Kansas Governors
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Published by University Press of Kansas

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Robert Docking gained the Democratic nomination for governor in 1966 and won the general election over incumbent William Avery, 380,030 votes to 304,325, with about 8,600 votes going to two other candidates. He followed his father, George Docking, as governor by six years.

Like his father, Robert Docking expressed a consistently conservative viewpoint on fiscal policy while espousing liberal views on social issues. He criticized his predecessor for traveling outside the state, yet Docking became the most traveled governor in Kansas his-
tory and still retained local popularity. He could support liberal Democratic national leaders without losing his conservative base of operations at home. Moreover, state expenditures rose rapidly during his administration in spite of his avowed fiscal conservatism. His ability to sense where tax dollars came from and to know voting strength of specific taxpayer blocs enabled him to retain the governorship through four terms in a period of rapid inflation and governmental expansion.

Following his university studies, Robert Docking had worked as a credit analyst for the William Volker Company in Kansas City. He became vice-president of the First National Bank in Lawrence in 1950 and, as a sideline, organized Docking Development, an oil drilling company. In 1956 he moved to Arkansas City to take over the presidency of the Union State Bank. While still in Lawrence he was chairman of the Douglas County Democratic committee from 1954 to 1956; following his move to Arkansas City, he was treasurer of the fifth district Democratic committee, and vice-president of the Kansas Democratic Veterans in 1957. He was the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce “Young Man of the Year” in 1966. In Arkansas City he served on the city commission from 1963 to 1966 and was mayor for one year.

In his second race for governor in 1968, Docking defeated Rick Harmon, Republican, 447,269 votes to 410,673, with the Prohibition candidate drawing 4,528 votes. In 1970, he was opposed by Attorney General Kent Frizzell, Republican, and he won an unprecedented third term as governor. The vote was 404,611 to 333,227, with 7,352 votes garnered by two other candidates. In 1972 Docking gained his fourth term by overwhelming Morris Kay, Republican, 571,256 votes to 341,440, while the Prohibition candidate received 8,856.

In 1972 the legislature drafted a constitutional amendment that revised the Executive Article in the Kansas Constitution—the first change in the article since the constitution was approved in 1859. The voters approved the amendment in the 1972 general election. It provided for a four-year term for statewide offices, with the governor and lieutenant governor running as a team, and limited their tenure to two successive terms. It also authorized the governor to
reorganize certain parts of the administrative structure of government by executive order. A series of constitutional amendments in 1972 and 1974 abolished the state auditor’s office and removed the state treasurer and state printer from the list of constitutional offices.

The Robert Docking period in Kansas history was generally one of growth in the economy and expansion of governmental services. Although he tried, he was unable to get a turnpike for southeast Kansas. But, like the preceding administration of William Avery, Docking was also faced with eruptions associated with the war in Vietnam. He would later remark that his most agonizing period as governor was when he had to send state troops to Lawrence and Kansas City to curb violence accompanying civil rights demonstrations.

Docking did not seek reelection in 1974 but returned to Arkansas

City and his position as president of the Union State Bank. Three years after his death, the state office building at 915 Harrison was renamed the Robert B. Docking State Office Building. Docking's son Tom served as lieutenant governor during John Carlin's second term (1983–87) and was the Democratic candidate for governor in 1986.