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Review of *Does People Do It?: A Memoir.* By Fred Harris

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Does People Do It?: A Memoir. By Fred Harris. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. xv + 226 pp. Photographs, index, $24.95.

U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr—often called the "uncrowned king of the Senate"—died in 1963. In a special election the next year, Fred Harris, a Democratic state senator, surprisingly defeated highly popular football coach Bud Wilkinson to serve out the rest of Kerr's term. Reelected in 1966 and remaining a senator until 1973, the young and energetic Harris allied with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program. As senator, he pushed legislation to aid agricultural interests in Oklahoma and the Southern Plains, called for reforms to alleviate racism, introduced bills supporting various American Indian groups, and served on the Kerner Commission, which studied the causes of civil unrest in America's riot-plagued cities. Though his tenure in the Senate was relatively short, Harris's national stature caused Hubert Humphrey to consider him as his vice-presidential running mate in 1968. Harris later sought the presidential nomination in both 1972 and 1976, gaining some early support but insufficient to keep him in either race for long.

After his retreat from politics, Harris became a highly successful political science professor at the University of New Mexico, publishing a popular textbook on American government and other works analyzing the structure and workings of the U.S. Congress. He has also written novels, and the felicitous style that has made him successful as an author comes across in this enjoyable autobiography.

The reader of this book should not expect a thorough description and analysis of the various legislative initiatives or the technical aspects of the legislative process. For that type of information, see Richard Lowitt's *Fred Harris: His Journey from Liberalism to Populism* (2002). Harris's memoir, instead, provides vivid reminiscences and stories about the Oklahoma senator and nationally prominent politicians—principally President Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, and Robert F. Kennedy, who was Harris's seatmate in the Senate.

Perhaps most enjoyable for students of the Great Plains are Harris's memories of growing up in southwestern Oklahoma, hauling hay, trading cattle, and traveling with custom combining crews. He also depicts his rise from meager beginnings to the statewide Future Farmers of America speech championship, his record-setting grades and accolades as law student at the University of Oklahoma, and his remarkable upset victory over the popular Coach Wilkinson. Harris refused to back down, following the advice of his favorite uncle, who always asked, "Does people do it?" If so, then Harris would be able to accomplish any human goal he sought. This memoir demonstrates he achieved a great deal.

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