

Jason Altmire ([00:04](#)):

Hello, and welcome, everybody, to another edition of Career Education Report. I'm Jason Altmire. I consider this episode to be everybody's holiday present because we have been doing this now for a year. This was our first year of the podcast. This is our last episode of 2022. I wanted to bring on somebody who knows a lot about higher education, of course, knows a lot about politics, but is just a really interesting person in his own right.

Jason Altmire ([00:36](#)):

Our guest is Kent Hance. He is the chancellor emeritus at Texas Tech University. It's the System of Texas Tech, which is 12 institutions, the Health Science Center, and Angelo State University. He was chancellor of the Texas Tech System from 2006 to 2014. He has been a legendary public official, and lobbyist, and lawyer in Texas for many decades. He served as railroad commissioner in Texas in the '80s and '90s. He was a member of Congress in the '70s and '80s, very prominent. We'll get into some of this. He worked closely with President Reagan, was the author of President Reagan's tax cuts, very famously, in 1981, and just a legendary figure.

Jason Altmire ([01:29](#)):

Most interesting, I think, is Kent has his own podcast, and it is justifiably called The Most Interesting Storyteller in Texas, and that is absolutely true. I've had the opportunity to get to know him more recently, and just a very interesting, funny, great person to talk to. I'm really enjoying getting to know him, and I want to introduce him to our audience. Kent Hance, welcome to the program.

Kent Hance ([01:58](#)):

Thank you, Jason. I'm honored to be on your program. Also, I'm honored that you are one of our professors, instructors at Texas Tech University Health Science Center, and teach a leadership course in healthcare, and that's great. We really love the job you do.

Jason Altmire ([02:15](#)):

Yeah, that's correct. I've enjoyed getting to know Texas Tech, and I do teach a class there. I have enjoyed getting to know the students and faculty as well. I just wanted to start by, I mentioned your podcast, Most Interesting Storyteller in Texas. That's a very high bar because Texas is known for its great storytellers. I just was wondering, from your perspective, how did you get that moniker?

Kent Hance ([02:40](#)):

Well, I think it goes back, when I was in the State Senate. I got elected when I was 30. I went in and talked to a lot of the older gentlemen and tried to get their knowledge. I'd ask them interesting stories to tell me. I got some good ones, and I had some to exchange with them. I think people think politics is tough, and it is, and it can be mean, but also, there are a lot of really charismatic people that have great stories on how they got where they are. I always like to focus on those type of people.

Jason Altmire ([03:15](#)):

One of the most interesting things, I think, about your career, and I know you've been asked this question hundreds of thousands of times, not just thousands of times, is when you first ran for the

United States Congress, 1978, your opponent in that election, very famously, was a person who had not yet ever run for public office himself, was the son of a very famous Washington politician at that point, who would become much more famous in his own right.

Jason Altmire ([03:49](#)):

Going back to 1978, your opponent was someone named George W. Bush. I just was wondering, what were your impressions of him at the time? How did that campaign play out? Over the years, of course, your relationship with him changed. How did that work?

Kent Hance ([04:08](#)):

When I first got to know George W. Bush, he was my opponent. We were running for Congress. I always try to identify myself, I was the local guy. I always try to put a label on my opponent, and he was the outsider from the Northeast. He'd gone to a private prep school in New Hampshire, and he'd gone to Yale, and gone to Harvard for an MBA. I used those things against him. He said that he never thought he'd have a good education be used against him, but I proved him that it could be.

Kent Hance ([04:42](#)):

I know one time, we were running a marathon race for, raise money for cancer, cancer research. It was 26 miles, marathon, and he ran. He agreed to do it. I said, "No, I'm not going to run 26 miles, die of a heart attack or something," but I entered someone that was a cross-country runner for Texas Tech, and I put on a ... I got him a t-shirt, and the t-shirt said, "Hance is ahead." Then we put a bumper sticker, "Hance for Congress" on his jogging shorts. I told him, "You stay 15 feet in front of Bush. If he speeds up, you speed up. He slows down, you slow down."

Kent Hance ([05:29](#)):

Bush told me years later, he said, "I followed that guy for 26 miles," and he said, "It was very depressing." He said, "I was not thinking that we'd ever be friends," but we got to be good friends. I was impressed with him. I knew he was going to do something well in politics. I wouldn't have guessed president at that time, but I thought he'd be governor or senator sometime, simply because he didn't have to buy a name ID. His dad, George H.W. Bush, had run statewide in Texas before, and they had good name ID, and so I didn't have a big advantage having ... I'd been a state senator for four years when we got in the campaign against him.

Jason Altmire ([06:12](#)):

You were elected to Congress that term, of course, and then George W. Bush's father became Vice President Bush when President Reagan was elected, and you had to serve in Congress. You worked closely with President Reagan. How was your relationship with then Vice President Bush, given what you had been through running against his son?

Kent Hance ([06:35](#)):

My relationship with George H.W. Bush was excellent. The first event I went to at the Naval Observatory where the Vice President lived, Barbara and George, they went out of their way ... They introduced me around and said, "This is the guy that beat our son for Congress." They went over the phone ... The

landline, didn't have cellphones then. They went over the phone and called George, and I visited with him over the phone. It was quite an experience. They were so nice. They were great people, and they were very professional in the way they handled things.

Kent Hance ([07:12](#)):

I also got to know Neil Bush. When I was running against George, I'd bump into Neil and got to be friends with him. The parents, that night they got George and they got Neil on the phone so I could talk to them from the Vice President's house and Naval Observatory. It was really pretty funny. I had a great visit with all of them.

Jason Altmire ([07:33](#)):

When you left the Congress in the mid-1980s, you became railroad commissioner, which is a very important statewide position in Texas, and did some other things. As your career was ongoing, of course, George W. Bush was pursuing his own career, which eventually led him to run for governor of Texas in 1994. How did your relationship with him evolve over that time?

Kent Hance ([07:58](#)):

It was very good. We got to be very good friends. Then in '94, when he announced, and really in '93 when he announced for the '94 election, I was his first large contributor. I gave \$10,000, which was a lot of money in '93, a lot of money now. I gave \$10,000. Here he was, his former opponent was getting out front for him. I raised money for him and watched him win. At that time, we were both Republicans. I ran as a Democrat for Congress and then later changed parties. I'm from a conservative area, and Democrats had moved too far to the left, and so I changed and carried Reagan's tax cut and helped on the budget cuts as well.

Jason Altmire ([08:49](#)):

Yeah. Talk about that. President Reagan's tax cut in 1981, very famously, I believe to this day, when adjusted for inflation, is still the largest tax cut ever implemented in American history, and that was your bill. You introduced that bill. Obviously, worked very closely with the President. How did that come about?

Kent Hance ([09:08](#)):

Came about that when Reagan won in 1980, Republicans controlled the Senate, but the Democrats controlled the House. The President could not get anything passed without having some Democrats help him in the House. After he won in January of that year, he called some of us down to the White House and talked to us about helping him on his projects, and I agreed to. Senator Phil Gramm, who was a House member at the time, and later went on to be in the U.S. Senate, Senator Phil Gramm agreed to.

Kent Hance ([09:43](#)):

What I did, I was on Ways and Means Committee. I carried the tax cut, and we were able to pass it. We had 78 Democrats vote for the tax cut. Now, in this day and time, if you were a Republican, you couldn't get 78 Democrats to vote for anything, and if you were a Democrat, you couldn't get 78 Republicans. It was easier then to have a bipartisan approach on legislation, which made it easier to sell, but with

redistricting taking place over the last 30 years, more people have been squeezed out of the middle, and if it's a Democratic opponent, they have to run to the left real hard, or if it's a Republican, they have to run to the right real hard. You really don't have but about 35 to 45 congressional districts that are truly swing districts that can go either way. That's cut down on the middle and it's cut down on compromise.

Jason Altmire ([10:43](#)):

How did you ... Over time, you gained experience and more importantly, just a personal interest in leadership and higher education. What spurred your interest in that, and what led you in the direction that became, eventually, you becoming the chancellor of Texas Tech University System?

Kent Hance ([11:02](#)):

Well, I had been a professor. I taught business courses. Texas Tech has a law school, two medical schools, and several nursing schools. It's huge. I had been involved as a professor before I went to Congress. I enjoyed being a professor, a lot of fun, and I enjoyed higher ed. It's fun being a professor. If you want to really learn a subject, just teach it. Then you've got to be well-prepared because there's going to, some kid ask you some question, you've got no idea what he's talking about if you're not well-prepared.

Kent Hance ([11:43](#)):

I had served in Congress, had represented the area of Lubbock, where the main campus is, and had really been involved in that. They were looking for a new chancellor at Texas Tech, and they interviewed me. Then they talked to me, and to take the job. I turned them down, and then they came back later and offered it again, and came to my senses and took it. It was a great experience. I'd been a professor there before, and I was now chancellor. I'd been there about two weeks, and a professor came to see me. He said, "Chancellor, I'm not getting paid enough." I said, "Well, I understand that. He said, "My office, too far away, and I don't have good equipment. I need a new computer, and I need a new parking space."

Kent Hance ([12:35](#)):

Finally, I said, "Dr. so-and-so, I wish I had a hundred just like you." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because right now, I've got 2,000 just like you. I want to cut that number down." He kind of laughed, and I had my secretary ... I got up, I stood up and reached out my hand and he grabbed my hand. I pulled him out of his chair and then I told her that, "In the future, don't schedule these people. There's a reason we have a provost. The provost is supposed to meet with those people, not me."

Jason Altmire ([13:05](#)):

I was going to ask you something along those lines. You had a very long, successful career as a federal public official, served in the State Legislature, was a statewide official, and had been a lawyer, and a very successful career in the private sector in Texas. Then you get this role as chancellor, higher education, a large, public institution. What were your observations in the time that you held that job that were maybe different than what you expected them to be related to what you thought higher education would be like?

Kent Hance ([13:40](#)):

Well, I tried to stay out of the internal political politics of higher ed. Henry Kissinger, one time, told me that the meanest, toughest politics in the world had to do with higher education politics. I said, "Why do you think it's that way?" He said, "There's so little to fight over," and he may have been correct.

Kent Hance ([14:01](#)):

I did not try to become buddies with the faculty. I didn't want to be enemies. The president of each campus was in charge of getting along with the faculty. I might have some interests that I'd want to explore with various faculty members, but overall, I let them take care of that. I raised money and I worked the Legislature for money, and it was very important.

Jason Altmire ([14:29](#)):

There's so much controversy in higher education today, mostly related to the politics of higher education, the curriculums that are taught, and the political persuasion of the faculty, the ability of students to voice their opinion, the type of books that are read, all of these things that we're seeing play out across the country. I know in Texas, it's first among them for some of those controversies. Having lived on all sides of this equation, what's your perspective of higher education today and some of those controversies?

Kent Hance ([15:04](#)):

Well, I think the one thing that you have to do in higher ed is that you have to have people that are well-prepared to think, to think through the process with the liberal arts education, or business, or engineering degree, whatever. I always took the position that Texas Tech was for freedom of speech, and that freedom of speech doesn't mean that, "Well, we'll have a committee and we'll decide what's free and what's not."

Kent Hance ([15:32](#)):

Look, there are people that are for freedom of speech, as long as they agree with you. If they don't agree with you it's, "Well, we can't have that." I've always taken the position that we need to have freedom of speech. I hired Bob Krueger, who was one of our government professors, and he was a liberal Democrat from Texas, and served in the House and Senate in Congress.

Kent Hance ([15:55](#)):

Then I also hired Al Gonzales, who had been general counsel for Bush at the White House, and was not liked well by ACLU because he had helped solidify ... He was not liked by a lot of the professors because he had helped establish Gitmo, where they were keeping soldiers. Those were two of the most popular professors I had. One, a conservative Republican, one a liberal Democrat, but we're in the idea business in higher ed. We're not in the liberal idea business. We're not in the conservative idea business. We're in all idea businesses.

Kent Hance ([16:37](#)):

I think there are some professors that if you agree with their agenda, then they want you involved. I can tell you whether I agree or disagree with your agenda, we are in the idea business. We want people to discuss ideas. We don't discuss backgrounds. We want them to think about what they stand for. I think that that's the main thing that you need to be doing in college. The ability to think. I am somewhat concerned that we have people in higher ed that they think their job is just to change everybody's position on everything and become very liberal or very woke, and I don't agree with that. I think they need to tell their side of the story, and others can tell their side of the story, and then people can decide what they want to be and what they want their position to be.

Jason Altmire ([17:28](#)):

How do you feel like, with regard to the politics, not just of higher education, but the public discourse? You mentioned that the tax bill that you led for President Reagan, 78 people crossed the aisle to support that. That is inconceivable today. If you could get one, that would be a very heavy lift. You've lived it. Again, been on all sides. What's your impression of the direction of our national politics today, and what can we do to bring more bipartisanship to the debate?

Kent Hance ([18:00](#)):

Well, I think a couple of things. One, cable television has come about, and that to get on cable television, you better say something pretty sensational or they won't get you on there. If you look at CNN or MSNBC, they're going to be very liberal. If you look at Fox, it's going to be very conservative. People have a tendency to tune in to what they like, what they agree with. That has caused people to be more split and more solid in their position to the left or the right, and not in a medium position.

Kent Hance ([18:36](#)):

It used to, when I was in Congress, if you asked somebody, "Who do you hate?" They'd go, "Oh, I don't hate anybody." Now if you ask somebody who they hate, well, you have to pull up a chair. They're going to list a lot of names, and it's unfortunate. Name-calling, calling somebody an idiot after hours, after you have a debate, and referring to somebody as an idiot, or a loon, or whatever, that does not help.

Kent Hance ([19:06](#)):

Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill used to get together at the White House at night, and they'd come up with all kinds of deals. The low-income housing tax credit that was established by Jack Kemp out of Buffalo, that was presented as a compromise bill to get the private sector involved in public housing. The result was it passed in the House 415 to one, and passed in the Senate 38 to nothing. That program has been introduced, and grown, and been a positive under every president since then, Democrats, Republican. Didn't matter whether it was Bush, or Obama, or Clinton, or whoever. They've all supported it, and supported it big time. I think that's very important, and that they can do things and work together.

Kent Hance ([19:57](#)):

I wish we could see more of that, but it's going to take someone really involved to get these things settled down. In the redistricting, every state wants to have more people with seniority, and so what they do when they redistrict, they try to protect the Republicans and the Democrats that have a lot of

seniority so they can get to be a committee chairman and maybe help that group later. That's not good for the country, in my opinion.

Jason Altmire ([20:26](#)):

Our guest today has been Kent Hance. He is a former U.S. congressman and chancellor emeritus at the Texas Tech University System. Chancellor Hance, thank you very much. If someone, one of our listeners wanted to get in touch with you, learn more about you, find you and listen to your podcast, how would they do so?

Kent Hance ([20:47](#)):

Well, there's several ways of listening to my podcast. They could just go to Spotify, or they could go to Google and type in, "Kent Hance, Best Storyteller in Texas," and it'll take you right to it, and you can go from there. I think you'd really enjoy it. I've interviewed Ben Carson. He was a cabinet member, you remember, and Rick Perry, who was governor, and then Ed Whitacre, who was CEO and chairman of the board of AT&T for 18 years, and then CEO and chairman of the board of General Motors. They try to be fun interviews. We don't get into in-depth politics. We don't hate anyone. We like all kinds of people, and I have a cross section. I think you'd really enjoy it. There's some funny stories in there as well.

Jason Altmire ([21:39](#)):

Chancellor Hance, thank you very much for being with us today.

Kent Hance ([21:42](#)):

Thank you, Jason. It was a fun interview.

Jason Altmire ([21:47](#)):

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