LONGstorySHORT with LESLIE WILCOX

PBS Hawaii

GUEST: HARRY KIM 1
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Aloha no, I'm Leslie Wilcox with PBS Hawaii. Welcome to Long Story Short – this week featuring Hawaii Island Mayor Harry Kim. When you call him Mayor, he says, "I'm Harry." In Part One of a two-part conversation, we'll see how Harry Kim's early years, defined by poverty and toil, would shape his life. And his love of, and respect for, nature would lead to a long career with County Civil Defense. Now in his second term as Hawaii Island Mayor, Harry Kim visits in our Long Story Short living room – next.

Harry Kim's story, like those of many children of immigrants, is one of hard work and perseverance – with parents who struggled to make a better life for their family. The youngest of nine children of Korean immigrants, Harry Kim was raised in a one-bedroom house without electricity, without running water, just south of Hilo.

You're a very modern mayor, but you had an upbringing that many people don't think happens in this day and age or
in our lifetime. What was your early life like?
You know, I know for some of your viewers, that they're gonna have a hard time believing what life was like, because it is from
a different time and a different place. But I'm Nisei, as we say in Hawaii, meaning I'm second generation, meaning my parents were born and raised in the old country, meaning Korea. All eight of us, nine of us in total—one passed away—was born in a house—no electricity, no running water, and a dirt road.
No doctor for the birthing?
No; the neighbor.
Where was your home? What was your home like?
In a beautiful place called Ola'a Forest. We had a one-bedroom house with eight kids, with a living room and a kitchen, hallway in between, on stilts, water tank. On a funny side, but maybe unsanitary side to people today, we would joke about cleaning our water tank once in a while, and always, there's a dead rat in it. And all white, because been in there a long time, or no hair. And that was life. We used to wash the kitchen floor and it had so many holes in the floor, when you throw the bucket of water from top bottom, because it was slanted, the water wouldn't reach the bottom 'cause it'd fall through all the holes before it reached the bottom, you know. And funny, you know, it was a beautiful place, coconut tree, 'ulu, pea, you know, avocados as we call it, yeah. Loved the birds. Our nearest neighbor,

we had one relatively close. But the rest was four, five miles of just forest, beautiful forest. You learn to be close with nature that way, because you depend on nature. And so life was of that small home with eight kids and close neighbors and good friends.

How did the family support itself?

Every which way you can. Farm. Weaving lauhala mats and baskets and purses. As young boys and girls, you'd go out and pick the lauhala, you cure the lauhala, you strip the lauhala, you weave the lauhala. You had chickens, you had farms. Dad worked at the Ola'a Sugar Company until he passed away. But you do everything to survive. And everybody worked. I was the youngest, so I had it the easiest, compared to the parents especially or my brothers and sisters. But coming here was simple, like all immigrants, looking for a better life. And they found one. They worked for their children, hoping for a better life for us,

not for them. And so the sacrifice is for today and tomorrow, hope for the children to get a better life, which obviously we have.

Your dad never got to see you become Mayor.

My dad never got to see me graduate from high school. And I smile about that, and you know, I know inside he knows. I never was a real good student, as people in Hawaii know that I got expelled when I was fourteen years old. And I got suspended and I'm sure at times he wondered if I'll ever graduate from high school.

Was he very embarrassed at—

[chuckle]

--because immigrant families want to do very well especially in their new country, right? I mean, most parents want their kids to be obedient and do well in school. What did your dad think? What'd your mom say?

You know, they never raised their voice or not. All they did was say, Where do we go from here? And in their way of not being able to speak English, you know, found a way for me to be readmitted to a different school and never, ever mentioned it.

Did they understand why you did what you did, or was that not discussed?

Not even an issue. Not important. You know, they knew what happened, but that was it.

What had you done?

[chuckle] You had to ask that, huh? [chuckle] I got into a disagreement with a teacher.

You stood up to a teacher?

Yeah; and you don't do that, those days. And I'll say it on camera; it was racism involved here too. Yeah. And that was those days, days of territory. And you just had to be very obedient those days in regards to authority, and I think some of the Korean blood came out.

Did the teacher insult you?

No, the teacher hit me.

Based on race?

No, based on behavior, but I think her treatment of me—you know, we were warned that, you know, you gotta tow the line. And

I don't want to make an issue of it, because it was of that time, you know, and of that individual. But not on the whole.

Because there weren't a lot of Koreans on the Big Island.
No, no.
There still aren't.
We're less than half of a percent those days. We're less than two percent today. But we had our prejudices, we have this. But there were certain things of social acceptance that was not accepted; this was overt type of behavior. And I loved that about growing up. You know, when you talk about the hardship of past; well, I can spend a day and a year and a month talk about the beauty of past. Because that was part of the beauty of people helping each other. You talk about being poor. Going to the store every day, you know, one of my jobs was to bring home a loaf of bread. Every day to the store. Akiyama or Suzuki Store; charge. And you just pick up the bread and go, and they charged. And never said anything of connotation, Eh boy, you never pay last month. Or you know, You guys behind three or four months, or whatever.
Lot of those merchants carried people, didn't they—
Oh, not—
--for a long time.
--lot; all of 'em. They all carried us, you know, and never charged interest. And I think it was not until high school, I remember, that maybe we cleared all of the debts for years with the stores. And that's the beauty of that time; everybody leaned on each other and helped each other.
Are you saying we were more progressive then, than now?
Much more. Not—maybe the word progressive is not the word. But we were more kind, more helpful, definitely less materialistic. We were more forgiving.

If you can't find Ola'a on a map, it's because it's now known as Kea'au. Although Ola'a was a multi-ethnic, plantation community, Harry Kim's family was the only Korean one. He recalls fondly how people from varied cultural backgrounds worked together to survive – a show of respect and tolerance that made up what Mayor Kim calls a "cosmopolitan" society.

Did you get to know your dad very well before he passed away? I think he—you were fifteen when he passed away?
I think all of the people who are second generation, maybe even some third, will understand what I'm saying. Life was different, your relationship with your parents was different. You know, you hardly had time to sit and talk for—not only because of work, you know, long days, but especially because of being Asian. You know, your relationships was very different. So you can count on very few fingers the number of times you talked, you know. Your talking relationship was not of togetherness type. You know, it was of respect, or doing this, or doing that.
Getting things done.
Yeah, yeah; right. And your relationship was of things that you felt. Words were rarely spoken. It was more of a what you felt and what you saw.

Did you have a take-away message, though, from seeing your father; because you would become a father later. Did you learn anything from him as a father?
I know I probably was not a very good kid, but I never can ever remember him yelling at me. That I learned, and in regards to strength of that, of working hard. The greatest thing I carried from him was his gentleness. The greatest thing I carry from my mom is, I think, her discipline and her strength, and her courage. I remember going to the grave, family grave, community grave. And my mom would say, Your sister is over there. And we knew approximately where. We were too poor to get a gravestone. Hilo was many miles away. And you ask later how did your sister die. And to show you the strength of a woman, my older sister says, Baby sister got sick.
How old was she?
She was seven, that we know. And I don't mean it lightly, because even birth certificates were different. I didn't get mine 'til I was five years old. And you gotta get one to go to school. You know, you're born at home, no doctors.
M-hm.
We were a territory, and I can see all your viewers saying, How old this guy, anyway?
[chuckle]
Well, my mom carried, I understand, my sister, that would be over six miles to the plantation dispensary, as they call it. And I'm told that the doctor tells her, Your daughter's dead. And she carries her back six miles, and then takes 'em to the community grave, country grave, territorial grave those days, and buries. And can you imagine the strength of a woman, as they say, you know, to do that? In the selfishness of being young, you don't look at your mom as people or pain and emotions. You think they're just parents. But now that you're older and wiser, you know what they must have felt, you know, of all the pain and agony of trying to survive. And boy, now that we're older and wiser, hopefully. And the strength, admiration of her as a person, I don't know how she did it. I really don't know how she did it.

The children had no toys growing up. They worked nearly every day of their young lives. Their mother taught them to weave lauhala to supplement their father's plantation work and farming income. And after his dad died and most of the children had grown and moved on, his mom started a business selling kim chee.

Let's take a sister. She graduates from high school, and one of 'em even left high school sooner; they gave her a degree because she had to go to work. They go to college. They leave home. I don't know where they go. They saved enough money weaving and whatever the parents could give, which was minimum or nothing, and go on to school. The first question is, Who helped them? Well, they helped themselves. School counseling was nonexistent, and five sisters. I never went to a single wedding. They leave home, and couple of 'em, I didn't even see for maybe ten years after they leave. I'm thinking of my sister—now other people know her as Mrs. Barry's Cookies. She was a teacher too. I saw her again after high school. She was a mama already, and with a beautiful young daughter.

I don't know how old; three or four years old. And teacher already. The whole gap; high school, graduation, 'til then. And that's how almost of them went to school on their own; they found a way. You know, they worked. We don't sit down—and we should. You know, what were your problems? How did you do it? Where did you work? We don't talk about it much. But you know it must have been hard. Outside of the fact that you're plantation kid. None of my five sisters ever dated. You don't talk about dates. You come home, you work 'til nine o'clock at night, every single day of your lives.

Doing lauhala weaving?

Yeah.

Or making kim chee?

Yeah. And they didn't make the kim chee, because they left, and you know, my mom was such a hard worker. When the labor left, which is my sisters, myself and the other sister couldn't make enough to, you know, to feed. And so what else does she do? Now she opens up a kim chee business, and that's the way she was. So most of 'em did not know the kim chee business; most of them knew the lauhala weaving business.

Can you still weave lauhala?

Yeah, I think so. I tried it once recently, and the fingers come back. You know, I still can weave. Not as good. I never was a good weaver; my sisters were great, my mom was great.

And do you, after all that time of making kim chee, do you hate it today?

Hey, I love kim chee.

Oh, you still love it? [chuckle]

[chuckle] No, I like kim chee. I'm going tell you too, Leslie; life was good. You know, I have the fondest memories of my wild mynah bird, my pet, you know? Of sweet guava and coconut trees, and learning how to climb a coconut tree, and your slingshots, and all those kids' stuff? I don't want this to be you know, like it was bad, because it was hard work. I don't think my sisters through their whole teenage life had more than maybe two days off a year. Can you believe that?

Wow. Did you think of yourself as poor?

Poor? I thought of us as not having anything. My very good friend by the name of Milton Pavao; he is the Water Department manager for the Island of Hawaii. He's from Ola'a too. And we talk about the old days—he's younger than I am. He's an engineer. Andhe said, You know, Harry, I always wanted a BB gun. He said, That was my dream. Never could afford a BB gun. And he said, You know, my first paycheck—when he was a engineer, he bought a BB gun. And we laugh but we know exactly what we're talking about. Yeah, of certain things you dream, someday I'm gonna have. You know what my dream was?

What?

Someday to have a piece of pie that big, all to myself. Because you had the Ola'a Bakery, and once in a while parents would buy a pie. About this big. And you cut it eight sections [chuckle], you know, you wish you had the last one so you can scrape the dish a little bit. And I remember thinking, Someday I'm gonna have a whole piece of pie to myself. And that's how you grow up, dreaming those kinda things. I remember my sister talking about

this story once. Do you know there are people with their own bedrooms? And you can't believe that. You cannot even fathom owning a home. That's not true—today, that's a guy's dream, right? Owning a home, owning a car. No, that's beyond. I never dreamt about owning a house. I thought it was fantasy to have your own bedroom. I mean, eight kids in one room? Your beds are stacked, you crawled over you know, to get to a place to sleep. And so I know this sounds ridiculous, but that is of truth. To go back now is a mental impossibility, because you know of other things. But at that time when you don't know of anything, you just do it.

How did that parlay over when you had children of your own? Did you spoil them and give them everything that you couldn't have and never even knew to dream about? Or did you say, Hey, when I was your age, I walked, you know, how many miles, et cetera?

I don't want to do that. You know, you are like your parents; you want life to be better for them. The greatest joy is to see them happy. And you better believe it. Anything I can do to make it easier for them, I'm gonna do. If they call it spoiling, well so be it.

You know, you went to college, and that—

Yeah.

--must have been a monumental struggle to afford that and go through that. You did realize a dream of becoming a teacher.

M-hm.

But you didn't stay with it. Why not?

When I was a teacher at Hilo High School, I loved teaching. And maybe after this job, I might even go back. I really do love teaching. I consider that to be one of the greatest things I've ever done. At the time, there was this new teaching method called Modular Flexible Scheduling type. And I didn't believe in it; I just could not accept teaching that way. To make it very simple, there was a lot of independence to children to make choices of this and that. I thought very strongly we're gonna lose a lot of kids. You know, that they needed more guidance than that. And I was told, either accept it or you know, you can't teach here. And literally, you know, I went home that day in October, beginning of school year—I was tenured—and I told my wife, I'm gonna go look for a job, I just resigned from teaching.

What'd she say?

I don't know what she said, but I probably can imagine what she felt. We had you know, a young boy, and I think she knew.

I told her I don't care if I have to work three jobs; you won't have to worry about being taken care of.

M-hm.

And I did work two and a half jobs for a long time. But I still love teaching, you know. But I know one thing about life; you can teach many ways besides classroom. And so I continued coaching and different kinda things. But classroom teaching was really good.

Harry Kim's entire life's work has been in public service – as a teacher, an Army medic, a director of a law enforcement assistance agency and, for 24 years, an

official with County Civil Defense. As Civil Defense Director, he was a familiar and trusted public figure, keeping citizens updated on volcanic eruptions, storms and other possible threats to safety.

I know people who saw me in the civil defense role, see more or less a dictator type. But that's what they see on camera and news. You don't dictate to people and a community, do this, do that. You have to work with them. You're gonna have people who are not cooperating with you. You remember Bob Jones?

Sure.

I'll tell you a story about Bob Jones. Because you learn from everybody. And Bob taught me a lesson.

And he was the KGMB anchorman—

You bet.

--and reporter.

Right. I set a policy in Kalapana that the media will not be allowed in certain area. You know. So the priority is of residents who having their lives destroyed. Bob asked for a meeting with him—with me, rather. He said that he represented all of the television media and other media—they appointed him to come talk to me. And we sat down and he said, Harry, he has the responsibility. He said the media has a responsibility to share and bring things to the people who cannot see it otherwise. You have a responsibility, this and that. Surely, we can work together. And I remember learning something that carried me from then to now, in regards to the responsibility of the media. And so we worked together to see how we can do this. He had his job, I had my job. And the most important thing I learned was that I needed him, and I needed the media to carry on what we were gonna do, you know, so everybody could understand. And also, one more thing. Volcanic phenomena is a very, very special event of nature. When you can, and if you can, it should be shared with the public. And that's what the media was there for. And I'll never forget Bob for teaching me that.

Did you have sleepless nights wondering if you'd be able to keep people from dying?

Oh, yeah; that's not of nature, that's of people. I think—somebody asked me once too long ago, I'm gonna leave—what's the one thing that I'm gonna remember, on a negative note? There were a couple that died. You know, I always wonder how they died, because they were caught in a storm. And obviously, you know, the job wasn't done that well because they got caught in a, you know, [INDISTINCT] waters. I thought we put the barricades in time, which obviously we did not. There are people out there that don't carry much respect for nature, and they think they can handle, so to speak. They do not understand nature's force. They always think, even today, all over the world, they wait 'til they see, hear, or touch, and then they figure they can run to safety. Always, that will happen, especially with major phenomena that are special like volcanic eruptions—and it is special. But they have to understand the power of nature. And people die, you know, and people have died; people will continue to die, and because of our disrespect for…

You know, I've seen you in the thick of it. I think I was covering the double eruption of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa.
Oh, you remember that?
'83.
Yeah.
And I remember you managing the office and being out on the scenes, and you seemed, I mean, obviously were you taking it seriously, making wise decisions. But you seemed so comfortable in the midst of disaster.
I am comfortable with nature. I'm not afraid of nature. Understand how we were raised, where we were raised. And nature was our friend. Nature is my friend. We call it natural disaster. I try to tell people those are natural phenomena. You know, believe it or not, you need hurricanes, you know, in regards to weather patterns. Tsunamis are natural phenomena of earthquakes, of Earth's adjustment. Volcanic eruptions, same thing. And if you learn to respect nature's ways, really, you're okay. I'm more afraid of mankind than nature any day, you know. I've never seen nature vengeance in my life, you know? Just nature carrying on its natural ways. You learn it, respect it; you'll be okay.

Like so many conversations, it's not easy to keep a *Long Story Short*. So we'll continue to talk story with Harry Kim. We'll explore his unorthodox candidacy for Mayor of Hawaii Island and the two terms in office he's won. Please join me for Part 2 – next week – on another *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou!

People of the family know that I'm not a very social person. I get my greatest warmth and peace by being alone with nature.
I make no secret of that, you know. You tell me what would I like to do? That's what I like to do. I like to be alone with nature's ways, and nobody of the family takes offense to that.

LONGstorySHORT with LESLIE WILCOX

PBS Hawaii

GUEST: HARRY KIM 2
LSS 118 (LENGTH: 27:16)
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Aloha! I'm Leslie Wilcox of PBS Hawaii. Last week on *Long Story Short*, we sat down with a man who says, "I'm just Harry." He's the Mayor of Hawai'i Island, Harry Kim, who grew up in poverty just outside Hilo, the youngest child of Korean immigrants. He shared his deep admiration for his mother's courage, his father's gentleness, and he spoke of his respect for nature. This week, we'll continue to talk story in Part 2 of a two-part conversation with Harry Kim.

For 24 years, Harry Kim worked in Hawaii County's Civil Defense system, protecting people and property spread over 4,000 square miles – that's more than all the other main Hawaiian islands put together. He retired as Director, after getting citizens through many powerful visits from the forces of nature.

You know, we think we control our destiny, so to speak. And when you look back, you probably had one percent influence over it. We had a mayor by the name of Herbert Matayoshi. I was the Director of Law Enforcement Agency at the time. And I used to get different kind of assignments. On that day in 1975, we had a major earthquake of seven-point-two. And it caused a lot of destruction, obviously. Unfortunately, a fatality from the tsunami. And county government got criticized for lack of proper response. And the person in charge told the mayor shortly thereafter that he would not like to keep the job. He was temporary anyway. And the mayor called me in and said that I want you to fix this agency. Just ensure me that when I leave this job as mayor, nobody else's death is on my conscience. And that's how I fell into the job. I thought I didn't want the job. I thought maybe two years, and I'd leave. I wanted to go teach at the college level. And that's how much of a slow learner I am. You know, two years, stayed 'til 24. It was just one of those things that so many things happened thereafter in regards to storms, in regards to fires, in regards to droughts, in regards to volcanic eruptions, you know. You just kept going, and before you know it, 24 years passed.

After 'falling into the job' and enjoying a long career at County Civil Defense, Harry Kim entered the race for Big Island Mayor. That was just two weeks before the Primary Election in 2000; and his bumper stickers read, 'Applicant for Mayor.' Kim won the election and took the General Election with 50%of the votes, nearly twice that of his closest rival. He became the first mayor of Korean descent in the United States. Now, Harry Kim is nearing the end of his 2nd term.

You know, I'm sure everybody remembers your remarkable candidacy for Big Island Mayor.

Uh-- [chuckle].

The $10 limit on campaign contributions, no campaign network to speak of. And I'm wondering what it was like when you entered the mayor's office. I mean, clearly, you knew county government. What made you think, I can do this, I can do this mayor's job, and of this very diverse island facing so many challenges?

I worked for county government at that time thirty years. Every job in county government was of administrative level; just the way it turned out. The job before civil defense was the director of law enforcement system administration, of working with State, County, Federal and private sector. Civil defense, basically the same, but in a concentrated field. I knew where we were financially from cabinet meetings and projections of gover—and shortage of revenues. I was typical of a lot of people, of seeing things not being done, but you know, you don't say anything, 'cause it's not your role. Saying things didn't matter anyway. I went in it totally aware of what uh, problems I wanted to address. That was one side. The other side of it was simpler. I think I represented a lot of people that felt of a growing detachment from our government, of even distrust. Of that this government which was supposed to be for us, was not for us. So you went with that kinda philosophical thing. But you also knew to do what you wanted to do, you had to run a certain way, you know, to give you that kind of independence, and tell people to no more than that. No fancy speeches or brochures of I'm gonna do this, and I'm gonna cure the, you know, ills of the island and the state or whatever. All I said was one thing; I will apply for this job, and I promise you to do my best to do what is right by law. And that's all I promised; no more than that. And I knew I could do it in regards to two reasons. I really felt I knew government, I really felt that I knew what the problems were, and I really felt that my jobs of past gave me the needed experience of having people work together to address it. I didn't have no magic answers, you know, in regards to how solve the problem. I just knew that confidence within because of job experience that I could—I knew these people, I could try to get them together to address the problem.

And you've spent a lot of time working to get people together. Not management by fiat, but hey, let's get a group together, and let's really talk about this, and let's come together.

And that's the job, you know. The hardest part of the job is this, without any question on that answer to that; is no matter what you do with some, they don't trust you. They question your truth. And I don't care what you do. And when you know 100% of what you did is of truth, of openness, and they still question you. That is hard.

And you haven't had any scandal or—I mean, that's one of the things that's said throughout all segments of the island; that basically, you've dealt with truth and sincerity, and good intentions. And some things haven't worked out to some people's satisfaction, but not because of any ill effect or mismanagement by you; it's just a different vision.

I think we all look for people that we can trust, uh, all look for people that you know, will be of truth. And we worked hard to be that. I'm so lucky that I surrounded myself with good, smart, you know, maybe the words are wrong, but I call 'em pure people, of what they want to do. And every day, I think, they convey that. And as they were told from day one, that's all what we got to try to do. And the only way you're gonna have people trust you is to be 100% all the time. You mislay them one time, then all your 99 times is for naught. And I don't think I'm any different than anybody else of what I want from my leader. And I'm gonna really try to be that.

So let's talk about the different figure you cut in office. Um, you—you're a hard guy for lobbyists to get to, because—

[chuckle]

--you don't have lunch, you don't play golf.

Yeah; I know. But isn't that great?

[chuckle]

No, no. You know, lobbyists—I was asked many years ago what's my attitude on developers and I have always said you know, they're my only hope, they're my greatest hope. And they have been, and they are in regards of addressing problems. I just came back from the legislature prior to this, asking for them to help us fund a transitional home, and telling them of the private sector. The land is from the private sector, the people who's gonna run for as a private nonprofit, people who are of community gonna help us develop it. And I think that uh, I know this is gonna be misinterpreted, but I'll say it. It was us in power and us politicians that created the atmosphere that you've got to do this, and butter this hand, you know, before this hand reacts. I know that's not true of most. But the atmosphere was created that way, you know, by us politicians. And so they learn they have to do that. But we created that situation. If all of us created a situation where—no, they wouldn't do it; they're not fools; they're not gonna do something that's gonna hurt 'em. They're doing things that they feel they need to do. And I think because of what transpired in the past seven years of, you know, all we're interested in is the issue, I think they welcome it more than anybody else. You know, I joked with them; I said, you know, any money you had to spend on me, just give it to charity on this island. And I wish they would do that, and they probably did; and a lot of people have. You know, I'll mention Castle & Cooke; I mention Stanford Carr. You know, I just told the Legislature, I said, Stanford Carr you know, built for me brand new, a safe place in Kona and paid for everything. You know. And that was his contribution, on his own. We didn't ask for it; you know, he donated it.

I know you don't mind getting your hands dirty when it comes to work; but did you ever felt like your hands were starting to get dirty in politics?

Never did.

Nobody ever tried to grease your palms, or line your pockets?

I think during the election, there were you know, offers for financial help. But you just later, you know, [INDISTINCT] what will or will not be, and from day one, I think it didn't take long before everyone knew to just address the issue.

It's just not gonna work to do it that way.

Yeah. And it's been really good. You know, like I said, I've never had you know there's a lot of disagreements, obviously. But as long as we stick to the issue, and then they stick to the issue, and it's been good.

Have you had any disappointments? I'm thinking of that five-year land dispute over Hokuli'a, the housing—gentleman's housing subdivision. Any disappointments during your term in office?

Oh, yeah; you know. Lot of disappointments; this guy trying to get some things done. Because you find out all the hoops that must go through. Everybody knows about EIS, for example. You know, I mean, the average EIS takes a year, you know, and the rules that the private government as well as any private developer to build a highway, a major highway, you find out the average is eight to nine, to ten years. And the average person cannot obviously understand that, why does it take so long. And it does take long. The Hokuli'a issue that you brought up, you know, you get tied up in court and this and that. But if you step back from it, you know, why, and you can understand it. You understand it, you accept it. You don't have to like it, but you know, you can accept it. The problem is trying convey that to public, of why it's taking this long, and try to curtail any kind of hostility towards anybody. And I still continue to try to get there. But that kinda disappointment always there. There's lot of other kind of disappointment in us, in government not addressing or focusing on certain kind of problems, and more fixated on things of roads and parks, and those things.

Harry Kim serves a big island where there are big differences in what citizens want to see happen. But he says the differences tend to be misunderstood or overblown.

And you've served so many different constituencies, and of course, many people still believe Hawaii Island should be Hilo and Kona side, 'cause those effectively act like two islands sometimes.

Kona and Hilo side conflict is exaggerated, grossly exaggerated in regards to the differences, so to speak, is very understandable if you are not of history of Hawaii. And Kona bloomed and blossomed and boomed—whatever word you want to use, in the past 10, 15 years at the most. All right. If 15 years ago I said to anybody in Kona—a little more than 15 years—that someday you're gonna have a Walmart, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, traffic problems, I guarantee you every one of 'em would have asked me, What have you been drinking, Harry?

[chuckle]

You know. The growth factor—people don't even know that Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway was not finished until 1973 or 74 or so. Governor Ariyoshi coined that, I think, the Gold Coast. Because Kona was just a small, you know, quiet place, and all of a sudden this growth came, like the world—and the world did discover this beautiful place of Kona and Kohala. Naturally, the infrastructures did not keep up; naturally there's impatience; and naturally, when you see the amount of money they contribute to the whole property tax of 65, 70%, and they see what they had versus what they perceive Hilo to have, they're gonna

say, Look, that's not fair. So if you understand that, your job is twofold; to try to catch up as best as you can, but being fair to the whole island based on need, not how much you contribute. But the other part is to try to make people understand, and I really believe most of them do. And I believe, like most things of controversy, there are a few that will make a lot of noise. But I really believe there are few. I can feel that when I go to Kona. I have never had anyone mistreat me in any kind of tone, I don't care where I go. And the controversy of east and west of Hilo, Kona, I don't think is what people think it is. There was about a year, maybe longer, maybe shorter period where people were asking me if I was gonna run for governor. I don't think I ever really seriously considered wanting to run. My ego was, I think, getting to me, because people were saying, you know, we want you to run for governor and do what you're doing of government. And it came to the point where I felt that that was something that I should do, you know, to be responsible for, as they say. And then you know, time came where I knew I had to make a decision. My answer was no, I would feel you know, like I'm betraying the commitment I made and who I am.

But you were interested?

Interested?

M-hm.

You know, I don't know if I can use the word interested, Les, because—

You didn't dismiss it out of hand.

No, it was about the job, about doing the job. I didn't want to be mayor. And I know—I really didn't want to be mayor. I had my life set out; I was gonna—I did retire, you know. And even running for second term—and this is the total truth; I didn't want to run second term, much less run for governor. And I wanted to do certain things of personal, and maybe learn to play enjoy the fish a little more, and the birds a little more, and the sun, and the ocean. My wife did not—I committed to everyone, I will tell you what my decision is by Monday; a certain Monday. Because I promised this reporter. You know, just to put him off three, four weeks earlier, I said I'll set this date, and I just picked a date. He didn't forget. [chuckle] So as the date approaches, all right, I said, okay, you know, I made a commitment. I did not know 'til four o'clock that morning; no one knew. My wife, staff, cabinet; nobody knew. I had a cabinet meeting set up for eight o'clock that morning to tell them what I'm gonna do. 'Cause their jobs depended on it. And it was at four o'clock in the morning, sitting by myself in the dark in the quiet, that you know, I felt I knew what I was gonna do. That's shows you the political ambitions I had, which was nonexistent. Yeah. As far as governor's race, you go through all the things you would like to see the government focus on that I don't think we are. There are certain social issues that I really wanted to see if could be done.

But decided your obligation was to the Hawaii Island.

I'll tell you what my thought process went that morning. Regardless if I ran for governor, regardless if I won, regardless if I lost, I would have a real difficult time looking at Hawaii's people in the eye again, because I would feel like I betrayed 'em. Because when you run for office, it's automatically without say anything; you're committing yourself for four years.

Nowhere did I ever say, maybe two. You know. It was an understanding I was gonna be here for four years, and I felt that if I left, I'll be leaving in two. And that's a betrayal.

From a sense of loyalty he felt he owed the people who elected him to office, Harry Kim chose to serve out his term rather than resign to enter the race for Governor. He's now getting ready to wrap up his second term. Harry Kim's approach to politics and governance has been called, "unconventional." He doesn't "do lunch," he avoids the dinner event circuit, and his dress-up clothes are pretty much his everyday clothes.

Everybody knows you as the guy who wears jeans—
Hey, I buy the better looking jeans.
[chuckle]
I hope you appreciate it. [chuckle]
I do.
[chuckle]
Have you ever worn dress slacks in office?
Yeah. I think um first day, when I got inaugurated. [chuckle]
And then? [chuckle]
Second time when I got inaugurated the second time. I think that's about it.
And no need, otherwise.
Yeah, I mean, you know, I don't feel comfortable wearing certain kinda clothes. You know, obviously, I have 'em. I'm sure people wish I wore 'em more. But I just wear what I feel comfortable.
It's funny, isn't it; lot of people who grew up without a lot—their dream is to have the material comfort they didn't have. But that's doesn't seem to be true in your case.
Oh, I like comfort. I like clean water. I don't want to worry about food. One of the things that is uh, scar that's there for whatever reason I like a dry place and a dry house, 'cause we had so much leakage. Walking to school every day, whether it be couple of miles and back, not owning an umbrella and many times caught in the rain, wet and cold. You have that. I was talking to you earlier; above everything else is a quest for peace. You know, what brings—what makes you feel good. Nature makes me feel good because I depended on nature. I love you know, a kid with macho problems, you don't say it publicly, but I love touching and staring at flowers and beauty of flowers. I love wildlife, I love fish. I have pet fish that I call names in the ocean. You know, and they grace me with letting me touch them, or they touch me. I have a high impatience of people that have very low tolerance of people. I have a strong, strong uh, dislike of people of violence. And you know, that's what stuck with me. I always know the hardship of my mom and dad, of their loss of family because of war, of man's—and I'll say it I've said it many times, Les. I consider man's greatest failure is that of war. And I will always feel that. To me—I'm not talking about wars of country, I'm talking about any individuals. When you resort to say, I don't like you, so I gotta kill you. You know, what else can you say but that it's gotta be our greatest failure.

You know, that that's the only way we can resolve something. And I think that all reflects on why we try to do the things the way we are doing and why I have a love of our cosmopolitan past. I think the Hawaiian people is our greatest gift, the natural warmth and beauty about them. And that's innate with them. And all of those things which I grew up that are special. The problems will always be there; the only difference is how do we resolve them. And that's what I just want to dedicate the rest of my time for, you know, in regards to a better way to resolve problems. It doesn't mean that people are gonna be happy, you know, [INDISTINCT]. Because I learned something long time ago; if you have a problem, I don't care how many people are on each side and the two sides, you can get 'em together, but one side come together with the total confidence, are we gonna get everything we want. You have nothing. Yeah. You have to come to the table with an idea that you're going to listen. And that's our biggest task, just to talk to them. Will you at least come and listen. You know. Not to give your side; will you just come listen to the other side, and then talk.

Takes a lot of time on your part, doesn't it?

Oh, yeah. It but you know, with the faith of mankind, you find that most of the people, they want that too. I really believe they want that too.

So uh, when you leave office, uh, you've said a couple of tantalizing things; that maybe you'll go back to teaching, or maybe you'll devote your life to peace and resolution of war.

I would like to do that, I don't care how small a scale. And I'm not, you know, putting myself on any pedestal level. Okay. It can be on any level. What greater way to spend your life than that. And I want to see what else I can do. And this job ends in less than 10 months, and I'll see what else I'll do after that.

Does that mean you're not gonna take up golf, that you're not gonna learn new hobbies, or any hobbies?

You know, once uh we went on a vacation. I asked what do the kids want to do. Everybody named one thing. And I told them what I wanted to do, and I'm gonna show you how limited my—how easy it is to make me happy. And my family knows this. I said, I just want to find me a beautiful stream in Oregon—that's where we were gonna go—and take off my shoes, and I'll wade knee-deep, stand there and feel the freshness and coolness of the water, listen to the water, listen to the—look at the beautiful trees. And that's all I want to do.

You're a cheap date.

[chuckle] Yeah. But really, you know, you give me a choice of what I want to do, and I love that; I just love that.

We can only speculate about what retirement will mean for Harry Kim. He has no hobbies – and he doesn't enjoy traveling. Will he make a run for Governor in 2010? He says he has no yearning to be Governor. That's not exactly a definitive answer. As you recall, he also said he didn't need to be Mayor. And he didn't seek out his Civil Defense job. I'm glad you could join me for another *Long Story Short*. Mahalo to you and Harry Kim. Please log on to pbshawaii.org each week to see who's coming up

with their stories. Keep sending us questions and suggestions by email. And please tune in next week for another *Long Story Short*. I'm Leslie Wilcox. A hui hou kakou.

Every single day, I touch a flower. Every single day. I need it; I don't do it because of any other reason than I need it. The staff knows that. They catch me looking at the sky, or you know, takes me sometimes 10 minutes to walk to my car, to my house, because I stop and look at the trees you know, listen to the birds, you know. I need it every day; I need my medicine, and nature is my medicine.