed a suspended, married priest to serve communion in his parish. He later served as chaplain at institutions in several states, including the Arizona State Prison, where he became interested in the plight of Latin American political refugees in the United States. Learning that many refugees the United States sent back to their respective countries were soon murdered by either government forces or political factions, Rev. Sinner swung into action. Using his inheritance (part of the Sinner landholdings near Casselton), he bailed as many as 2,000 Central American refugees out of U.S. detention centers during the 1980s.

His commitment to refugees eventually led to Rev. Sinner's involvement with the Sanctuary Movement, a religious and political movement active mainly in the 1980s. Sanctuary offered protection from the political violence that was taking place in places like El Salvador and Guatemala. Refugees were funneled through "safe houses" to Sanctuary workers in various parts of the U.S. or Canada. Rev. Sinner was detained by immigration authorities several times, attempting to take refugees across the U.S.-Canadian border illegally. Rev. Sinner was also active in anti-war protesting throughout his life, including planting evergreen trees at nuclear missile sites in North Dakota. In 1986, he received the Prairie Peacemakers Award from the Peace Coalition, of which he was a founder and long-time member. During George Sinner's campaign for governor, his activist brother returned from Arizona to work on the campaign. "He probably got more votes than I did," George Sinner told the Fargo Forum in 2004. "He knew everybody and everybody loved him."

mouth open, finally sitting back down.

Nothing more was said; it never came up again.

I told Dick that story about three weeks before he died, and he was so touched he cried almost uncontrollably over it. But that's who he was. He lived what he believed, sometimes in ways that were difficult to accept, but he had great courage and he did what he believed was right.



The Prairie Rose State Games have brought North Dakotans together to play their favorite sports for almost a quarter century. Courtesy of Prairie Rose State Games.

Memorable Events

The Republican candidate for the Senate in Montana provided the idea for the Prairie Rose State Games. I was on my way to a governors' conference in Idaho when we stopped in Billings to refuel the state plane, and I called a former St. John's friend, Bill Osborne, and asked him to have lunch. He came out, and we had a great time. He had been a successful coach at Billings High School and later went back to coaching. As we were leaving he told me I ought to go home and start a state games. He then described to me the program that his son was running there.

I got home and called Alex MacDonald, asked if he would lead our effort, and he said he would. That was Mac; no baloney, just I'll do it. And he did all the rest, with the help of a wonderful steering committee working with Tim Mueller and Karen Aassel and others from the state Parks and Recreation Department. They made a decision, starting with the first games in 1987, that has helped our games be so uniquely successful when so many of the other state games programs no longer exist. That was to move city to city—rotate between Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks and Minot. This program requires quite a bit of money and much of it is contributed. But these communities only have to do it every four years. It also takes a ton of volunteer work, and by moving the games around they don't wear out the same people year after year after year. When their turn comes, they

remember the games with good feelings.

Look what's happened. It started out with seventeen events, and we're now with many, many more. Karen and Tim and Mac and Bob Jansen and that committee did it. Two legends in North Dakota sports, Sid Cichy and Jack Brown, were also on that original committee.

After he was governor, Ed Schafer explained why the games were so important. He participated in the first games as a runner. He said to think of the people who have a wonderful weekend doing something they dearly love to do and they don't have to travel far. Bismarck has been the leader in number of participants because that city is quite reachable by everyone. People come from Minot and Fargo and Dickinson and all corners of the state. With high fuel prices, it's important to have those kinds of events move around the state.

Energy Efforts

By the end of the 1980s I had moved from agriculture committee chair of the National Governors Association to energy committee chair because I also headed the Interstate Oil Compact Commission, an organization of all twenty-nine oil-producing states. In fighting some of the oil industry battles and at the same time trying to get the states to do a better job of environmental protection, I proposed a national meeting of all the environmental group

leaders and all the energy industry people to find a way to solve some of the problems and the horrible disagreements that were going on.

Along with energy industry leaders, primarily two other governors, Sullivan and Mickelson, shared my interest in finding a way to develop a national energy strategy. We had formed the American Energy Assurance Council in 1987 and Apache Oil Company provided one of its executives, John Jenkins, to serve as executive director. I was the first AEAC chairman and learned that nobody was talking to anybody else—environmentalists were jawboning mainly to themselves about problems they saw, and the energy industry was damning the environmentalists for various sundry things that were being said and were resulting in Congress because of environmental pressure. So we got the idea of trying to bring them together. Dick Gross worked with Jenkins and the staffs of other governors, wrote a grant application and, as I recall, we had about a million and a quarter dollars to hold a national meeting of the leaders in the environmental and energy fields to try get them to talk to each other.

Gross and Jenkins pretty much organized it—the AEAC asked a renowned public disputes organization on the east coast to conduct what was called a National Energy Policy Simulation. That twenty-three-hour event in November 1988 brought together many of the stakeholders involved in the energy policy debate across the country. The whole thing turned out to be a pretty embarrassing episode because highly paid people that the organization brought in to facilitate the various group sessions didn't even bother to learn the jargon of the energy field and probably not even of the environmental field. Half the time had to be spent explaining things, or they were misinterpreting them. Often, they didn't have a clue what people were talking about, and they were making it up as they went along. We had raised and spent a lot of money on this effort, but no consensus was achieved.

After that disaster, we eventually started our own dispute resolution program here because we saw so many things that demonstrated the inability of people who were in the early stages of the consensus-building field to understand they must know the issues, or they can't help. The people's rejection of tax measures in the 1989 referendum emphasized the need for building consensus in North Dakota, but that national energy exercise had demonstrated how not to do it. Dick worked with some of our state agency grant-writing people and proposed and received a significant grant from The Northwest Area Foundation to fund what was initially called the North Dakota Consensus Council. Larry Spears, a Quaker lawyer who had been assistant Supreme Court administrator, was chosen to head the staff. The North Dakota Consensus Council, which later became the

Consensus Council Inc., has a bipartisan board and has done amazing work in states and around the country, around the world, as well as here. It is among the best in the country and remains a model for other consensus-building efforts.

Goal For Coal

I've always been proud of helping save the coal gasification plant at Beulah. The plant was built for \$2.1 billion in 1984 as a pilot project in response to the energy crisis of the 1970s. Its purpose was to develop a process for making natural gas from lignite, a low-grade coal abundant in western North Dakota. We convinced the federal Energy Department to sell it rather than tear it down—that sale was a huge coup.

Five years after a consortium of energy companies built the plant, it defaulted on \$1.5 billion in federal loans. I met with the final two bidders: Basin Electric and a Texas-based company called Coastal Corporation. I gave them both the same advice: if you want to make this work bid it at a price you can afford and promise to share any profits that develop with the federal government. My sense was that Coastal's



*Entrance to the DGC coal gasification plant.
Courtesy of Basin Electric Power Cooperative*

people were laughing at me telling them how to do their own financing. I didn't even try to prejudice the choice by the Energy Department. Basin Electric listened and actually bid the way I had suggested and bought the plant from the Energy Department in October 1988. It's in place today and making pretty good money. Basin's newly formed Dakota Gasification Company subsidiary paid eighty-five million dollars for the plant, and agreed to pass on some tax breaks and share revenues with the federal agency through 2009. They've done a great job with it. I'm proud that their CO₂ has a huge outlet now in the secondary and tertiary recovery of oil.

If Coastal had gotten that bid I've been told it would have torn the plant down. Coastal is a huge company and big in oil and coal and natural gas. It was part of the original ownership consortium, under which the synthetic fuels plant had been such a fiasco. Allen Wampler, assistant secretary of energy, verified that the Energy Department had a strong suspicion the only reason Coastal wanted to buy the plant was to close it. Wampler said its failures may have been intentional and the original owners were all a party to it because they were afraid of the long-term competition from synthetic fuels. They didn't want that technology to develop.

My one bad decision as governor was to veto the first coal severance tax bill in 1985. The coal severance tax is imposed instead of sales or property taxes on coal mined in the state. That bill would have frozen the future tax rate. It was the one time that I let staff and the party people shout me down.

Two years later when we were preparing a new bill to cut the coal tax, I was sure of another idea, a lignite research council, and stuck by my guns. The lignite industry's problems were familiar as we were involved with buying a lot of coal at American Crystal. I had urged Crystal to burn North Dakota coal and they said they couldn't afford to—it cost way too much to transport and you can't get that much heat out of it. So my bill cut the tax even a little bit more than the previously vetoed measure, and it provided a two-cent checkoff to fund a lignite research council, set up by executive order. I was firm the day I told the coal industry people that if they wanted a bill passed, they had to do it my way. The coal industry came in and didn't want two cents taken for research. I explained that I'd been involved with a research fund that was started by the sugar beet growers, that while it wasn't my idea, I knew how powerful it was. I promised to show them who would be

on the executive committee, the management board, and they would see that industry would have control of it. I assured them the committee wouldn't be academic, although it would involve academics, it wouldn't be labor either, although they are involved—industry would control it.

They insisted that they opposed it. So I asked whether they wanted the tax cut, the research would go with it. And that's the way it was passed. The coal guys came back in three months later and said they had no idea how powerful this program could be. We had provided that the attorney general would sit in on all the meetings and keep them out of trouble, and I had learned from some of my previous work that that was the way it had to be. It was just one of those state needs, and I found out a way to do it.

We Look Back, Then Turn Back

Because of the 1989 referral election, North Dakota's centennial year ended up a *dies irae, dies illa*, which roughly translates as day of wrath and day of mourning.

"Cherishing our Past—Shaping our Future" titled my State of the State address given January 4, 1989, to the 51st



*President George H.W. Bush plants a centennial tree on the Capitol grounds.
Courtesy of The Bismarck Tribune*

Legislative Assembly—it was also the theme for celebrating that centennial and remembering North Dakota's heritage. The first big event of the centennial year was a visit to Bismarck in late April by the president, the first George Bush. With an estimated 10,000 people looking on, he wished North Dakota a happy birthday and planted an elm tree on our Capitol grounds that had been brought from the White House lawn, along with a bur oak that was placed on the opposite side of the Capitol steps. Unfortunately, that 12-foot American elm tree didn't fare so well. It was infested with gypsy moth larvae when it arrived here and a few years later the tree died after it budded out during an unseasonably warm March and then was hurt by a late frost.

My most vivid memory of the state centennial celebration is the coming together of the four former governors: Al Olson, Art Link, Bill Guy, and John Davis. It was really good to see all the governors come together and recognize the special gift of leadership that they all had.

I will never forget the Party of the Century celebration on the mall of the Capitol grounds. And I remember particularly KFYY Broadcasting's owners, Bill and Marietta Ekberg, coming by and stopping. They were particularly grateful that the event was happening where it was on the mall there, as a lot of people were there who didn't often get back to Bismarck. Bill and Marietta told me how special it was for some of their friends who came back to see the elegance of the mall and the way it had been preserved, which I couldn't take any credit for. The man named Rodney who took care of the flowers, head of the groundspeople, had a knack, and the mall was simply elegant.

The state centennial observance's focal event was that July 4th Party of the Century. In addition, throughout the year some six hundred endeavors designated as centennial projects took place and, as President Bush mentioned, the big project was a campaign to plant 100 million trees by the year 2000, the new millennium. We decided to participate by



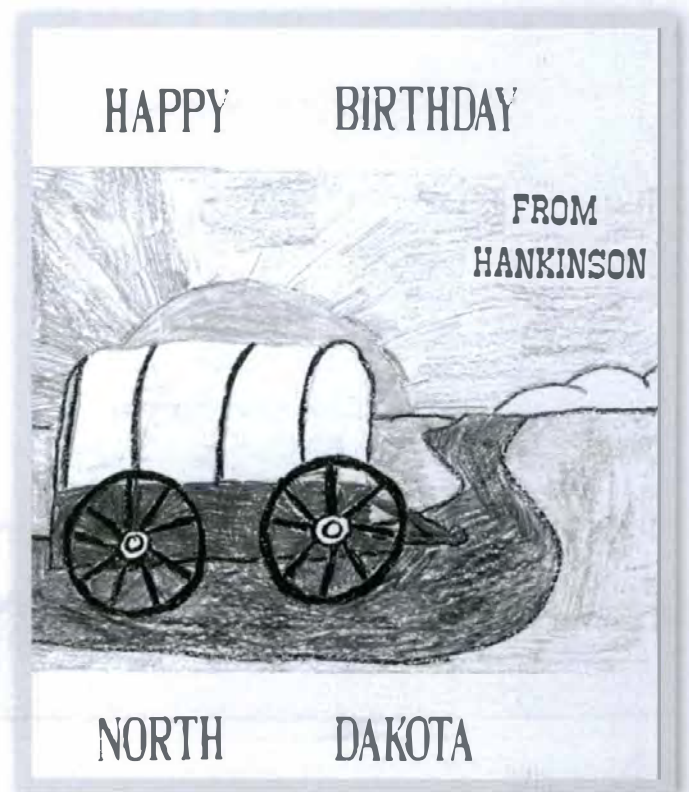
Governors John Davis, William Guy, Arthur Link, Allen Olson, and George Sinner gathered at the Capitol during North Dakota's Centennial Celebration in 1989.



The state centennial's focal event was the Party of the Century on the Capitol grounds.

planting a tree in the hometown of everyone who had served as governor since statehood. That would contribute twenty-six trees toward the 100-million goal. We tried to fit these plantings in during the appropriate time of the year, when I would be scheduled in an area of the state near a former governor's hometown.

In August of 1989 I planted the first Governor's Centennial Tree, a juniper, in Davidson Park at Williston, the adopted hometown of Thomas Moodie, who served the shortest time in office of any North Dakota governor. Moodie was a Democrat and he had defeated Lydia Langer, who ran for the job after her husband Bill Langer was removed from office the previous July. Moodie took office as governor on January 7, 1935, and then left six weeks later when the North Dakota Supreme Court determined that he was ineligible. The state Constitution requires a governor to have been a citizen of the state for five consecutive years prior to the election. Moodie's opponents learned that he had voted in a municipal election in Minneapolis in 1932. I know we also managed to get trees planted in honor of the most recent former governors, including Bill Guy, who served in office the longest of anyone, but I think this effort lost steam after the referrals hit in December. As that Centennial birthday year of 1989 ended, I don't think that there's any question that the most disappointing loss I experienced was the defeat of the taxes in the referendum.



One of the Centennial activities was a poster contest in the state's schools. These posters are preserved in the State Archives.

"North Dakota Was Home": *Jane Baute Sinner*

Kentucky was my home during my early life. I lived in a small town of 5,800 in what some would think was a "privileged" life, the daughter of the town's only doctor, and a product of private schools.

My mother was a native of Pennsylvania. She met my father when she was Operating Room Supervisor in Children's Hospital in Philadelphia and he was an intern at Hahneman Medical College. They were married in 1929 in the depths of the Depression, and my mother worked as a private-duty nurse for five dollars a week. In 1931 they moved to Kentucky, which was my father's home state. He began his practice in Lebanon, joining another physician. Within a short time that physician died, leaving my father as the town's only doctor. His work kept him extremely busy as he was called out into the country often for house visits.

My mother was raised in a very poor family and she was determined to be a "proper" doctor's wife. After they were settled and in a larger home, she began entertaining for my father, reading Emily Post's Etiquette for advice. In doing so, she taught my sisters and me the finer ways of doing things. We were her door greeters, we were her servers, and we did all the removing and clean up. What she taught me then served me well when I was a hostess in the Governor's Residence.

For my siblings and me, my parents considered private schools to be necessary, as our town of Lebanon was a hotbed of alcohol and moonshine. Kentucky counties can be "wet" or "dry." My county was a "wet" one, completely surrounded by "dry" counties. It is easy to understand why my parents didn't want us exposed to it. So by eighth grade I, with my three younger sisters, was sent off to a convent school nearby.

Life in boarding schools was not easy but my sisters and I learned to adjust. We all gained a good deal, having access to various sports, including horseback riding. We learned to sew and to knit, and we also learned to deal with adversity.

I then enrolled in St. Louis University, but I was uncomfortable in a big school. So I transferred to Webster College nearby, which was much smaller and all women. I was in school there when I met Bud. It was a blind date, and love at first sight for both of us. I left school in May and went home to Florida, where my mother was living after her divorce from my father. Bud was in Valdosta, Georgia in the Air Force.



In 1951 Bud frequently drove from Georgia to Florida to visit Jane Baute.

By this time, his National Guard unit from Fargo had been activated and sent there. It was very easy for him to drive down on weekends to visit me, and soon we were engaged to be married.

When I came to North Dakota as a young bride and settled with Bud in Casselton, I found life to be far different from the days when I was growing up. Casselton had no paved streets, no library, and we lived on the north side of an old building. I missed the sunshine in winter, I missed the rolling hills of Kentucky and I very much missed my access to books! I was an avid reader. James Michener was (and is) my favorite author, and I have collected most of his books. He actually visited us in our home in Casselton one year when he was doing research for Centennial.

All of the finer points of "being a lady" were not much help in Casselton! As a farm wife I was initiated into cleaning chickens, pasteurizing milk, and taking lunches into the fields from spring through fall harvest. In addition, I was having a baby almost every year. Those years were not easy ones. I



Farm and family life kept Jane Sinner busy for many years. Front row: Jerry, Paula, Joe, Mary Jo, Jim. Back: Betsy, cousin, Marty, Janie, Bud, George Jr.

told my loving husband one time, "I only promise to stay here twenty years!" But time passed, and by the time our family was complete we were blessed with ten beautiful children, and I knew North Dakota was "home." I was enjoying my favorite pastimes, sewing, knitting, and reading. We found ways to entertain with friends and family members, our favorite game being "charades." And Bud began an interest in politics.

For many years I tried to become involved in some public organizations. But Bud was really the 'involved' one and I

didn't think it was good for both of us to be away from the family. His interest in state affairs and government in general kept growing. In 1962 he decided to run for the state Senate. We all went out campaigning for him, and he won. During that first legislative session, I stayed behind in Casselton. But in 1965 we moved to Bismarck to a rented house so we could all be together. That was a big mistake. Our older children were not happy in school, and with three small boys at home and no sitters available, I was stuck. I would have packed up and gone back to Casselton, but I couldn't as we had rented out our house.

In 1966 Bud was defeated for reelection, and subsequently was appointed by Governor Guy to the State Board of Higher Education where he served for seven years. In 1982 he again ran for public office, this time for the House of Representatives, and was elected. While serving there he was approached to run for governor. I passed it off as not at all

possible. I did not like the idea! And no way could we afford it. But many friends called to encourage and support us. Kent Conrad and Byron Dorgan were two who made the strongest case. Chuck Fleming was another. He and Bud had developed a strong respect for each other. When Chuck offered to spearhead the campaign and raise the needed \$300,000, we finally decided to give it a go.

It was a memorable campaign. We crisscrossed the state for sixteen months, stayed in many different people's homes



Newly-elected Sinner and Jane Sinner dance at their first Inaugural Ball.

and made many great friends. It was also a difficult campaign, being on the road so much and dealing with the media. I wrote thank-you notes, thousands of them, by hand, to each person who contributed, even if it was only two dollars. I guess all the traveling, personal contacts, and the notes helped because we won.

Shortly after the election a reporter from the *Grand Forks Herald* came to interview me. I recall making the statement that I hoped I wouldn't change. Looking back, that was very naïve. Of course I would change! I learned so much about the people in North Dakota and the state itself. I grew in awareness of what I was expected to do, and I became a more tolerant, more inquisitive, more independent person. I learned to deal with difficult decisions on my own, as Bud was too occupied with his role as governor and there were some serious problems facing the state. But I also gained untold knowledge from other governors' spouses. It was a growing experience, those eight years, and one I have treasured. And six of those governor's wives are among my best friends today.

The Inaugural Ball was a grand affair. When Bud and I danced the first dance, the military band played "Could I Have This Dance For the Rest of My Life?" and I was overwhelmed with pride for him. We had worked so hard to get to this moment, and now it didn't even seem real. All of our family had gathered earlier in the Governor's Residence for a family photo, and that photo is a treasure. I look at all those young grandchildren and the excitement in their faces. They didn't understand the significance of the event, but they knew it was

something special. They visited us often in the residence and we had wonderful family dinners around the large dining table.

We settled into a routine, not knowing what to expect, and found life in the residence to be extremely demanding. Immediately, there were phone calls requesting the use of the house. Because the Olsons had not lived there, it had been used by many organizations to hold events. I asked Anne Murphy to come from Fargo to be my assistant. She and I devised a plan. "There is a family living here now" and "weekends are for family use." We also made sure the holiday weekends (Fourth of July, Memorial Day, etc.) were kept for family. This was quite a break from tradition that had preceded us. The public accepted this. For those eight years, we were off to our cabin in Minnesota for summer holidays. Steve Sharkey, another house manager, teased us one Friday afternoon in the spring when we were leaving to open the cabin. The van was piled high with our belongings, even with a chair on top! He called us the "Beverly Hillbillies!"

Our first official trip out of town was the annual Governors Conference in Washington, D.C. All fifty states' governors attended and we were entertained at a formal dinner in the White House. This was the first of eight such events for us. We had met the new governors two months earlier at a seminar in South Carolina and had become fast friends with the Gardners from Washington State and the Clintons from Arkansas. Bill and Bud hit it off right away and we were included in several nightly policy sessions with the Clintons and the Rileys (our South Carolina hosts). Governor Riley later became Secretary of Education in the Clinton Administration. Hillary introduced me to one of her pet organizations, the Children's Defense Fund, and I soon began working with them on children's issues.

The White House was fabulous. At the conference, we were seated at round tables with huge floral arrangements in the center. The food was served "family style" by white-gloved butlers and everything was very artfully displayed. Entertainment was violin music by the Marines. Every year, the dinner was a memorable event. I wish I could remember all of my tablemates, but unfortunately it's too late now. However, I do remember one, President Reagan. He really didn't converse with any of us. Instead he rambled on and on about World War II throughout the dinner. My impression was that he was in a world all by himself.

Following dinner, we were ushered into the East Room for entertainment and afterwards, with the band playing, we danced. On one of those evenings, I danced with Governor Clinton and remarked that I hoped he would someday



President Ronald Reagan and Jane Sinner.



Jane Sinner displays her "Teddy Roosevelt Bear," a very popular centennial gift.

be president. He was a good dancer, by the way, and very handsome.

During our first year, we were asked to represent the National Governor's Association on a trip to Japan. This was a real eye-opener! We were away twelve days, visiting Japanese governors in many areas of Japan. We were given specific instructions about what to wear, how to greet our hosts, and to bring gifts. In Japan, we enjoyed beautiful state dinners, tours of different areas, and a visit to the Mikimoto pearl factory, a silk painting factory and to Mt. Fuji. We rode the bullet train in the front of the nose. But our most memorable visit was to the Imperial Palace, including an audience with Emperor Hirohito. The palace was exquisite, sparsely furnished, but with amazing art. We were four governors and three spouses, and the emperor took time to visit with each of us. It was an awesome moment, to be in the presence of the Emperor of Japan.

That visit to a foreign country taught me that we desperately needed a special North Dakota gift for foreign dignitaries. First we asked Richard Bresnahan of St. John's University to design a piece of pottery. Richard had grown up with our children in Casselton and had become a famous potter. He used soybean straw from our farm to produce a special glaze for his pottery and it was receiving raves in art circles. In addition, I began thinking of a bear to represent President Theodore Roosevelt and our badlands. It took a few

years, but my "Teddy Roosevelt Bear" came into being just in time for our state's centennial. These two gifts became very popular and we enjoyed presenting them.

We later made several overseas trips, always to enhance trade with North Dakota. We visited Taiwan and Korea in 1987. We happened to be in Seoul on Easter Sunday and attended Mass that morning. We were delighted to find we were at the children's mass. Suddenly we heard them all singing *It's a Small World (After All)*. Of course it was in Korean, but it drew smiles because we knew the tune.

Meanwhile, back at the residence, I was learning how to work with employees. Annie Murphy had decided to return to Fargo, and I found Pat Ness to replace her as the residence manager. Pat was very competent but not long after left for a better-paying position. She did recommend Steve Sharkey, and he turned out to be the very best manager ever. We became great friends and I suggested to Nancy Schafer she would do well to keep him. Which she did. Ann Wetzel, who was great help to me, was the housekeeper. And later her daughter, Linda, became the kitchen supervisor. These three were the staff who kept the residence always ready for our family and for guests.

Within a short time I began getting involved in my pet project, preventing teen pregnancy. I wanted to be more public with it, but it took a lot of courage for me to give a big speech. I practiced and practiced. When I finally initiated



Governor George and Jane Sinner on Inauguration Day in 1989.

Photo by Garry Redmann.

my campaign by speaking at a Mental Health Symposium at the University of Mary, I advocated bringing nurses into the school system. Well, all hell broke loose. The right wing accused me of advocating birth control and insisted nurses would pass out condoms and abortion information. It was quite a storm for a while. But I didn't quit. I continued to speak whenever I was invited. I stressed over and over the importance of communication between parents and their children. Today, most schools in the state have a nurse on staff as well as other programs to discourage sex, and I am proud to have suggested it early on.

I continued working with the Mental Health Association and together we began the Christmas tree fundraising effort. A huge thirty-five-foot evergreen was moved onto the lawn of the Governor's Residence and lit to represent donations to help those with mental illness, and to remember loved ones who had passed away. It was a very successful effort and we had trees in several communities in the state and at the state hospital in Jamestown. I traveled every holiday to light the trees and it was a very rewarding experience. I believe it is still continued today, and that huge tree in Bismarck on the corner lawn of the residence has survived and flourished and lights up Fourth Street every December.

Another of my goals while in the Governor's Residence was to set up a foundation to raise money to update the house. The house was unchanged since it had been built thirty years earlier and was badly in need of improvements. I first asked the capitol photographer to take photos of the damage in and around various rooms, the torn wallpaper, worn carpets, aging appliances and leaking roof. And then with the photos in hand I testified before a Senate Committee and asked for funds (I believe this was a "first" by the wife of the governor). I got the Senators' attention, but little else. All they allowed was enough for a new roof.

So I worked hard getting the Friends of the North Dakota Governor's Residence Foundation established and some generous people agreed to be on the board. I had John Schuhart, Marv Erdmann, Jenny Wheeler, Lou Dunn, Bill Ekberg, and from Fargo, Mike St. Marie among others. Together we raised about \$80,000 and went to work. With St. Marie's help getting everything at cost or less, we were able to refurbish many of the rooms. The last project before we left office was the kitchen. It had to be gutted completely and the layout reconfigured. It's now a beautiful, well-organized kitchen with two of everything. I am very proud of that project. When we finished we still had a few hundred dollars left, so with permission from the Foundation I ordered some new wildflower china for the residence. It is a Fitz and Floyd pattern that was designed for Queen Elizabeth when she visited Texas in the early 1990s. One of the wildflowers on the plate is the prairie rose.

During all eight years, we had many memorable dinners.



Decorating the Governor's Residence in 1986 for a teddy bear Christmas.



George and Jane Sinner with their son Eric.



Sinner family gathers at the 1989 Inauguration in the Governor's Residence. Since this photo was taken, more grandchildren and great-grandchildren have been added to the Sinner family.

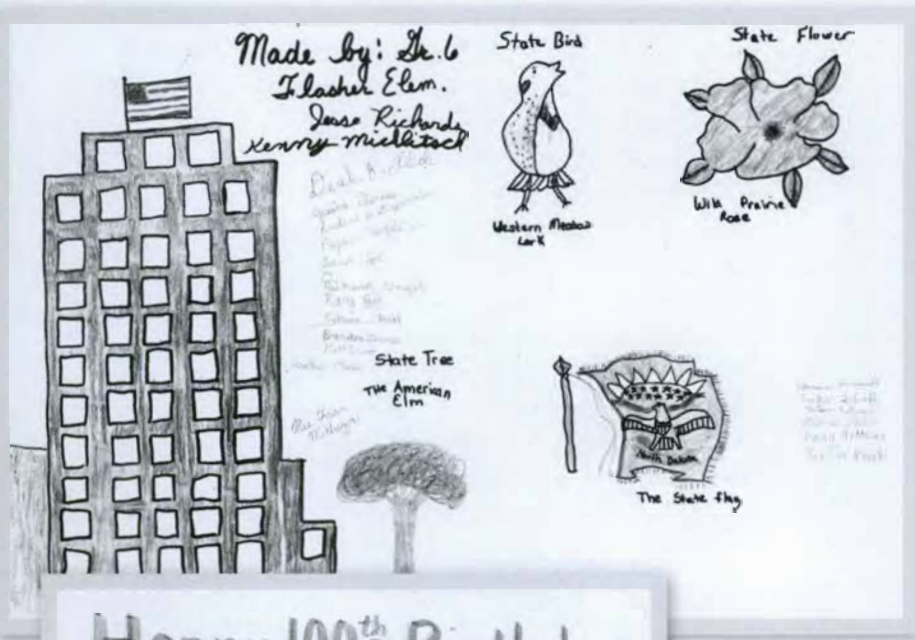
At Christmas and throughout the year, we invited Rosemary Person's Strolling Strings to play for us toward the end of the meal. They were very popular and the Japanese visitors especially loved them! We hosted many U.S. and foreign dignitaries. We had the president of Harvard University for dinner one evening, and often heads of corporations. We had both Angie Dickinson and Phil Jackson following their inductions into the North Dakota Hall of Fame. We also hosted many receptions and parties. At Christmas we always included Jim Dunn, our gardener, and Rodney and Jenny Nagel. Rodney was our main contact at the capitol and always ready to take care of our needs. One special request was to get rid of the thousands of crows who settled in the trees on the southwest corner.

At Christmas each year we featured an ethnic group represented in our state. I invited the Germans from Russia, the Swedes, and the Norwegians, among others. They brought their special ornaments to decorate the tree and place around the state rooms. They helped host open house every day for two hours during the holiday season and shared their customs. And one year we had a Teddy Bear Christmas. This became a very popular event and we had many visitors. Once though, the tree was decorated too heavily on one side and late one

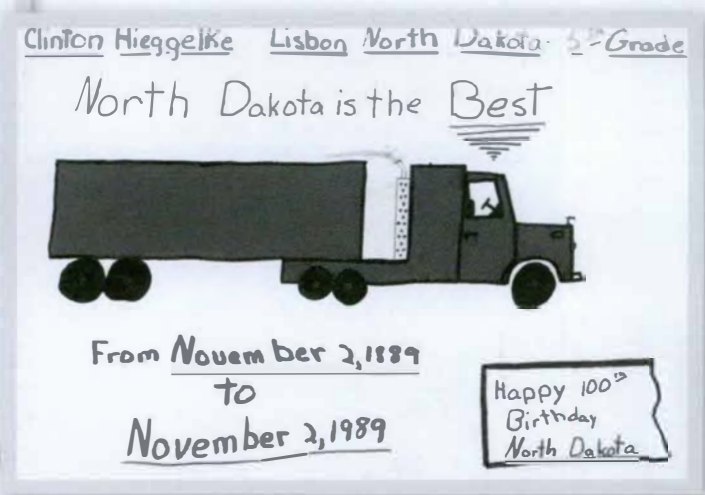
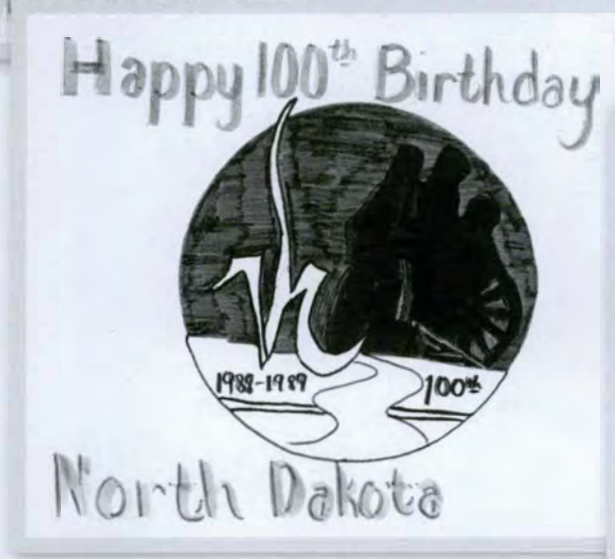
evening it toppled over! We spent hours scrambling to get it back together and ready for the tour the next morning.

When we left Bismarck, I felt sad to leave two daughters and many friends behind. But we knew it was not possible to remain in Bismarck and ignore the political process. It was time to leave this great adventure behind, and it WAS a great adventure. We have never regretted that decision. I was anxious to be in my own home and have more time with Bud and our children. I carry with me many wonderful memories of new friends, people we met along the way, staff from those eight years, and encounters with some of the world's powerful figures. And always there will be memories of the thrill of winning a big election, followed by the inauguration.

After returning to the eastern part of the state and settling in Fargo, Bud was selected to be Vice-President for Governmental Affairs at American Crystal Sugar and I was asked to be a trustee for the Meritcare Health System. I accepted that role and served for eleven years, with two as the system chair. Now, grandchildren and great-grandchildren fill our lives and give us the joys of grandparenthood we've been waiting for.



The poster contest and other centennial activities took place in a time of economic uncertainty.



Regrettable Referral Repercussions

As we were taking office in 1985, we went through the Olson budget and asked the Legislature to cut out seventy-three million dollars. That was just the first in a continuing series of actions to deal with the devastating impact of a regional recession and a decline in our oil, gas, coal and agricultural fortunes on North Dakota's economy and the resulting revenue problems. The Legislature restored twenty million dollars and approved a general fund level that was \$107 million higher than the amount of expected income, which left a small projected ending balance. However, revenues subsequently came in far below expectations. I cut 4 percent, a total of forty-five million dollars.

That December (1986) I called a special session and the Legislature bumped the income tax rate from 10.5 percent

of taxpayers' federal liability to 14 percent and raised the sales tax and the motor vehicle excise tax, all effective January 1, 1987 to June 30, 1989. Republican Leon Mallberg, a Dickinson business owner who later was my re-election opponent, ran the petition drive to refer the income tax hike, which qualified for the ballot in a matter of days. But the voters sided with the Legislature and those tax increases were upheld.

The economy didn't improve. In 1989 legislators knew the problem and by better than a two-thirds majority passed a one percent sales tax, along with modest increases in the income and gas taxes to fill the gap. Tragically, the taxes were referred by unscrupulous people to a public vote. Eight measures were referred. When the petitions came in and we realized what it was going to do to the state's revenue I remember calling the staff in saying I wanted to go out and fight.

The referral episode was disappointing in lots of ways. I knew if we didn't save the sales tax we were going to be short funds for primary and secondary schools, and property taxes were going to go goofy. Of all the things that are important in state government—care of the sick and assistance for all manner of human need—the future depended upon how well we did in education. And everyone who was thinking knew that, but few would stand up and fight and say the tough stuff that you have to say to get new taxes. They liked saying “no new taxes,” and it's caused all kinds of trouble. Back then it was more the Republicans who were crying about the folly of deficit spending than were the Democrats. Bill Guy told me it has always taken Democrats who don't run on the principle that they're going to cut taxes to get things straightened out. It seems to be true. It's weird; this obsession with cutting taxes obliterates every other kind of rationality in public policy.

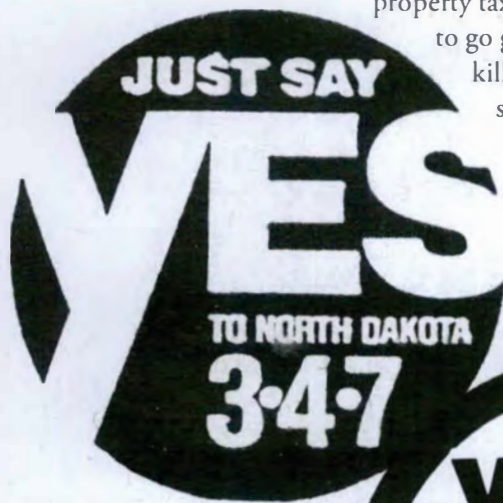
Few of the people in public life came forward to fight and save the sales tax. When the petitions were filed my memory is that someone in the office, probably my press secretary, told us that the polls showed us down eighty-twenty—only 20 percent of the people supported continuation of the sales tax increase. Two people helped. Wayne Sanstead, the state superintendent of public instruction, was consistent but he wasn't able to be out on the road working day after day; the other was Evan Lips, a wonderful longtime Republican state senator from Bismarck. Evan went out and spoke wherever he could to remind people what I was telling them, that

property taxes were going to go goofy if we killed these revenue sources.

I loved that trip around the state on the tax referral fight—not

because I convinced everyone, just because people were honestly interested in the issue and the implications of the issue and people listened intently everywhere I went. It was a wonderful experience, contrary to what some people thought. I gave up to five or six lectures a day for six or seven weeks. I was pretty tired but I was never unhappy and I enjoyed the discussions and people were generally good to me. Even when they didn't agree with me they listened and seemed to be appreciative that somebody came out and told them what they thought, with clarity.

I had charts to show North Dakota's taxes were low to moderate. We were running into a situation where we couldn't adequately fund everything we had to support. Because of my belief of what government was supposed to do in taking care of the rights of people, human service programs were a high priority, particularly helping the poor



SHSND 90-E-0007

Material urging voters to vote for or against the referred legislation blanketed the state before the December 5, 1989, election.

THE PRESENT GOVERNOR PROPOSED



ATTENTION, TAXPAYERS: HERE'S THE DEMOCRAT TRACK RECORD IN BISMARCK

- **THAT'S RIGHT** . . . your present Governor proposed a Tax Increase of \$343 million dollars. A \$500 increase for every man, woman and child in North Dakota.
- **STATE INCOME TAX** . . . your present Governor flew all around the state promoting an Income Tax Increase in the March '87 Special Election. Your state income tax has increased 47%.
- **STATE TRAVEL** . . . your present Governor is seldom in Bismarck. He takes one junket after another junket and the taxpayers pick up the tab. The first two years of his term cost you, the taxpayers, \$30,007,144 for State Employees' Travel.
- **GOVERNOR'S MANSION** . . . your present Governor is spending \$165,800 to fix up the Governor's Mansion. That's almost as much as it cost to build the residence originally (\$216,000).
- **OIL IMPORT FEES** . . . your present Governor flew south to meet with the Governors of the big oil producing states to see what could be done to raise foreign oil import fees. He then flew to Washington, D.C., and testified before Congress asking them to raise the tariff on imported oil.

Your Governor did everything he could to raise crude oil prices so that the gas you put in your car and the diesel fuel you put in your tractor would cost more. That's how much he cares about you, the consumer.

Yes, you do have a choice . . . Leon Mallberg is that choice!

Sponsored & paid for by Wells-Foster Republican Women, Minerva Paul, Cathay, President

Campaign material supporting Leon Mallberg, the Republican candidate for governor in 1988. Sinner defeated Mallberg with 59.9 percent of the vote, 179,094 to 119,986.

Throughout the Sinner administration the state was faced with flat to declining revenues. The actual revenue collections for the 1983-85 biennium, for example, were \$1,109,006,300. By the 1993-95 biennium, collections had increased by only \$800,000 to \$1,109,801,429. This flat revenue stream constrained budgets and required cuts to appropriations throughout the decade.

In March 1986 Sinner ordered all state agencies and boards, including those directed by other elected officials, to cut spending in the remainder of the biennium by 4 per cent of their two-year budget. The actual revenues for the 1985-87 biennium were eighty-seven million dollars, or 8.6 per cent, below forecasts. In the special legislative session held December 2-5, 1986, income tax rates were raised and cable television made subject to sales tax. As a result of these tax increases and further spending cuts made during the 1987 session, an ending balance for the biennium of \$32.6 million was forecast. The increases were referred and on March 18, 1987, the income tax increase was approved by 50.7 percent of voters, although the cable tax was defeated. In July 1988 an across-the-board spending cut of slightly more than 2 percent was ordered by Sinner.

As a result of the successful 1989 referral of several tax increases, approximately ninety-eight million dollars was cut from the 1989-91 budget. Twenty million dollars of potential reductions had been identified by the legislature during the

1989 session, and the remainder was an across-the-board cut. However, as the state economic situation improved in 1990, approximately twenty-two million dollars of restored funding, in an across-the-board 2 percent increase, were approved in August 1990. In the next biennium, one further small cut of .36 percent was made in July 1992. The following bienniums saw moderate increases in revenue collections and an end to cuts in appropriations.

Comparison of General Fund Collections to Revenue Forecasts 1985-87 to 1991-93

Biennium	Forecast	Actual
1985-87	\$1,025,505,250	\$937,887,848
1987-89	\$1,055,283,000	\$1,072,433,908
1989-91	\$1,091,319,000	\$1,122,735,213
1991-93	\$1,117,450,650	\$1,109,801,429

General Fund Appropriations 1985-87 to 1991-93

Biennium	Appropriation	Adjusted
1985-87	\$1,133,350,035	\$1,077,110,663
1987-89	\$1,057,169,173	\$1,032,914,290
1989-91	\$1,119,785,620	\$1,044,267,562
1991-93	\$1,198,630,674	\$1,194,325,674



Evan Lips (1918-2005) was mayor of Bismarck and a long-term North Dakota legislator, known for his support of education. Born in Bismarck on October 17, 1918, he attended the University of North Dakota, where both his academic and football achievements were notable. After graduating from UND, Lips enlisted in the US Marine Corps in May 1941 and served in a number of Pacific battles, including Iwo Jima, Guam, Guadalcanal, and Bougainville. He was awarded the Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, and Presidential Unit Citation. After returning to Bismarck he began a career in insurance and was first elected to the first of three terms as mayor of Bismarck in 1954. In 1960 he was elected to the state Senate, where he served until his retirement in 1998. During his time in the Senate, he served as majority leader, president pro-tempore, and as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Lips was recognized for his knowledge of state government and his willingness to work with both parties. In 1989 he joined Governor Sinner in campaigning in favor of the package of tax increases approved by the legislature. The memoirs of every governor in office after Lips was elected to the Senate have commented upon the support and advice given by Evan Lips and his role in making state government work. Governor John Hoeven said after his death that "Evan Lips, in the course of his life, embodied outstanding service to his community, state and nation. As a public servant, he approached all issues as an advocate for the people of North Dakota, considering only what was right and good for our state. His life's work is a legacy to North Dakota."

and the sick and the handicapped. Higher education had little place to go other than raising tuition and tuition was raised pretty significantly during that period because we didn't have enough money after the referendum loss. It was building in the three years before that but the resulting calamity was what I told every audience.

In addition to the meetings around the state, I pointed out in a letter to North Dakota newspapers that if a no vote prevailed there would be cuts in state services and increases in local property taxes to offset the loss in state revenues.

Voters said no down the line, even rejecting a constitutional change that would have allowed a commission to propose a plan to the legislature for streamlining state government by consolidating departments. I think we would have won that election had it not been for an ad the North Dakota Education Association ran that offended people. It showed people slamming the door on education. I don't know that I vigorously objected when I saw it in advance, but I remember that I didn't like it.

Those who knew how hard I had worked were angry. I remember Dick Rayl being just beside himself with frustration that the people hadn't seen the wisdom of keeping that one-cent sales tax. Dick turned off the holiday lights at the Capitol, and I was completely unaware that he'd done it. He was feeling badly for me because he knew I'd worked my butt off. He was angry on my behalf. I was embarrassed. I called up Dick and told him you can't do that, that's petty. He knew he shouldn't have done it, and he turned those lights back on.

People got the message that there was some burn in the budget office for losing the election and those who didn't support the tax didn't see how disastrous the loss would be. But at the same time we made it clear we didn't really want to get revenge. We had to reduce general fund spending \$110 million by using up the projected balance of twelve million dollars and cutting ninety-eight million dollars. I had learned the first time I cut the budget in 1985 or the first part of 1986 that in order to do it right you had to accept the legislative prioritization and do an across-the-board cut like we did that year. There was little complaint because everyone got treated the same. Within the agencies there were some tough decisions to make, but for the most part people were pretty understanding and were pretty good about it.

The tragedy of it was after the loss of the sales tax in the 1989 election the only area of appropriation that had recourse was primary and secondary education, because the schools had property taxes to get revenues. I had told everyone during that campaign that that was the only alternative because if it happened the state would not be able to honor its 70 percent support of education. The 1980 initiated measure that created an oil extraction tax and a state resources fund had established the 70 percent support level. UND President Tom Clifford was one of the people who I remember was extremely helpful. We had to raise tuitions, which was the only way we could get adequate funding for higher education. I remember him telling me,

confidentially, that it isn't all bad the kids have to pay more because they then understand how important it is for them to pay attention to what they're doing. I never forgot that. It was something I needed to hear because having been on the Board of Higher Education I was truly worried about the implications of raising tuition.

Despite our efforts to cut, we found ourselves unable to adequately fund schools. It's clearly the cause of so much trauma today. We have cities like Fargo where the percentage of home owners is just abysmal by any standard; people can't afford to own their homes because they can't afford the property tax. Of course no phenomenon in history is single sourced and there were other reasons—certainly the lack of diversity in the economy was part of it. But the fact is we were in fair shape after increasing the sales tax 1 percent in 1989, but we fell a long way after we lost it.

Gone With a Puff Of Smoke

One of the really interesting examples of political fallout as a result of political actions was my decision as governor to discontinue smoking in the state buildings. We had been aggressive in the state under the leadership of Dr. Stephen McDonough in the Health Department, headed up by Dr. Bob Wentz. Under Wentz, McDonough had begun as many programs as we could to get smoking stopped in the state, and in 1989 we were given the first award from the Centers for Disease Control for having the best smoking-secession effort in the Rocky Mountain region.

I smoked until 1978. In fact, the doctors said my artery blockage that required bypass surgery was a result of earlier

State finances suffered through the 1980s. Revenue from taxes on oil extraction, envisioned to be the key to school financing following the passage of an initiated tax measure in 1980, failed to materialize as oil prices plummeted and remained low. Farm commodity prices also suffered and the farm economy was made even worse by an extended drought.

In 1987, the Legislative Assembly enacted a temporary additional half-percent sales tax, set to expire after two years. Then, in 1989, the Legislative Assembly passed three major tax increases and an emergency measure. Individual income tax rates increased from 14 percent of federal income tax liability to 17 percent. The sales and use tax was increased from 5 percent to 6 percent, and the motor fuel tax was increased from seventeen cents to twenty cents per gallon. In short order a committee headed by Bismarck businessman Kent French successfully circulated petitions to refer the legislation for popular vote. The referral fever was not limited to the three tax measures. Provisions for mandatory seat belt use, legalization of electronic video gaming devices, a comprehensive k-12 health education program, executive branch reorganization, and legislators' inclusion in the Public Employees Retirement System were also referred. While all eight measures had strong advocates and opponents, most attention focused on the three tax measures: numbers 3, 4, and 7 on the ballot.

All eight measures were defeated (i.e., voters rejected the legislation) by large margins in a strong special election on December 5, 1989. The tax measures lost in forty-six of the state's fifty-three counties with most of the "yes" votes (support of the tax measures) coming from counties in the Red River Valley. The state income tax increase and the motor fuel tax increase were rejected by 61 percent and 60 percent,

respectively; the sales tax increase was rejected by 53 percent. Electronic video gambling, mandatory seat belt use, and comprehensive health care education were rejected by margins similar to the income and motor fuel taxes. The optional retirement plan for state legislators received the soundest rejection with 88 percent voting "no." State government reorganization, strongly advocated by Lieutenant Governor Lloyd Omdahl, was rejected by 71 percent of voters.

The Bismarck Tribune reported in its December 6 edition that referral leader French called Governor Sinner by 10:00 p.m. election night with a list of recommendations for trimming state government. While referral advocates celebrated and their opponents recovered from the shock, Sinner and his staff were left to determine how to slash \$98 million from the state budget that would run for another eighteen months.

The effect of the successful referral of the tax measures remains controversial. State spending is spread throughout the state, with the largest items including k-12 education, higher education, social services, and transportation. Some areas, such as k-12 education, would rely more heavily on local property taxes, while others simply cut services or raised fees. Supporters of the referral argued that the state needed to simply establish priorities, limit government services to those constitutionally (and sometimes, federally) mandated, and cut "waste." However, perhaps the clearest outcome was that the Legislative Assembly would not soon attempt another tax increase. An improving economy and, three years later, a new governor, reinforced this caution. Ed Schafer, who would be elected governor in 1992, had supported the defeat of the tax measures.

Gerald G. Newborg

smoking. But when I quit then, I just quit. I had tried once before but got started again. I knew smoking was a stupid thing to do, but that really didn't have any bearing on it. I watched and listened to the reactions of the people who complained about smoking and began to read about the implications of secondhand smoke until it became more and more clear to me that innocent people were being hurt quite significantly by smoking.

One Friday afternoon I left the office thinking about it, and quite by accident Janie and I had a dinner engagement with a man named Jack Schuchart and wife Joyce. Jack was the CEO of Montana-Dakota Utilities, and he had prohibited smoking at MDU. As we sat and were eating, I asked him what all he all he did before he discontinued smoking. He looked at me and said he didn't do anything, he just announced it.

I realized that was what I needed to do, because if we began a long discussion on how it was going to be done, it would never get done. So, the following Monday I asked Dick Gross to prepare an executive order, and if I remember correctly we had a press conference the next day, April 17, 1990, with no warning to anybody that it was going to happen.

Lots of people were upset. Many called and wrote letters complaining. They were from all over the state and different building facilities, but the most significant challenge came from a group of Capitol employees who asked to see me. I met with them and listened to their stories for I don't know how long—it was a lengthy meeting . . . they wanted me to give them a “smoking room.” Probably thirty or forty people attended. Finally I explained to them that we are trying and we are doing the best we can, but we haven't got enough money to pay you well. If we are to provide special places for you to smoke here, we must do it for all state employees. Did they have any idea what that would cost?

I announced the smoking ban in the large auditorium at the North Dakota Heritage Center. I think the vast majority of state employees knew it was the right thing to do. Eventually some of the same people who complained came in and thanked me for helping them quit smoking.

However, several legislators were upset that they wouldn't be able to smoke while they were in session. In fact, they insisted that the legislative wing was not under my authority. It was, in fact, under my authority, but there was no point in my engaging in a big battle, so I deferred to them and they had a smoking room. Until I left, they were still smoking there. I was told you could hardly see in that room and people were in there inhaling that stuff. Much later, the legislature finally ended smoking in their private room. At any rate, the smoking ban was something I was proud of.

What I didn't know about my smoking ban decision I learned later. After his election, the early part of

December in 1992, Bill Clinton called me about becoming his secretary of agriculture. He said he hadn't actually decided to give it to anybody but wanted me to think about that. So he called me back about December 15 or 16 and asked whether I still wanted to do it. I told him that I would be happy to and I could do it but if something else changed, not to worry about it and do what he had to do. So he told me to come to Little Rock the next Tuesday and he would introduce and name me.

Warren Christopher met me when I returned and said he thought it had changed. I eventually went in and sat down with Bill, just the two of us, and he didn't even bring the appointment up, so I think he thought Warren had advised me.

Bill and I talked for quite awhile. At any rate, I left and came back to Bismarck. I hadn't told anybody back home I was going to Little Rock because I knew things could change. But the news got out after my private meeting with the president-elect. While I was en route back home to North Dakota on the day before Christmas, the *Fargo Forum* ran a story about Clinton's decisions on various appointments. The paper spread a five-column headline on the front page indicating I had been passed over for agriculture secretary.

After leaving the governor's office I was then hired by American Crystal Sugar Company to do lobbying work. I spent a lot of time in Washington D.C., for the next three years. About a year into my job at Crystal—it must have been winter of 1994—I was having lunch with a friend of mine, who had been in and around Washington, and I am still in close touch with as we hunt together. He had been in the Reagan Administration. We were dining and he asked if I knew why I didn't get to be secretary of agriculture.

When I said I didn't, he said it was because the I was first governor to ban smoking in all state buildings and facilities. The tobacco lobby found out I was the candidate to be the nominee, and raised all kinds of hell, and that is why I didn't get it. The thing that upset them most was many other governors followed my example and banned smoking after I made the move.

I had another chance to become agriculture secretary about a year and a half later when Mike Espy, the man Clinton had chosen, resigned under some pressure. But the whole debate over the Freedom to Farm bill was going on, and I wasn't sure that as a newcomer coming into Washington I could deal with the Republican Congress as well as one of their own could.

When I was in to talk with Clinton about it I told him, if he could get Dan Glickman he had better take him. So he then appointed Glickman, who was a member of the House Agriculture Committee, a good guy from Kansas, and a friend of Bob Dole.

Sawyer Landfill

In November 1990, State Health Officer Bob Wentz wrote me a letter critical of the Echo Mountain municipal solid waster incinerator and landfill proposed near Sawyer. The public hearing was scheduled for a few days after that. Wentz stated that he was firmly opposed to permitting the landfill, and, his preference would be to approach the public hearing with an announced intent to deny the permit. When that letter came I immediately asked Dick Gross to run around and stop its circulation because Wentz was going to be the hearing officer. Dick tried, but it was too late, the letter was all over. Attorney General Nick Spaeth came in and said I should fire Wentz.

I said I wouldn't fire him as he was a good health officer—he made a mistake. I liked Bob Wentz and his passion for doing it right, so I didn't even chastise him. When the Sawyer landfill had first got on my screen, I went back to the office, called Fritz Schwindt, head of the Health Department, and asked what the deal was, whether those guys were meeting our requirements? He said they were absolutely going far beyond them.

So everywhere I went I said from the beginning that from what I could understand, if they meet the standards they get approved. We don't change the rules because somebody gets a whim. I doubt Bob Wentz knew he could be removing himself as hearing officer when he wrote the letter. But I assume he knew Fritz was probably the next in line to hold the hearing. Both Fritz and Bob were honest to a fault. It turned out that Bob Wentz did preside over the hearing and

he denied the permit in December 1990. Municipal Services Corporation pursued legal action and the Supreme Court ordered the state to reconsider the permit. A second hearing was held in November 1992 with Fritz as hearing officer. After we left office and Bob Wentz was no longer state health officer, the Health Department eventually approved the permit when MSC agreed to increased treatments of some wastes, on on-site inspector, and a slight change in location of the site.

Producing Solutions

My past involvement in agriculture, even in national policy, led me to conclude pretty early that was one area for me to personally follow as governor. The same was true with petroleum and the energy field; not so much because of my past, but because my regular daily involvement with the Industrial Commission provided a crash course in those issues. But there were all kinds of areas where I simply relied on members of the staff to tell me how things should go and what course of action should be pursued.

Generally speaking, my staff and I wanted to have every issue be a sacred issue, and we gave every one of them our best shot without reference to partisan politics. Some things were difficult to get a handle on because there were so many facets to them, but there again, the ability of the staff was invaluable to me. We were constantly consulting with agency heads and finding people who would tell us what the truth was. Also, Earl Strinden and some of the other Republican leaders and I had a pretty good understanding on how things

Governor Sinner worked closely with staff, particularly Dick Rayl, OMB director (left). Here, Sinner takes a short ice cream break during another press conference on budget issues.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune.



were done and worked. One business group came in and said they'd never had such good access to the governor as they had in our office. That was just the way we thought it should operate.

I took huge satisfaction in achievements on problems we had worked for a long time to resolve. I won't ever forget passage of the PACE program in 1991. We were so sure it was the right approach for economic development. Chuck Fleming and I got the idea for PACE (Partnership in Assisting Community Expansion) when we were flying to Bowman one night. We went there to tell the Bowman people they needed to have an economic development tax to help new businesses, a process that was legalized and available, but few counties or cities were using, to help get businesses started.

The old system of approving loans for new businesses had no form or procedure that was well thought out, and we went through all sorts of efforts to get the PACE program adopted and provided to the business people. That was a huge satisfaction for me—I'm proud of the work we did on that. *The PACE fund assists North Dakota communities in economic development by creating a fund administered by the Bank of North Dakota to reduce interest costs in loans from the Bank and private lenders for development projects.* We went to Bowman to tell people they had to be proactive in this. When we talked about the concept of the PACE program that night, we didn't realize that was the solution for getting people to start a local fund. When the PACE program details were finally finished, every economic development jurisdiction had to have an economic development plan of its own; they had to have a fund or they couldn't use the program.

Growing North Dakota included policies and initiatives like the PACE program. *Growing North Dakota was a set of policies and programs implemented by a number of legislative initiatives in 1991. It grew out of efforts in the late 1980s to assess the state economy and options for the future.* Another was the Match program, through which the Bank of North Dakota participates in loans to lower interest rates and attract financially strong companies in manufacturing, processing, and value-added industries. The 1991 Legislature implemented the package by approving a \$21 million budget for economic development, four times larger than any previous budget.

The guy who eventually headed USDA's development program, our good friend Wally Beyer from Minot, said PACE was the best program in the United States, and others, too, have said the concept involved was the only one that really worked. Everyone had to be a player, all the interests had to put their money where their mouths were, and everyone had to behave—no passing the buck.

The greatest sense of achievement came many years later when one of the Industrial Commission members noted that

there had never been a business failure in that six or seven years the PACE program had been in place. None of the businesses funded in the first place by the PACE program had failed.

In the 1980s, farm foreclosures had become another knotty issue. If we hadn't found an answer for the banks, the drama would have been far more tragic. The answer we came up with saved many farms for at least ten or fifteen years, and we didn't lose a bunch of banks.

Numerous meetings took place and hundreds of hours were spent finding an answer to the problem the banks all faced—particularly the farm creditors—where they had loaned more money than the land was currently worth and there wasn't any hope of being paid back. Foreclosures left ownership of the farm in the bank's hands, but the anti-corporate farming laws limited the banks from keeping the farms more than three years before they had to move them. There was no way they could win. Banks didn't know how to deal with their own policies, which required them to foreclose. We had worked and worked trying to find an alternative to this scenario. Early one morning, I was lying in bed unable to sleep and suddenly realized that if the lender had a good farmer it should rewrite the loan to a level the farmer could handle and then provide for reclaiming the money at the end of a certain number of years if the value returned.

Right away from the office I called a man named Larry Biegler at the St. Paul Farm Credit Bank and told him. He said I was absolutely right and they put the policy into effect immediately. Somebody later at the local farm credit bank said everyone thought Larry Biegler walked on water because he'd come up with the answer, which was fine with me.

The word spread rapidly that it was the best solution, everyone adopted it and as far as I know we didn't lose a bank. Who knows how many farmers had been abandoned and how many banks actually foreclosed, but it was a huge day when we realized there was a solution to the problem. It turned out later that many of the farmers were in trouble when the ten years were up. Many went down the tube in the early and middle nineties, but at least they had that time to make a more sane adjustment in their lives.

One of the economic development leaders that I liked, Bill Patrie, who headed the state Economic Development Commission, was actually critical of me for being too cautious in economic development. He believed that you should have some failures, that you should be giving money helping companies start that are more risky. I remember saying to him that business failures end up leaving many communities with people owed money, people out of a job, the banks disenchanting, and they are double negatives for further economic development. Somewhere between what he believed and what I believed is probably right. The PACE program over time has proven to be very helpful for

well-planned, well-managed companies, but probably not sufficiently helpful for a little more imaginative entrepreneurial programs.

The most amazing economic development example was the movement of Marvin Windows and Doors into North Dakota in 1991. Marvin has done extremely well here. When the Marvins were originally trying to make a location decision, they had already purchased an option in Wisconsin and had met four times with the Wisconsin governor, Tommy Thompson, to work out the details of their moving into Wisconsin.

I don't remember who suggested we should go up to Warroad and visit with the Marvins, but I said set it up and we'll do it. We flew to that far-north Minnesota community in the state airplane on a bitterly cold winter day. I've learned since that what happened was totally unpredictable and unforeseen when we left there. We were sitting with the Marvin father, Bill, and the senior operators of the company at that time. Jake and Frank Marvin were the day-to-day operators; we had about four people with us. I can't remember who made the statement but in presenting our tax structure the person from North Dakota said our workmen's compensation premium rate was extremely low, and he quoted a figure.

But we knew the workmen's compensation bureau had already voted to raise it significantly. So I said we better tell them the rest of the story, because we didn't come there to blow smoke to those guys. We wanted them to be successful and we wanted to tell them the truth. He then backed up and somewhat embarrassed gave them the changed rate. I didn't know it until a friend told me the story much later, but after we left Bill Marvin told his people they were going to North Dakota because we were the kind of people we want to work with. They made the decision that day.

Marvin Windows has been extremely successful in North Dakota and loves being here. The company had good offers from both Wahpeton and Fargo so it had a big decision to make about location. I've since learned that another reason Fargo was chosen because they could rely on a supply of degreed, well-trained scientists—they have mostly North Dakota graduates working in their technical division. *Marvin makes its Integrity windows and has other operations in Fargo, along with a window plant at Grafton.*

A Signing and a Veto

In February of 1991 I signed a bill repealing the state's one-hundred-year-old blue laws, which limited the sale of goods and services sold on Sundays. As the last state in the country to prohibit Sunday shopping, we were kind of an island. That was evident in Fargo-Moorhead with



Governor Sinner demonstrates his skill with a Bobcat loader at the ground breaking for the Bobcat plant at Gwinner.

tons of people shopping in Moorhead on Sundays. I think philosophically it would be a good thing if the whole society would block marketing on Sunday. But the blue law was really built on a religious principle. As much as I believe in the principle of worshiping God and resting from the run of the mill activities on Sunday, I didn't think the state should be imposing it, unless it would be done nationwide.

That April I vetoed a bill that would have been the strictest anti-abortion law in the nation. The bill would have banned abortions except in cases of rape, incest, or if the mother's life was in danger. Rapes leading to pregnancy would have had to be reported within twenty-one days of the crime or within fifteen days of when the victim was capable of doing so. Those who performed illegal abortions would be prosecuted, with a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

I was ready for the bill and acted quickly. The North Dakota House then voted, sixty-three to forty-three, eight votes short of the seventy-one needed to override my veto.

My position on abortion directly flows from my education at St. John's. I was long a student of church

teachings on when life begins and saw major inconsistencies in the position of the church on abortion in its teachings through the centuries.

What was ironic, I've never believed that abortion was a good thing—it wasn't that at all—but when you get into the area of public policy you have to be scrupulously careful to not ever give credence to the idea that the state can impose church opinions, even when they are the opinions of the majority.

I had made it clear in the earlier writings that I disapproved of abortions because I thought they were dealing with human life. I also believed it was wrong for the general public to pay for them. It's probably not ethical of a society to use people's money to pay for something the vast majority doesn't agree with. Admittedly people who are poor and pregnant deserve help, as they do for their food and medical care. But I think it's a miscarriage of that concept to conclude that because some of them want to have an abortion the public—which doesn't really believe in it—should pay for it.

Reorganize And Consolidate

Everyone was aware that if we didn't plan for school reorganization it was going to happen after lots of mistakes. Many schools had been built that never should have been, and were still being built. It was particularly obvious to me lots of children were short academic work they needed, particularly in the last two years of high school. There were just too many upper-level courses that the small high schools couldn't offer. Some of them were providing a few of the science courses by using a rotating teacher, but lots of times there weren't adequate lab facilities. Lots of things weren't working well, but reorganization was like pulling teeth.

We weren't that successful at promoting school reorganization. It required vast amounts of legislative courage and foresight to do it. I had tried it when I was in the Legislature. Clearly the section of law called the Joint Powers Act was responsible for many school reorganizations. It gave school districts the ability to try joint efforts by contract. It probably wasn't as dramatic as some of us would have liked to have seen in bringing about reorganization, but it's a wonderful section of law and it was used often in putting joint efforts together.

The other area where reorganization is so badly needed and where there was so much frustration was in many of the county functions. I was determined to get extension programs regionalized, not just because they would probably be more efficient but because we could provide specialists in the region that we couldn't in every county. We actually cut the budget one time and said we wouldn't raise it unless there's a commitment to get these county offices centralized. Oh yeah, they said, we'll do that, just give us the money.



Governor Sinner explaining the philosophy that led him to veto the 1991 anti-abortion legislation.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune

Well, it never happened. I've always been upset about that, and about weakening to giving them the money without a plan, without certitude that it was really going to happen. It's really the same issue as with schools---quality of service.

What's Up, Doc?

When it came time to actually move to Bismarck after the 1984 election, there were many things to plan for—one of them was my health care. I called a long-time friend and doctor in Fargo, Gerry Kavanaugh, for advice. There was no hesitation on his part: Ralph Dunnigan. It turned out that Ralph, who headed the UND Family Practice Center, was Governor Olson's doctor, too. To say we became instant friends would not be an overstatement. I certainly liked him and was impressed by him.

I'd had a physical check-up in December of 1990 and failed a stress test but the doctors couldn't find the problem. In July we were at the lake and I was playing tennis with one of my sons when this stretching phenomenon became

pretty pronounced, so we walked around a bit and it went away. I didn't feel anything after an hour-and-a-half of pretty hard tennis. The next week, on a basketball court, we had just started playing when this stretching feeling came back. I slowed up for a few minutes and it went away.

Three days later brought a trip to Minot to welcome the troops home from Kuwait. We left early on the state plane, did the presentation at the State Fair Grounds, got in the plane, flew home to Bismarck. Janie boarded in Bismarck and we went on to the Western Governors' Conference in Rapid City. I don't recall noticing anything all day until we got back to the hotel room after a reception at Mount Rushmore. This stretching feeling hit again, more pronounced than ever, so I decided to get checked. My assigned driver, a South Dakota highway patrolman, rushed me to the emergency room. There they administered blood thinner and nitro or something, got everything quieted down and admitted me to the hospital.

The next morning they did a major angiogram. The cardiologist stood watching the electrocardiogram and the



George and Jane Sinner leave Rapid City Regional Hospital after his successful heart bypass surgery in 1991. He had been attending the Western Governors' Conference in Rapid City.

blood flow and he said he didn't think there's anything there. The surgeon came in, a Polish doctor from Krakow, Dr. Paul Wojewski, who was an excitable, energetic man. I talked to him as he was standing over me. All of a sudden he spotted the problem--the blood was barely squeezing through an artery.

The cardiologist came in when he saw the blockage and told me I had a serious blockage. It all happened pretty fast and the surgery was pretty invasive—they cut the breastbone right in half and they used a pulmonary pump. The last thing I remember is coming out of anesthesia and the surgeon sitting beside the bed. He told me I was a fortunate man, that playing basketball had saved my life because no normal heart would have taken what mine did. He said it's amazing my heart was strong enough to push blood through there



Jane Sinner with new wildflower-patterned china for the Governor's Residence. Ordering the china was the last step in a major remodeling project.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune

without any damage, because it was really blocked. He also advised me that cigarettes had started the blockage, even though I quit smoking many years before. The good news was that there had been no heart attack, no damage to the heart.

The Rapid City heart surgeon became a fast friend—Wojewski went to Poland with us that next fall, after which we worked with health care people from both North Dakota and South Dakota to organize a program called Dakota Heart in an effort to help Eastern Europe's cardiovascular specialists and to show them the latest technology. They were well-trained. Paul said he too had good training over there before he came to the United States and the Cleveland Clinic. But he said they didn't know modern technology and weren't able to use it—they just never had that hands-on experience. The plan was to get them to understand how to do things in a modern way.

Paul himself became so frustrated because he couldn't get a good job of screening done on the people that came over here for the program. Eight of them arrived in the fall of 1992 for training in Bismarck, Rapid City, and Fargo. These heart specialists had lived in a Communist climate for so long they took advantage of everything they could. Some of them were pestering the nurses. Two of them took a state car one weekend and drove to Texas, believe it or not, from Fargo. Paul felt personally responsible, and boy, he was livid. I don't remember that we personally ended the program, but we quit pushing it and the clinics just quit bringing them. Basically Paul turned it off.

Minding Our Manor

Living in the fish bowl wasn't as uncomfortable for me as it was for the family. A hard part for Janie was always having people around in the Governor's Residence. Hardly any days were totally hers. People kept coming and going—staff and events. That became a source of discomfort to her on many occasions. She wanted to get away. I didn't do as much as I should have, but we did get to the lake a few times each summer. After my bypass surgery, patrolmen were there. Although they were wonderful, she still didn't get the privacy she craved. And yet I don't think she ever publicly complained about the situation.

While never having privacy at the residence was hard, the people there were great. Steve Sharkey, residence manager, was God's gift to all of us, and Janie was responsible for getting him. He is, in the finest sense of the word, a professional at what he does. Thankfully, the succeeding governors have kept him on, and Steve has retained his professionalism to the nth degree. I call him fairly frequently, but he never talks out of school. I was informal—treated him like I treated everyone else—do what you want to do, just do it right. We were good friends.

Janie did a fabulous job with renovating the Governor's Residence. And right out of the shoot she banned smoking inside the building and reminded me year after year that I needed to do something. The first thing she did was put up "No Smoking" signs. I don't know why I was so slow but once I saw it clearly and realized toward the end of my years that it wasn't tough, all we had to do was issue the executive order.

When we got there the roof of the residence was leaking. The state was as poor as a church mouse, so I was not about to spend the money to replace it. Quite by coincidence the residence had the same flat-type, built-up roof as my home in Casselton, which we had just reroofed. Back there, I couldn't find any way to do it that didn't cost a ton. I wasn't going to go back to pitch and gravel on a built-up roof. I was trying to find some way to put shingles on but it was pretty flat, a two-twelve pitch. The problem was when they put shingles on a flat roof, the wind would come under and they would start flapping. One day somebody told me about a young roofer who was good. He came out and advised that there was a simple way to fix that. He said instead of using a four-inch overlap on the asphalt shingles you use three inches and they will last 'till hell freezes over and they will not blow. So I had done that in Casselton. I remember telling Dick Rayl this was the way to do the Governor's Residence roof.

Not There For The Perks

My decision to do away with the official state car and driver was part of my ordinary-guy mentality. I was not much different than anybody else, and hated the pretense while we didn't have the money to do the things that were really urgent. I didn't need a driver or a Lincoln Town Car. It was a waste, so I eliminated that. Not everyone thought it was a good idea. Some told me I was demeaning the office. It was demeaning only if you thought the office was about pomp and circumstance. I drove my own car, and rarely submitted mileage. I had a Dodge van when I got there, and then traded it off for a Chevy Suburban.

Dick Rayl came by one day to talk about the old State Office Building, the brick structure on the southeast corner of the Capitol Grounds that originally housed Bismarck Junior College. He said we needed a new place for the Water Commission because that building was a mess. But I said a new building didn't make sense given the circumstances of what we had to do with the state. Instead, we should remodel the building.

They did a good job. After the remodeling, it is still an attractive building. That issue was a little bit like the state's luxury sedan—it just didn't fit with all the other stuff we had to cut. And constructing something new was not a good signal to people.

Wise and Wonderful Women

One thing that I feel badly about was I didn't often give my wife, Janie, the credit she deserved. She was always a huge help to me. Janie's a brilliant woman and I've always paid close attention to what she thinks and says. So many times during those eight years in the governor's office, she made some small hint that I needed to pick up on.

Janie wasn't deeply into the history of the abortion issue herself, but she understood what I wrote and trusted my research. When I had to develop the veto message I will never forget her saying you have to write something different, you can't use the same stuff you used in the background paper. It was at that point I decided, with her help, to include in the veto message background information from the official statements of several prominent American churches. Together we worked on several drafts and prepared the veto message that was so widely carried. And of course, the staff did most of the research.

Even before I was governor, Janie led me into the mental health field. Probably more because of her activity than my own, I chaired the founding of the southeast regional mental health clinic, the first in North Dakota.



Without an official car and driver, Sinner was often seen refueling his own vehicle.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune

We learned of Ruth Meiers' cancer in the fall of 1986, and she went awfully fast. We lost her only six months later. I'll always remember that Ruth was still coming into the office after it was pretty clear that she wasn't going to recover. Her suffering was a gallant episode. Ruth never feared death. She knew it was coming, probably before the rest of us did. Yet she went on and did her job. She was a terrific woman who had a strong background. She came from the farm and she didn't mind doing the things that get your hands dirty and was matter-of-fact about dealing with lots of problems. She cared about taking care of people. She knew better than most that government is about protecting the rights of people and the rest of us better serve that end or you are badly mistaken about government.

In my eulogy during her memorial service at the little church in Ross, I talked about how much Ruth loved life and how we would miss her hearty laugh in the office. I remembered the delight that showed on her face in the photos taken when she entered a milking contest and lost to another woman, Mandan's mayor. Both of them beat the only male contestant.

After Ruth's death some people who really wanted the lieutenant governor's job were disappointed and some others were upset that I didn't appoint a woman. It would have been a good thing to select a woman but we were dealing with so many huge problems with the budget and so many different areas that clearly the easiest thing for me to do was to choose someone I knew extremely well, thought the

world of and trusted implicitly. It was sort of a no-brainer once Lloyd Omdahl's name came up. He overshadowed everyone else, even though we were, in fact, looking for a woman.

Lloyd was so automatically compatible. He was aware of most of the issues, understood them and thought essentially the way I did, so it was an easy decision. I agree with Lloyd's characterization of him and me as philosophical twins.

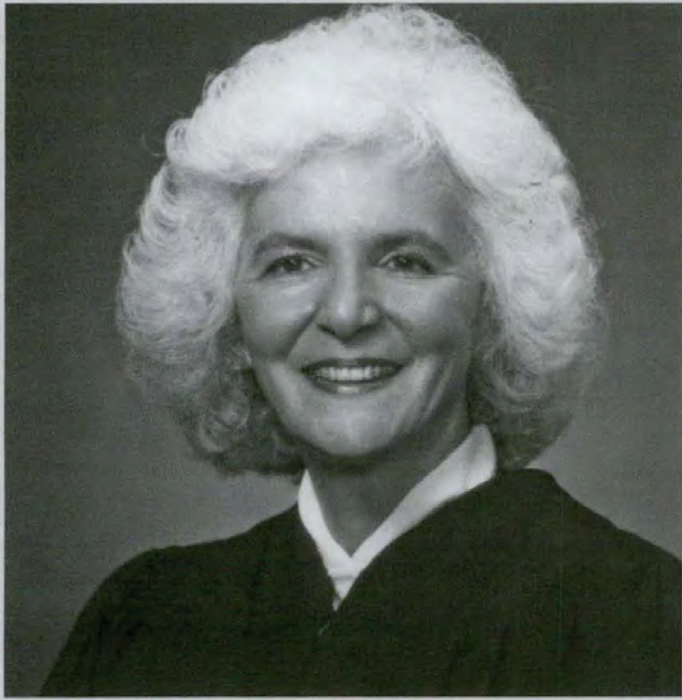
Although it didn't happen in that case, we were pretty conscious of appointing women. During my final months as governor, I had the honor of appointing the first woman to serve in the U.S. Senate from North Dakota. Quentin Burdick died September 8, 1992. Many other qualified candidates were interested in the office when I named Quentin's widow, Jocelyn "Jocie" Burdick only four days later. My statement to the press declared that events and important issues coming up in Washington made it important for North Dakota to have immediate full representation in the U.S. Senate. I noted that Jocie had been at Quentin Burdick's side throughout his more than three decades of outstanding, dedicated service to the people of North Dakota and the U.S. Senate, and that important provisions had been authored or influenced by Quentin Burdick. With the help of an experienced, superb staff, I knew Jocie would do an outstanding job of representing the interests of North Dakota.

There were so many personal items of Senator Burdick in that office. It just seemed like that was a way to make sure all



Jocelyn Burdick unlocks Burdick campaign headquarters. To her right is Grace Link and on her left is Jean Guy and Al Wolf, Bismarck attorney.

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Beryl Levine became the first woman to serve on the North Dakota Supreme Court when she was appointed by Governor George Sinner on January 17, 1985. Levine filled the Supreme Court position vacated by Justice Paul Sand. She was elected to serve the remainder of Sand's unexpired term in 1986 and in 1988 was elected to a ten-year term. She resigned from the court on March 1, 1996, and now lives in Palo Alto, California.

Courtesy of the North Dakota Supreme Court



In 1986 Heidi Heitkamp was appointed tax commissioner by Governor Sinner and elected to a full term in 1988. In 1992 she was elected attorney general of North Dakota and reelected in 1996. In 2000 she ran on the Democratic-NPL ticket for governor, losing to Republican candidate John Hoeven. She resides in Bismarck, where she is currently a director of the Dakota Gasification Company.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune

those things would be taken care of the way Jocie would like them taken care of. That was a major consideration. Jocie took office September 16, and served about three months until December 14, 1992, when Kent Conrad took over the Burdick seat after winning a special election a week earlier.

My making Heidi Heitkamp tax commissioner after Kent was initially elected to the U.S. Senate was automatic. She was later elected attorney general, and ran for governor. Some of my other women appointees were Supreme Court Justice Beryl Levine; Jane Lundstrom, banking commissioner; and Jane Robb, state laboratories director. All of them were extremely capable.

Our First Peoples

One of the most moving experiences of my life took place while waiting my turn to speak at a national Native American powwow, which brought people from all across the country to the United Tribes complex south of Bismarck. The powwow arena is a quarter of a mile off the end of a runway at the Bismarck airport. There were nearly a thousand dancers in the arena for the opening dance. It

was the largest Indian powwow on the North American continent. Twenty-five or twenty-six states were represented, along with half a dozen Canadian provinces, and over half of the approximately 450 North American tribes were represented.

I stood with Dr. David Gipp, a wonderful Native American man whom I have known for twenty-five years. He is president of the United Tribes Technical College and has devoted his life to educating Native Americans. While waiting for David to introduce me for my greeting to that huge crowd of people, the arena was aglow with marvelously colorful costumes overflowing with eagle feathers. I asked him where on earth all the eagle feathers came from.

David smiled and said it wasn't what I thought. He explained that his people did not kill eagles. He said eagles are a symbol of God to Indian people and their feathers are handed down from generation to generation. They are sacred. If just one small feather were to drop into the arena during the dance, it would be ceremoniously retrieved. Beyond that, he added that if an eagle should fly over the powwow; it would be seen by everyone here as a sign of blessing from God.

Standing a quarter of a mile off the end of the runway, I peered skyward and there were not one, but four golden eagles slowly circling the powwow. I was absolutely awestruck. Eagles are rarely spotted this close to the city and its airport. David saw the wonderment in my skyward gaze. He looked up, too. Within seconds, the whole arena fell silent. The drums stopped; the dancers stopped; and we all stood reverently realizing, of course, these eagles were a sign of God's blessing.

Later I learned not only was it significant that one eagle was there, but that four were there was of rare significance indeed. The Indians, you see, believe in the God of the West Wind, of the East Wind, of the South Wind and of the North Wind. I was deeply moved—and thought about it for days. Beyond doubt God was blessing those people, and it became clear to me how narrow my own experience really was.

I don't know if others appreciate what we were able to do with Indian gaming contracts, our exceptionally hard work on getting them right. Under the contract negotiated with the North Dakota tribes, a significant percentage of the adjusted gross must go to the tribes for use in human service programs and economic development other than gaming. North Dakota was the only state where this was done in this way. I hope the overall quality of life on the reservations has

improved as a result of those funds.

By the 1980s a movement to return the skeletal remains of Native Americans from museums to their descendents for burial gained ground across the country. Ancestral remains have deep spiritual significance to Native Americans, and they ardently sought to get them back. Alice Spotted Bear and Pemina Yellow Bird brought to my attention that the state had such remains in its collections. As far as I knew, after checking with the National Governors Association, no other state had returned remains, but to me it was the respectful thing to do. After we appointed Pemina Yellow Bird to the State Historical Society Board, North Dakota established a means for returning remains for burial, despite initial opposition from institutions like the Smithsonian.

In gratitude for these efforts, I was surprised by a wonderful gift in December 1990, during the opening of a public educational program put on by Native American leaders on the centennial memorial of Wounded Knee. The Lakota Sioux tribe adopted me in a beautiful spiritual ceremony, and gave me the Indian name "Canku Wanjila," which means "One Road." An eagle feather was woven into my hair. After Sitting Bull's grandson placed that feather in my hair, we smoked a peace pipe of brotherhood and they embraced me as a brother.



SINNER ADMINISTRATION

Standing (left to right): Helen Tracy, Bruce Larson, John Graham, Bob Wentz, Dick Backes, Jim Sperry, Gary Ness, Glenn Pomeroy, General Alexander MacDonald, Dave Sprynczynatyk, Gary Pressler, Brian Berg, Mike Diesz, Deborah Painte

Seated (left to right): Tim Kingstad, Elaine Little, Lt. Governor Lloyd Omdahl, Governor George Sinner, Doug Eiken, Lloyd Jones, Charlie Mertens

Not shown: Mick Bohn, Joe Lamb

February 1992

Funny Things Happened

There were so many wonderful experiences in the governor's life. Wherever I went at the Capitol, people were working away and they'd all look up and smile. Early on it was apparent something really wonderful had happened—it was fun to come to work. The Governor's Suite is a small complex of offices and work cubicles on both the ground floor and first floor of the Capitol, connected by a private, internal stairway. Often I would arrive singing and would usually make the rounds on my way in, greeting the staff individually. My singing happened because I was happy to get there and see everyone because it was always so pleasant.

Even when we were dealing with difficult problems, people knew it wasn't so much that we might get beat up or abused, but rather that we had to try to do it right. That sense of trying to do it right seemed to help make everyone happy; it certainly made me more relaxed and comfortable with criticism. I learned there were lots of bright people in the office who could help me reach intelligent conclusions—it was just a great time. It was all about trying to be a good servant.

New Portraits In The Hall

One of the honors I had was bestowing the state of North Dakota's highest distinction, induction into the Theodore Roosevelt Roughrider Hall of Fame. We gave the prestigious award to federal judge Ronald Davies, basketball star and coach Phil Jackson, writer Larry Woiwode, and actress Angie Dickinson.

For me, the highlight among those was Judge Davies, who was honored and best known for challenging Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus in 1957, during the Little Rock Nine crisis. The judge from Fargo had been temporarily assigned to deal with that segregation problem. He nullified a local injunction and ordered the school board to proceed with integration of Little Rock Central High School. I will never, ever, forget something he said to me that night. We were sitting at a State Bar Association banquet, and I was on the left side of the microphone and Judge Davies was on my left. As I was being introduced to go to the podium, I all of a sudden felt a tugging on my coat. I looked around and here was Judge Davies with tears streaming down his face. He sobbed that he was no racial justice hero and didn't even know what the problems were. He just did his job. Putting my hand on his hand, I assured

him it was OK. Then I went and introduced him.

His emotional words stayed in my head because I realized here's a guy who really understood what it was to be a hero. No matter that he had all kinds of threats to his life, and probably to everything sacred to him, he didn't turn one way or the other. He just went down the road doing his job. Look what he did. It was a fabulous experience for me, one of those rare times in my life when I learned something important—damn the torpedoes and just do your job.

I had not had a particularly high opinion of Angie Dickinson until one day I was told she was going to stop by and wanted to visit with me. She was in my office for about two hours. I was astonished to find out what kind of a person she was. It turned out she was taking care of her sister who was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Angie had brought her sister back to see her roots where they were born in Kulm before she got so she wouldn't be able to remember what she did. I kept hearing things from this woman that were not the classic thoughts of a movie star. To be honest about it, I was pretty impressed.

It was the former governor, Bill Guy, who nominated Angie for the Rough Rider Award. He wrote a long letter why she should be appointed, a pretty convincing letter saying she had brought fame to North Dakota.

Angie came back to help me with the campaign in '88.



George Sinner and Angie Dickinson flirt in the governor's office in the fall of 1987.

She did a great job and impressed lots of people when she played a starring role in a series of birthday parties that were fundraisers for me. Janie and I were on the plane over to Grand Forks to meet her for one those rallies. I was sitting in the back of the plane and I realized I had nothing to say. So in about ten minutes I wrote the limerick titled "Angie I," which was probably one of the better ones I've done.

Decision Not to Run Again

I mentioned earlier how Governor Schwinden of Montana had called me after I was elected with a few pieces of advice for a new governor. One of the things he told me that I never forgot was to not ever think about running for a third term. "I've seen several people do it and they all end up in ruin," he warned. "They're spent and people get tired of them and they want a change. Just don't ever think about it...and it's too darn hard on your children."

In a goose blind, on a Saturday morning in the fall of 1991 when I decided against running for a third term, I immediately thought of Schwinden's words. He told me exactly why I should not run for a third term. "You will be risking arrogance, because you do get power as things go along and you learn how to use it," he said. "There's a lot of dangers in going beyond two terms—you risk doing things that you probably should not do and probably more important than that are the dangers that come to your family. You've got to devote a lot of attention to your family—a lot of families get hurt by being in the shadow."

The episode in the goose blind happened when my son and I were up at Underwood with Dave Kjelstrup, a local banker. It was his land, his goose pit. Rough guy, he swears almost as well as I do—or more. It was about 9:30 a.m. when the sun got bright and the geese weren't flying any more and we were waiting for Dave to come and pick us up. That's when the conversation took place. It was pretty brief. "We don't want you to run again," my son said. "We're proud of what you do but nobody ever treats us like ourselves, we're all treated like the governor's kids. I said, "Oh my God I knew this could be a problem and I know what I must do." So I left that goose pit and become a lame duck.

I stayed home the next morning and before we got out of bed I said to Janie, "I made a decision yesterday." "Really," she said, "so did I. What did you decide?" "I decided I am not going to run again." "That's a good thing," she said, "because that's what I decided too."

I had a press conference the next morning. About once a month before that the reporters would ask whether I had made a decision about whether I was going to run again. Although those questions were just periodic, once speculation became a public issue a lot of people would get activated, and foolishly. I knew what I had to do. It was clear to both Janie and me what we had to do so we let people know right away.

The failure of the Democratic Party candidate to succeed me as governor is something I didn't see coming. I gave the nominating speech for Attorney General Nick Spaeth at the 1992 state convention, but the delegates favored Bill Heigaard. People urged me to support the party nominee,



George Sinner goose hunting with his sons Bob and George. Hunting was a family tradition.

and even though I thought highly of Bill, I also reminded Democrats that the open primary is as an important part of our political system. Nick beat Bill in that primary election and lost to Ed Schafer in the fall. That campaign was a huge disappointment to me. I was responsible, in part, and felt terrible in realizing Bill might well have won, and certainly would have been a great governor.

Leaving Office

We needed to find a place to live after eight years in the Governor's Residence. Janie took care of that. She found our current home in South Fargo after about four months of looking with a real estate agent. The contractor was just finishing it and we bought it right away. We moved to Fargo when my second term as governor ended on December 14, 1992.

After leaving the governor's office I was hired by American Crystal Sugar Company to do lobbying work. I spent a lot of time in Washington D.C. for the next three years. I was

also still involved with the Tri-College board. *Tri-College is the cooperative arrangement between the three higher education institutions in Fargo-Moorhead: Concordia College, Minnesota State University Moorhead, and North Dakota State University.* During my years in Bismarck I had called and sent letters telling the Tri-College that I needed to get off the board, but they wanted me to stay on. So when I finally retired from the board in 2004, Provost Nathan Davis asked me how I would feel about a banquet. The presidents wanted to hold an event to wish me well. But I attended a lot of banquets and had my fill of them. So I said if you want to do something, let's try to do something in the public policy area. That's when Nathan got together with Dick Gross to write the grant application to the Otto Bremer Foundation. The Governor George Sinner Public Policy Symposium resulted.

The first symposium explored the impact of the use and abuse of addictive drugs—especially methamphetamine—on the criminal justice, corrections and healthcare systems, and the appropriate public policy response for this region. The second symposium focused on a similar problem—alcoholism. It resulted from two or three serious drinking episodes on the campuses and turned out to be a powerful expose of the problem of alcoholism in the region. So the final symposium brought together experts with proven solutions to the problems of substance abuse in schools and college campuses, the workplace and in the community. The professional direction of Dick Gross and his team at the North Dakota Consensus Council masterfully guided us to three directions of activity. The broadest of those was expansion of the successful Healthy Communities program in Moorhead to Fargo and West Fargo. In addition, we sponsored presentations and distributed information through the Chamber of Commerce to employers on developing and using drug policies. We also lobbied to generate support for drug courts, which have been effective in helping people kick their substance abuse addictions.

I've been blessed in countless ways. In return, sometimes I get called upon to help with something and for reasons that are never really clear or thought out I say yes or no. That's kind of the way my life has gone and that's the way it will go, whether I set plans or not. At one point, I even tried help a group of independent truckers who were literally going broke because of high fuel prices. It's hard for me because I'm trying to not get involved with problems like that but I found these people who came to me almost in tears are so



George and Jane Sinner enjoy dinner together in November 1992.

Courtesy of the Bismarck Tribune

appreciative and so in need of someone to just listen and maybe make some phone calls. It is extremely rewarding and I find myself unable to say no to people who have needs like that. I can see that maybe it's just a way for me to continue to fulfill what seems to be the mission of my life—to serve.

What more is there to accomplish? One thing I want to do and must do is be a loyal and supportive husband, doing everything possible to make my spouse happy and take care of the things she needs. I also want to continue my public work, particularly for people who are hurting, like the homeless, the addicted, and delinquent youth.

Summing This Up

How would I like to be remembered as governor? I wasn't perfect, but was open and honestly trying to be a good servant, and didn't put a lot of stock in prestige. I wanted people to know that I was just like they were, somebody who laughed at his own mistakes, and someone who understood human need and human suffering and had a human sense of humor.

But nobody ever did a good job that didn't have good people around them. In the governor's office, over and over again we were saying this was what's right and it is what we're going to do. The whole staff was dedicated to that, and the agency heads also became wonderful advocates of that motivation. I had the best staff of any governor in North Dakota's history. I'm proud of the fact that Dick Rayl, who was absolutely a genius at budgeting and the management of that office, helped me spend hundreds of hours going



Photo courtesy of Garry Redmann

The six governors at the 2001 event at the North Dakota Heritage Center. From left, former governors Bill Guy, Art Link, Al Olson, George Sinner, Ed Schaffer, and Governor John Hoeven.

through the budget with his analysts. Major changes that we made in the budget were always well discussed, well thought through. Chuck Fleming was a huge help in that; he understood the budget better than I did. The two of us, along with the OMB staff, spent way, way more time on the budget than any other governor had ever done. We had to. We had to get the priorities covered and make the best sense possible out of the short-funded budget.

I'm also extremely proud of the work of the Lignite Research Council I established in the early period. The council has done a great deal of good. Also, we did the best we could for higher education under the circumstances, and for all of the "people" service agencies.

One thing I regret not doing while governor was not fighting for a higher minimum wage. It's always frustrating that all these people, for supposed moral reasons, criticize those earning a low wage who practice birth control and who maybe even have abortions. But a lot of them work three and four jobs, have no health benefits, scrape together barely enough income to keep body and soul together, let alone raise children.

There are a lot of good politicians in this state. Neither party has a corner on the good people; the trick is to work with those who are sincere and willing to tackle the tough issues for the long-range good of the state. I'm strongly encouraged by seeing young people politically active, because

there's always more idealism among the young than among the old. They seem to understand that it's not who gets the credit, that it's the issues that are important. And the most difficult issues to face are often the ones that most need to be addressed.

In 2001 I spoke at the North Dakota Heritage Center with Governor Hoeven and former governors Bill Guy, Art Link, Ed Schafer and Allen Olson. The event kicked off a campaign to support the Heritage Center expansion. I suggested that maybe even more important than the building project might be hiring a staff historian who would record significant things that happen.

Democracy grows and gets stronger by its testing, and we as a nation are being tested. But unless that growth and the results of that testing are recorded for future generations, growth isn't as fast as it should be. Unless we single out and spotlight those significant periods of growth in democracy, our democracy will become stagnant and will not continue to grow and be appealing to the rest of the world.

