Q and A - Video Script

Jerry Younger:
Is there any news in terms of the state legislature that we can be optimistic about?

Secretary Miller:
Actually, I think there is a lot to be optimistic about, quite frankly. One, when you read the news information whether we’re starting to see it in Kansas or not and whether we’re starting to see jobs come back, it seems pretty clear, from all the economists, that our economy in the United States is coming back. I think that’s going to be reflected here in Kansas. In terms of where we are right now with our state legislature and what’s happening there, one of the things that gives me lots of comfort is that Governor Parkinson not only said no more cuts, state government has endured as many cuts as we can responsibly even consider, but he said absolutely clearly he will veto a budget bill that comes back with more cuts. If he vetoes it, then it takes two thirds vote to over ride his veto and I can guarantee there aren’t the votes to do that. So I think we’ve seen all the cuts we’re going to have to absorb and I am feeling more optimistic. We’ve got a long ways to go and veto sessions are very perilous things that can be very well balanced, but I’m feeling optimistic that the state will have a revenue measure and when that revenue measure passes that there will be an element of the revenue measure that’s available to KDOT and I think we’re going to get our transportation bill that has other non-revenue items in that quite frankly are going to be helpful to our agency and are going to be good. In a year like this, really, that’s not bad. I’m feeling good about it.

Jerry Younger:
Secretary Miller, what’s been you best and worst day at KDOT?

Secretary Miller:
I think I’d say the best day was when we had our CTP celebration down in Hutchinson and we did the ground breaking on the last K-61 projects which was also our first ARRA project. We thought we shouldn’t let something as monumental as completing the CTP go by without really acknowledging it. It sort of felt like we were having budget cuts already and the ARRA projects had come along and people’s attention was otherwise focused and we kind of put together a celebration we were going to have in Hutchinson, but I had the pre-party anxiety. It felt like nobody was going to come and if they did come, it was just going to be ho hum. In fact, we had 200-250 people and they were all really excited. They saw this as a big deal. They were happy they’d been involved in it and it really gave me the opportunity to reflect back on how amazing it was. That in this 10-year period with all the upsets in the economy, with all the obstacles that were in our way, we completed this program. That’s truly unbelievable.

I have had a number of bad days too. I think the one that I would point to was the day that Scotty McDonald was killed. We’ve had a number of really tough days when we’ve lost employees. Richard Cunningham, Gary Burroughs severely injured in that accident. Ty Korte, each one in their own way, got a little bit harder, but for me, the day when I got the news about Scotty McDonald, it was one of those days that made you
think this really is an adult’s job and very tough things happen on the job. That was very sobering. It was such a clear reminder to me how risky the job is for a lot of our employees.

Jerry Younger:
My worst day is right along with yours. Anytime we’ve had tragedy within the KDOT family it’s been a bad, bad day; especially, when you’re pretty close to those people. In this case, it was district one employees while I was district one engineer. That hits even closer to home. You feel like that happened on your watch. Nothing you can do can make it feel better. Those were the bad days. I’ve had a lot of good days too at KDOT. It’s hard to pick out one, but I’ll certainly say the one of the really good days most recently was the day we only had $65 million dollars of ARRA money left in the bank and we had one more project to let that was estimated to be a $71 million dollar project. Luckily for us it did come in at the $65 million dollar project bid wise. That was a darn good day.

Secretary Miller:
What’s one thing you would really like to see accomplished at KDOT this year?

Jerry Younger:
Well, it’s always easier to accomplish a whole lot of stuff when you have a whole lot of money. Obviously, this year not so much, but take a line that you’ve always said the lights don’t shut off at KDOT. We’ve still got a job to do day in and day out, whether that’s maintain roads, whether that’s making sure all bills are paid, whether that’s design highway improvements, whether that’s work with our local partners on projects that they have. All those sorts of things we have to continue to do. I’ve been very proud of the ability of our folks to continue to do those things in less than ideal circumstances over the last year. Hopefully, and I believe it will happen, we’ll continue to have that same success over the next year in these trying times with a limited budget. One day it will get better. It probably won’t be this coming year, but one day it will get better.

Secretary Miller:
I’ll just tag on to that too. I’m really excited because as I look toward things we need to do in the future, I think we’ve got some really interesting stuff going on here that’s go a lot of meat on the bones, that’s going to set us up really well for the future. I’m actually pretty engaged and excited about some things I think we can do over the next year.