Edward Wallis Hoch was drafted by the progressive wing of the Republican party—the “boss busters”—at the Republican state convention in 1904. This Republican faction strongly endorsed the program of Pres. Theodore Roosevelt. Hoch, nominated as a reform candidate over incumbent Willis J. Bailey, defeated Democrat David M. Dale, by 186,731 votes to 116,991, leaving Granville Lowther, Socialist, with 12,101 votes and James Kerr, Prohibition, with 6,584.

Hoch came to Kansas in 1871, settling first at Pawnee Rock but moving soon after to Marion County to a claim near Florence. In 1874 he went to Marion, where he took over the Marion Record as repayment of a debt. As a Republican, Hoch served two terms in the state house of representatives (1889-91 and 1893-95). In his second term, dominated by the “legislative war,” he was speaker pro tem of the Republican-organized house.

With the active support of the progressive wing of the Republican
party, many changes occurred in Kansas government during Hoch’s administration. In a fight with Standard Oil Company, the state developed and built its own oil refinery at Peru to be operated by convict labor. The state supreme court found this enterprise unconstitutional because of the longtime constitutional restraint on “internal improvements.” A depository law for state funds, changes in the management of state institutions and in juvenile courts, and judicial reform were all part of Hoch’s first two years as governor.

After he was renominated in 1906, Hoch campaigned on a “Square Deal” for Kansas, modeled after the domestic program of Pres. Theodore Roosevelt. Hoch’s platform was designed to curb railroad companies, to provide equitable assessment and taxation, and to allow direct party primary elections rather than party conventions. A popular Democrat, William Alexander Harris, was his major opponent: Hoch’s margin of victory was slim—only 152,147 votes to 150,024, with the Socialist, Prohibition, and People’s candidates collecting 13,208 votes. Actually, Hoch trailed the Republican ticket in 1906 because of internal factionalism in the party that brought back the old machine crowd to power. Hoch’s strong prohibition stand and the impossibility of his administration’s producing a vigorous economy hurt him in the election. Although most of the reform legislation he asked for in his second term was approved, Hoch did not get a direct primary law, so he convened a special session of the legislature in January 1908 to force that measure through. (This emergency session also passed a bank guaranty law, which was a kind of primitive deposit insurance.) The first party primary in Kansas was held in August 1908, and a new type of candidate emerged, more attractive to the general electorate and less responsive to party leaders.

Hoch returned to his role as publisher of the Marion Record. From 1913 to 1919, he served on the State Board of Administration, an agency designed to administer all public institutions except the State Capitol. Hoch was commemorated by Kansans because of the reform character of his administration and his popular oratorical style which endeared him to the Chautauqua circuit. A large auditorium at the University of Kansas was named for him, and one of his sons
Like many public figures of the early 20th century, former governor Hoch was a popular speaker on the Chautauqua circuit.

carried on his public-service tradition, becoming a longtime congressman and a state supreme court justice.

REFERENCES: Brodhead, 1962; Callis, 1933; LaForte, 1974; Schruben, 1968; Van Meter, 1972.