

Colleen McNamara

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Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Friday, January 25th, the year 2002. I am Jeff Charnley interviewing the Honorable Colleen McNamara, the immediate former chair of the Board of Trustees at Michigan State University. We're at her office in Lansing, Michigan. This interview is part of the MSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the university that will be celebrated in the year 2005.

Ms. McNamara, you see that we have a tape recorder here today. Do you give us permission to tape this interview?

McNamara: I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start with some background information about where you were born and raised and where did you go to school prior to college.

McNamara: I was born in Detroit. I went to school--public school in Dearborn Township, would be Dearborn Heights--actually I didn't. I went to Catholic School. I went to Divine Child Catholic School until I was about--oh, in fourth grade; and then we moved to Livonia. And then I was raised the rest of my--prior to college, was in Livonia public schools, and then I came to Michigan State.

Charnley: What did you graduate from high school?

McNamara: 1967.

Charnley: '67? What was it that caused you to choose MSU for your university?

McNamara: I think it may sound shallow, but I think a lot of kids make the decision--a lot of my friends were going to Michigan State, and I wanted to be far enough away from my family. I didn't choose it because I was interested in the course of studies at that time. [Laughs] I was interested in going to a good school. But I, at that point, really didn't know what I wanted to do. When I entered, my first major was journalism, because I'd been on the yearbook and the newspaper at the high school. So I really didn't come as an extraordinarily serious student, but I know I wanted to go to a good school, though.

Charnley: Was there anyone in your family or let's say a teacher that had influenced you to come here?

McNamara: I think there were teachers actually at our high school that were interning or whatever. They were doing their student teaching and they were from Michigan State. Yes, as I recall, there was an English teacher. But no one from my family. My father went to UFD. That's the only person who had gone to college in my family, before me. Just my father.

Charnley: What were some of your earliest impressions? Did you have any contact with campus before you came here?

McNamara: I did. I went there the year before, I went with a friend to her older sister to stay in a dorm. They have these brother-sister weekends, and they are very helpful. I was very enchanted by dorm life. I stayed in Brody by going to visit, so that was the first impression.

Coming on to campus, I think these are probably pretty standard impressions. It was so big. It was hard to find your way around. I chose not to room with anyone from my high school so, in fact, I moved into Holden Hall. I was the very first tenant in my room. It just opened in '67. So there was an entire floor, mainly with freshmen because it was a new dorm. People weren't established. Sophomores weren't really established in the dorms. We were all in it together. Very few people knew other people and that was quite good. It made us kind of stretch to get to know people.

Charnley: Did Holden have some of the Living Learning at that time, or did that come later?

McNamara: Oh, that came later. Yes, they had some of the large classes, ATL, such as the television parts of them that you could go down, with a coat over your pajamas, down in the basement and watch the television. [Laughs] It was real different than it is now, but that's the way it was.

Charnley: Was that an exciting time to be on campus?

McNamara: It was an exciting time; and for me, it really was a change in who I was. I think starting in '67, as I did, going through the late sixties and the early seventies, I was deeply involved in left-wing politics. I was in Students for a Democratic Society. I was involved in many demonstrations. I was arrested at the union, 130 people arrested, were surrounded by the state police and campus police. I was deeply involved and deeply believed in the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement.

It was a tremendous learning experience for me. I think I learned as much, or perhaps more, outside of the classroom during that period, because it was a time when people took very seriously that ideas were important and they were relevant to the world around us. I think it's something that has stayed with me for my life, just realizing that. People at that point, I think, were willing to take some real risks. Well, we were willing to take risks with being arrested for ideas, for important things that we felt were values, even though now I wouldn't take those risks. I really wouldn't.

[Laughs] You know, I have a child now and a job and a reputation, and I make good money, and I wouldn't want to risk any of that for certain kinds of ideals.

I'm so happy that I lived in a time and I lived through a period where I did take those risks. I had a lot of friends who were also doing that. I know college friendships last through your lifetime. You gain a lot of friendships. But these were very strong and very deep as a result of a lot of things we went through.

Charnley: I've spoken with a couple of other people who were involved in SDS at that time on campus. Were there any of the leaders that you remember?

McNamara: Oh, absolutely. Beth Shapiro, for one.

Charnley: Yes, she had been brought up in terms of people I have talked with before. You knew her.

McNamara: I knew Beth. She was several years older. In fact, Beth was a teacher. I took a couple of classes from Beth. I think she taught sociology classes.

There's a guy named Mike Price, who still works on campus. I think he works at Wharton Center [for Performing Arts]. Mike was very involved. There's a number of people still around that were involved at that time that I see from time to time. Some are actually involved in state government, and I see them in the course of my own work; and we kind of have this kind of little sister and brotherhood because we know where we were back then.

Charnley: Were there any faculty that were particularly supportive or that were involved in some of the demonstrations?

McNamara: Oh, there were a number of them. In fact, yes. Oh, I'm trying to think of some of their names. I'm not really good with names of late, for some reason. [Laughs] For a politician, that's not so good. But when I became a trustee, I was surprised to see several of them still on campus, still working, still clinging on to some very important principles, and that was kind of heartening to know that they were still there.

Charnley: So you were there during the last years of President Hannah. Did you ever meet him?

McNamara: No.

Charnley: Did you see him in the course of any of these--

McNamara: No. Actually, [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.] was the one that had the strongest sort of presence during that time, and not necessarily in a good way. I mean, he sort of was representative of the role of the university as being involved with the South Vietnamese Police and that kind of thing. I remembered being a demonstration that went to his house one night; and he came out with his robe on. The same Cowles House that I go to now for dinners with the trustees. I was outside clamoring that the president respond to these charges. [Laughs]

Charnley: What did you ultimately end up majoring in?

McNamara: I actually got a multidisciplinary program, a degree in sociology and social science, actually. So it was really a very nice liberal arts degree. I think it's the kind of degree that leads one to go into the kind of work that I'm in, public policy work, that kind of thing.

Charnley: What happened after graduation? What year did you graduate?

McNamara: I ended up graduating--I think I stuck around a little bit. I think I graduated in '72 or '73, I can't remember now. I should have graduated in '71, but I was having a very good time and couldn't decide what I was going to major in, as it turned out. After graduation, I went to work at the State Capitol in the mailroom; actually in the Senate mailroom, and worked for the Senate for five years. I worked in other things besides the mailroom.

Then there was a housing agency in Lansing called Housing Assistance Foundation, that was looking for an executive director. It was a nonprofit, paid very little, but it was also the kind of work that I was really interested, helping low-income people with housing problems; and I happened to have been on the board of directors of that little agency, so I took that job and had that for about five years.

Then not making money--see, this is where I started to say I'm not going to take that kind of risks anymore. Not making very much money, someone I knew about a job being the director of the Michigan Waste Industries Association. It would be like a state association like the one I work now. So I applied for and got that job and began in association work. That was about three years.

Then I came to the cable industry, and I've been here for about fourteen years now as the director.

Charnley: What degree did lobbying come into play in some of these jobs?

McNamara: Lobbying is--well, the last two jobs is basically that's what we do. We try to affect public policy in a positive way toward the industry, and mainly state public policy. So my association--both associations, actually--hire multi-client lobbyists. In fact, you saw him coming in.

He was bringing Girl Scout cookies, the Girl Scout cookie list from his daughter. [Laughs] We hire multi-client lobbyists. I have attorneys, not on staff, but on contract. We have a public relations firm from time to time helping us. There are four people on staff here right now. In terms of cable, we try to effect legislation that is affecting the industry.

Charnley: So some of those earlier jobs you got to know the legislature?

McNamara: Well, they were very helpful. Yes, those were helpful jobs, helpful in the sense that certainly in the mailroom was a great job to learn how things worked and the staff people. Many of the staff people who were at the same level as I'm at, I was then as mail people or they were working as pages, are now either legislator or they're lobbyists. I mean, they're directors of departments. They worked up through the process as I did. So it was sort of similar to the college experience. People that you kind of worked with in the dredges of the bottom of the Capitol. You really developed a lot of really great relationships.

Charnley: When you worked at the Housing Authority, who was the mayor of Lansing at that time? Was that Jerry Graves?

McNamara: I think that was Graves. But it was the time Model Cities--that's an old program. So there was a lot of money for these kinds of programs. So we got a lot of money actually to help people. That was a good experience, too, just to see how, from the side of trying to get money from government, what that was like. All those kinds of experiences really helped me in the job I have

now.

Charnley: You stayed in the Lansing area then?

McNamara: I did. A couple of times, I tried moving back. I really would rather live in Southeast Michigan, but this is where my jobs have been.

Charnley: Did you have any contact with the university after graduation, obviously before you became a trustee but--

McNamara: Yes, during the Housing Assistance Foundation job, we had some contact with Urban Affairs Programs. Yes, there's one in the Lejan [phonetic] Building in Lansing. And Rexell Morris [phonetic], the director--he was director then, as a matter of fact. That was a long time ago. So we did a lot with them. So I knew some of the outreach kinds of things that the university had been involved in because of that community work, yes.

Charnley: Any other contact with the president, besides Wharton, before you entered the trustees?

McNamara: No. No, just reading about everything, yes.

Charnley: How was it that you came to serve on the Board of Trustees of Michigan State? Talk about how you first heard about there might be a vacancy.

McNamara: That's an interesting idea. Well, see, these are some of the things that maybe ten years from now, I can talk more. [Laughs]

Charnley: What year were you elected?

McNamara: The '93 or '94 election. It's an eight-year term, so whatever eight years began with, yes.

Charnley: 2002. Time flies so quickly.

McNamara: It sure does. It does, yes.

Charnley: What I meant was, obviously they're political. You have to get the parties.

McNamara: They're totally political. They're totally political, both the Republicans and the Democrats. I am a Democrat, and for our party, you really have to have support of organized labor to make it through your convention. I mean, frankly, the bigger fight in most of these races is to get through your own convention because there are so many people who want these positions. There are only three universities that actually elect their statewide partisan election of trustees. So I knew that Barbara Sawyer, who had been the Democrat on the Board, was not going to be nominated again by the Democrats for whatever reasons. That's up to her to talk about. But anyway, they were

not going to nominate her again, so there was going to be an incumbent position that was open. I would have been running, and I ended up running with Joel Ferguson, who is also a Democrat, who was running for his second term.

In all honesty, Joel did not want me to run with him on this ticket. He didn't, because Joel is very smart politically and this was probably going to be a Republican year, which it turned out to be, and he knew that his only chance was that there were no women on the ticket for MSU, neither Republican nor the Democrat side. He didn't want to run with a woman. The fact of the matter is, he tried very hard to get white men to run.

Charnley: He had another candidate that he was interested in?

McNamara: He had another candidate, yes, right, who happened to actually be on my board of directors. It was very clever of Joel. [Laughs] You can see how this sort of works. Joel is a very smart, savvy politician.

I can't really be honest about this unless I talk about the role of my father. My dad is Wayne County executive and very, very powerful in the Democratic party.

Charnley: And that's Ed McNamara.

McNamara: His name is Ed McNamara, right. So at the time, actually two years prior to that, I had tried to get on the ticket and labor was simply--they were really, whatever, angry with my dad or whatever; and it just wasn't going to happen.

This was the year that it was going to happen, and we plotted and schemed, and I know it doesn't sound pretty, but it happened. [Laughs] I was nominated by the convention, and as it turned out, I came in second. I won, and Joel came in last. [Laughs] I mean, he was absolutely right. It was a Republican year. I mean, there was nobody else. It was not a Democratic year at all for these kinds of positions. So I was very lucky in that regard. I was lucky probably because I was the only woman of the four people running and I have a fairly good name to run statewide and a good base in the Detroit area.

Charnley: So you come from a political family.

McNamara: Right.

Charnley: Grew up with it.

McNamara: Although, I have to tell you, running for the seat is nothing like running for--believe me, these seats are very hard to campaign. Nobody really cares about them in the larger picture. What you really do is to go around to editorial boards and you sit down and you try to convince editors or sub-editors or whatever that they should endorse you; and you hope their endorsements are made for you and that you prevail because with a little help from their endorsements. I didn't get the *Free Press*, I didn't get the *Detroit News*.

Charnley: How about the Grand Rapids press?

McNamara: I'm not sure whether I got them or not. I know I got *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, because I had worked with their editor-in-chief on some issues. But I got very few endorsements and won. So what does that tell you about endorsements? I don't know. [Laughs]

Anyway, so that's all you can really do. I mean, I've known trustee candidates who have spent \$100,000 and they've lost.

Charnley: And you didn't spend that much?

McNamara: No. I think I spent about twenty, but I don't know that I would do that again. If I'm running again this coming year, I'm not sure I would spend that kind of money. I think that twenty made me feel like I was doing something, but I don't think it really did--

Charnley: You mentioned editorial boards, but what would you say was your other successful area where you were able to attract voters or at least the public interest? What do you see as the real success?

McNamara: Well, I think the success was that I was born female and had a really great name. I mean, the truth. [Laughs] But beyond that, in terms of trying to strategize--and we did try to--I'm pro-choice, Democrat, female. What I tried to look for were some crossover women Republican voters, so what I did was get the alumni women list of women in Oakland County, because I felt that might be a more moderate female vote. I wrote to all MSU female alumni from Oakland

County. That was pretty much my biggest mailing. Then I bought a little bit of cable, odd little cable, it's called "crawls." We're underneath--like the Weather Channel, it'll just say, "Vote for Colleen McNamara for MSU Board of Trustees." Only because it kind of made me feel better to--

Charnley: Spend your money this way?

McNamara: --to buy cable, yes. So it was kind of an odd, funny little campaign, but it worked.

[Laughs]

Charnley: Was there anything you would have done differently, you think?

McNamara: I wouldn't have spent \$20,000. [Laughs]

But you know, what would I have done differently? No, I don't think so. You have to make yourself feel like you're actually running, when, in fact, it really is the top of the ticket, even though my election does not prove that. It's really what happens at the top of the ticket that helps the education posts.

Charnley: What about the issue of your being an alumna of the university? Did that help or hinder; do you think?

McNamara: Well, because I was, I think it was helpful. But if I hadn't been, I think that people would have made an issue of it but I'm not sure it would have--there have been other people on the

MSU Board who have not gone to Michigan State and, in fact, there was one--I can't remember his name now--who went to U of M. He was appointed by one of the governors--I think [William G.] Milliken.

Charnley: But I didn't know if that was a factor.

McNamara: I think it was more of a factor in the convention, that they were really looking for people. They wanted to make sure people went to the universities that they were going to be representing, yes.

Charnley: This was one of the questions that I had prepared later, but it might be an appropriate time to do it. Do you think this method of choosing for the three largest universities, having a popular election is a good idea or should they be appointed by the governor? What do you think?

McNamara: Does this sound self-serving, but I do think this is the best, in an imperfect world. I think this is the best way to choose, at least the three top universities. I mean, the amount of money and the profile that these universities have, I think, requires a little extra attention to sort of a--little "d"--democracy.

Presently, we're in a situation right now with decreasing state revenues. What has occurred, which is just ironic considering that the governor, Governor [John] Engler, has been pushing for the non-election of these education posts, the most abusive or perhaps the most outrageous raise in tuition came by Central Michigan University, whose entire board is completely and totally

nominated, or named by him. They're all appointees of the governor. The boards that have looked a little bit more responsible have been, in fact, these kinds of elected boards, who felt that they've had constituents and philosophical problems with raising tuition.

I think in some ways, if you're a true Democrat or a true Republican, you come to the table with a philosophy about education that is different from the other party, and I think it's healthy. I don't think it would be good to have all Republicans or all Democrats on these boards, because they really deal with deep philosophical--really, they do--deep kind of philosophical approaches to the institutions. That's what they should do.

Sometimes they get caught up in the little housekeeping business, but that drives the presidents crazy, of course. But they should be involved in the bigger questions about society and the university and how they interrelate. As long as Democrats are Democrats and Republicans are Republicans, I think that they come with a healthy approach that is different. Good debates. We're four-four now, split on this. Well, we've had some very good debates on issues, domestic partners issues. I mean those aren't huge issues, but they are issues that kind of reflect where the society is, right now. So, yes, I think that they should remain elected.

Charnley: So you see that as a strength in the system.

McNamara: Absolutely, absolutely. We would have eight Republicans on the MSU board right now because John Engler would--and then you have situations like at Grand Valley. The domestic partner benefit issue was a huge debate issue on our board at Grand Valley, whose entire board is appointed by the governor, with some very wealthy but conservative Republicans. There was no

debate by the board. The president of the university knew that he simply had to go with a certain philosophical approach to it. I think that's not necessarily healthy at the top.

Charnley: You mentioned the Central Michigan experience. I kept up on it because my bachelor's and master's is from Central, and then my Ph.D. is from Michigan State. So I keep up on some of the stuff on Central, but the 27 percent tuition increase, the tuition guarantee that was in place for some years, what was your position on that when you first got on the board?

McNamara: On the tuition guarantee?

Charnley: Yes.

McNamara: Well, I have really mixed feelings about this, because there are a couple of people on our board who are very adamant about keeping tuition low for low-income people, moderate-income people. Philosophically, I'm there; but I also have this other sense of role that we have to maintain the quality of the university, that if someone or their family is spending five, six thousand dollars a year in tuition, that they need to have a degree that has quality; that we can't be cutting ourselves down to the bone and lose that value for the students and for the state. So that's really been a challenge, I think, for every trustee in terms of tuition of late because of the kind of resources we're getting in terms of revenues from the state that you just have to kind of balance. You've got to have the money to keep the quality of the university, and it's got to come from somewhere.

So, a 27 percent increase, I would never--that would be outrageous. But 9 percent? At

some point, we've got to make sure that we don't make the university lose its quality and its value.

I've been very convinced that because the tuition guarantee was an initiative that--I have mixed feelings about it. In some ways I felt it was kind of a gimmick. Our president went around the country several years ago and really kind of talking it up and all. He felt it was valuable as showing the world how we felt about keeping tuition down, but he felt it was a very good tool internally so that the rest of the faculty and the deans in the colleges understood that he was serious about being fiscally conservative internally, as well. So he found a very good tool. So I was willing to support him all along on the tuition guarantee, but not rabidly.

But when this really serious crisis came from the state in terms of revenue, his recommendation of 9 percent increase really, to me, I felt that he really had done the job of assuring himself that he couldn't do anything less than that in terms of tuition. Because of my historical experience with him, that tuition guarantee was so valuable to him, so I really felt that he was sincere about that and that I wasn't going to try and nickel and dime him down. I was really confident, at least in this. I mean, there's a lot of things that when I'm dealing with the president that I have some "Let's play with this." But I really trusted his numbers on this, because I knew how much he felt about keeping tuition down. So it's had an interesting little history, the tuition guarantee, and I'm afraid it may be gone.

Charnley: What were some of the other issues? Before you became chair of the board, what were some of the other issues that you were particularly interested in?

McNamara: The experience of being a trustee is an interesting one. You come to a campus where

the model we all have--and we all have it on the board--is this corporate top-down, you're the board of directors and you have your CEO, the president; and you tell the university what to do. Well, the university doesn't see the world that way. [Laughs] Then it begins to dawn on you, little by little, that the faculty believe that they are the university; that the faculty believe that they, in essence, run the university, and that you are in some ways, and the president as well, are just kind of off to the side, doing whatever it is you do. But they believe that their contributions are much more important.

It's, cynically, a quaint little sort of Oxford kind of idea, but in some ways, I've come around to be quite thankful for that. I think it adds something really wonderful. It is the university, the faculty. So that's one huge revelation that begins to dawn on you, one hopes, if you're a trustee. Now some trustees choose not to recognize that.

Charnley: The corporate model still applies.

McNamara: Exactly. "Well, just tell them we're doing this." You know, "Who cares what the faculty says about this? We're just going to vote for it." So it was this whole process.

The provost [Lou Anna K. Simon] is a wonderful actor in all of this, because she very diplomatically tries to tell the trustees, "You simply cannot just say, 'Who cares what the students and faculty think?' At least, sit and listen. Wait until it perks up through the university."

The second thing that is really interesting that sort of dawns on you if you're really going to get anything done, is that you come into a campus with 50,000 people, most of them are very smart, most of them are very self-motivating, most of them are very creative, and they really are very

happy to get involved in any kind of intellectual anything and give their opinion on everything.

And there's so many things going on. There's so many different endeavors.

You can't know about everything, unless you're provost. I have to say Lou Anna Simon is one of the most intelligent people I have ever, ever had the privilege to know. She knows everything that's going on on campus. Everything, I'm telling you. The scientific side, the arts and letters, I mean, she is just amazing.

But anyway, as a trustee, you can't. So you have to sort of make a decision. Either you're going to be a real generalist and just kind of look at the budget and really general things, or if you want to get something actually done, you have to find an area of interest to yourself and just focus, hone right in.

Some trustees, as you're probably all too aware, choose athletics. That's their area and they focus right in on that. For me, it was urban affairs, how the university interacts with and affects the urban life of Michigan. Now, the realization became that just because I was interested in it didn't mean that anything was going to change on campus. A trustee doesn't just issue an edict, "Okay, we're going to try to convince the president to do it." That's not an interest for him. It's not. He's got other interests and he's found, I'm sure as much as I did, that just because he's interested in study abroad, didn't mean the entire campus was going to all of sudden hup-to and get interested in study abroad. He had a lot of work to do on campus to get that achieved.

So that was really a revelation to me is that, to try and get some sort of movement on urban issues with the university, I had to kind of work some things. I needed the provost to kind of help me, and she was very helpful. But I learned how things moved on campus.

What the provost did, there's this--and you're probably aware of it--at the beginning of each year there's sort of a thing that each college does that talks about--there's a consonant, there's some letters, it's called, but where they talk about what they intend to do.

The dean puts this together, and she inserted a question that just said, "What is the college doing around urban issues?" I mean all she did was put the question, but the very fact that the question was in there indicated that the provost thought that there was something important about being involved in urban issues, and that was very good.

She also took an interest in the Urban Affairs Program, changed the dean, got involved with trying to reorganize. She's got a pot of money that she uses for bits and pieces. She took some of that money and did a study, did a survey across campus, how do people feel about the Urban Affairs Program. She got one of her assistant provosts to be sort of a center across the campus of collecting urban issues, who is doing what across the campus. I mean, she was very, very helpful.

Now, it didn't make a big jump, but, as I've learned, you don't make big jumps at a university. The little, little, little movement is probably as good as you're going to get and probably is more thoughtful, anyway. It's not the flash, fad, you know, the latest fad. It has some longevity to it. So those are the things I kind of learned over the last few years about being a trustee and what you can actually do and get done. So in terms of issues, that's where my issues were, sort of my focus was.

Now, as everybody who was involved knows, we had all kinds of other issues. Probably one of the biggest periods of building on campus ever, in the fifties with Hannah; and that was fascinating. Not knowing anything other than that, though, it seems sort of natural that we'd have a building a week being put up. [Laughs] So the building was fascinating, the issues around--

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is side two. When the tape ended, you were talking about buildings as an issue while you've been on the board. There's been a building boom and you were learning about that.

McNamara: We, as a board, were learning about what it meant to expand a campus. There are a lot of issues around that, that had to do with the beauty of the campus. Now, that may seem superficial, but I think if you talked to alumni of the university, one of the first things they say about the university is how beautiful it was. If you talk to people who you are trying to recruit to come to campus, the beauty of the campus is a reflection of how we feel about the university.

So the circle, the trees, the beautiful circle drive area, was obviously much more beautiful than as we were going farther, farther south, where the new buildings were being built. So there's a real discussion and some movement around trying to envision how we want South Campus to look, and some movement around actually doing something about that.

I think this board was adamant about ugly buildings. They didn't want ugly buildings, and there were moments when the president was looking for cheaper and we were looking for better-looking, and we actually did override on some buildings, in terms of trying not to go for the most economical building, but to try to assure that they weren't going to look like the Administration Building. Let's put it that way. [Laughs] It's one of the ugliest buildings on campus.

Charnley: It's not your favorite.

McNamara: Right, right.

Charnley: What building appeals to you?

McNamara: The latest that I remember this was the Spartan Child Development Center that is being built now. It was going to be aluminum siding. Joel Ferguson, who is a trustee, he's a developer in town. He said, "Make it brick. How much more is it going to be to be brick?" And they said however much it was going to be. We all said, "Yes, great idea. Make it brick." And Peter [McPherson] is kind of cringing there, "Oh, god." But it is much more pretty to have a brick building over there. So those are the kinds of thing.

Art on campus. Bob Traxler, a former trustee, was very adamant that each building had to include a certain budget for art, for public art, that it's an important part of who we are.

So I think this board really kept an aesthetic about what the campus was going to look like, and, I think, in some ways convinced the president, who really is very dollar-conscious, but he established something to do with trees. For \$5,000, you can have a tree in your name along some of the roads.

Charnley: Didn't he have a pay raise that he directed for that?

McNamara: Exactly. Yes, exactly. So he kind of got into the spirit of it as well, I think.

Charnley: How is it that you became chairperson?

McNamara: When you're interviewing as chair, it's interesting because it's a good way to stand in line to be interviewed, because that's really all it is. It's a rotation now. I was elected but only because the chair, Bob Traxler, quit the board prior to the end of his term, and so we felt we needed to elect someone to fill out his term, and then I rotated into the chairmanship.

Charnley: Following,

McNamara: Following.

Charnley: So you were elected to replace him.

McNamara: I was going to be following him anyway. I think the days of strong chairs elected are just gone from Michigan State; and I'm not sure that they're even-- I don't know who the chair is of the Board of Regents U of M. I don't know who the chair is. I just don't think that they have the kind of sway that they used to have as a position. I think, as much as anything, it's a position where you're the one who's going to have to stand up and introduce the rest of the trustees. [Laughs]

I must say the president does treat it as though it's something a little bit--there's some leadership involved in it, and perhaps there is. There are issues that you can decide to take up or ask not to take up, and I think the board is willing to, because you're the chair, agree to those things. But for the most part, it's kind of a ceremonial position at this point.

Charnley: So the rotation of the chair, you think it's a good thing?

McNamara: Yes, I think it's a good thing. I think it is. From a little "d" democracy, standpoint, I think it is. It used to amuse me last year when I was chair, when people would call me and say, "Well, as chair, would you do this or do that?" I would think to myself, you know, before I was chair, I would just do that. So they're saying that the chair should do it. I like the fact that any trustee at any time can initiate some sort of policy change or an idea. Maybe you do have a little more weight.

One of the things I did do--it may sound shallow and superficial in a way, but one of the things that I did do when I was chair--and I feel really good about having done this for a larger reason--is in the Board of Trustees' meeting room, the board room, lining the walls are all the presidents of the university from the beginning. It's very impressive. I think it feels really good to have that, and there was no such similar kind of recognition of trustees who had served on the board. So I worked with the board staff, and we got someone to make two very large plaques. I don't know if you've been out to the fourth floor.

Charnley: Not recently.

McNamara: But they're out there and they're engraved with the names from the very first trustee of Michigan State University to the last one, I think Bob Traxler would be the last one to have gone. Their names and the dates that they served on the board. For me, it was really an indication of

recognizing the people who contribute to the university.

When I think of this building splurge, one of the issues for me has been the naming issues, and that we are in a process, a time in this world, where the greatest achievement is to make tons and tons of money and we name all these buildings. I don't want to take away from these wonderful people who have earned great amounts of money and have donated to the universities; but do we really want a hundred years from now to recognize only people who have made tremendous amounts of money? There are other things that we need to recognize in a long-term way than just the Al Taubmans [phonetic]--and I'll name him because he didn't donate to Michigan State--but the Al Taubmans of the world with their names on buildings.

My feeling was that we really need to find ways of recognizing people who contribute to the university. But the reality of the world is, we have to give naming opportunities to building to people who donate money. We need the money. We absolutely do. So, in some way, the plaques for the trustees was sort of a way of recognizing people who had given to the university.

Additionally, I really made it a point when I was chair, when we did a resolution for somebody and we recognized somebody, that that was included in our minutes. Many times, over the years, it has not been. Someone would just mention, "I want to do a tribute to so-and-so," and it just never got printed.

Charnley: You want it part of the official record.

McNamara: Exactly, exactly. So there are a lot of other opportunities to do that, and I guess if I get elected again, I'll continue to do that.

Charnley: Where do you think the priorities of the university should be in accomplishing its land-grant mission?

McNamara: Well, that's a good question, because certainly for me, I came out of Arts and Letters. I came out of a liberal arts approach. It was a time when I went to school, liberal arts was more queen or king than it is now. When I started on the board, I was very surprised at where liberal arts was in the university pecking order. It's way down there, way down there. Sciences and where the money is for research grants, that's what is king at Michigan State and continues to be, and understandingly, in some ways. There's money there. We're all out chasing money and we are a research university.

But the land-grant side of it is concerning, because there is not a lot of money for the sharing of knowledge, the land-grant kind of philosophy. MSU Extension is hurting terribly at this point and time. Research is really the driving force in the university, so that research you can interpret as part of our land-grant mission in that the results of that research are meant to be shared with the world, the community at large.

I was impressed, and am impressed, every time I talk to faculty members, so they are very well aware that they are teaching at a land-grant university and they know what that means. So it's part of who they know that they are and what they're supposed to be doing, but what you're supposed to be doing and what you've got the resources to be able to do, I mean, those are sometimes not as linked.

Charnley: Yes, teaching at the people's university is a good thing.

McNamara: [Laughs] That's right. That's right. But talk about teaching, teaching is a big part and yet teaching is not considered--like I say, research is king. Teaching is not as well rewarded as research is. So that's something that I think Peter McPherson has tried over the years to deal with. It's going against the grain in terms of nationally how faculty members are rewarded or treated in terms of respected. Good teachers are not as well respected as good researchers, but I think at Michigan State, Peter McPherson, the president, has tried to kind of at least add a little bit of kudos to those who teach.

Charnley: Were there any undergraduate professors that you had that you really had a key or important influence that you remember?

McNamara: There were. Yes, there were, particularly in the English department. Yes, there were, very much so, yes, yes. But As I said, my truly emotional learning, you know, where you really get emotionally involved in learning something, occurred outside of the classroom, even though there were lots of faculty and grad assistants involved in that process. The conversations that you have at the Union, the arguments about ideas, those really revolved around the real world events when I was in school. I don't think that happens as much right now.

Everyone on the board is interesting. Everyone on the board wants the university to look like it looked when they were at school. [Laughs] It's really true.

[Dolores M.] Dee Cook, who went to school in the fifties, would like--well, Peter

McPherson would like there to be a Fraternity Row. We all have a memory of "It was so great when we were at MSU." And for me, it was so great when I was at MSU because there were these huge arguments and fights over ideas.

Charnley: The war.

McNamara: The war, right, and feminism and racism. All the isms. It was very "Are you a Democratic Socialist?" You know. [Laughs] It was just a fascinating world of ideas, and the dorms were filled with it. Off campus was a terrific place to live because there was the culture, the music. I would love to have the campus be like that again. [Laughs] But it's not, and it won't be. You have to come to that realization.

Charnley: Some of the issues that you mentioned, the tuition guarantee, we've talked a little about some of the educational issues. Are there any other things that you can speak of peripherally or fundamentally that have occupied your time on the board?

McNamara: Athletics, I have to say that. That's it, first off. And it's not that I necessarily disagree with it, but if I did, I would be really resentful of how much time the trustees spend on athletics. Now, in deference of that, I understand that for most MSU alumni, that is, in fact, the way that they keep in touch with and have something going on with their university and the memories of their life at the university. Throughout their entire lives, they're watching MSU sports. So I understand, and I know the spike that happens in terms of donations to the university, when we had the national

basketball championship, I know the spike in the number of people who applied for Michigan State.

The quality of student applications has risen dramatically over the last four or five years. Some of it has to be attributable to the national profile we've gotten as a result of athletics. So athletics is important. I recognize that. But it does, at times, become a little bit overwhelming that we're always talking about some aspect of athletics. I know it is somewhat disgusting to several members of the board, but that's just the way it is.

Charnley: In looking at your experience that you've had to date, is there anything that surprises you about service on the board?

McNamara: Surprises me? Well, some of the things I've talked about weren't not necessarily surprising, but just revelations about how it really worked. You come in with one model. I guess it is surprising you do get sort of a camaraderie with board members, that despite whatever differences you might have, that's not necessarily surprising, because I've worked in the legislative arena so I know Democrats, Republicans, people who are different, work together quite well. Even at times when we have very strong differences, there is a real sense of camaraderie and "Come back another day."

Charnley: Consensus-building?

McNamara: Yes, yes. Although, some of the issues, you can't.

I'll tell you what has surprised me. Peter McPherson has surprised me. My expectations of him were of a Republican, very strongly held Republican opinions and beliefs; and his spouse is very, very, very conservative. I had a lot of feelings that there were going to be some real serious problems.

Peter works it. He's on the phone all the time. Talk about consensus-building. He is trying. He works every angle, talks to everybody. He's probably connected his ear to a phone. He's always on the phone to see where you stand, where does the next person stand, how can we do this, do you have a problem here. Every issue. Every issue. He's on top of every issue in that way. You can call him a control freak, and when one's angry at Peter, that's what many of us do call him. He just can't stand to let an issue just kind of flow on its own and get decided by a discussion process on the hand.

On the other hand, I have to admire the fact that he's always out there kind of brokering everything, making sure that things don't get out of hand. I'm sure he's got a memory of the [John S.] DiBiaggio years and what occurred there, and he doesn't want that to happen to him or to the university. That was horrible for the university. So I have to say I'm very surprised that for someone with his very strongly held beliefs, he is still out there trying to accommodate much different beliefs than his on some of these issues.

I'll tell you another thing. I was surprised at Lou Anna Simon. I really was. I mean, I just had no idea of the kind of person that she was. She's very interesting. People outside of the academic world don't know what a provost is, have no idea that this role is so important; and I guess that's what surprised me as much as anything, that there was this extraordinarily important role in the university that people don't even realize. They think the president runs the university.

Charnley: The provost does.

McNamara: I don't want say that to Peter or anything. [Laughs] But I think he knows as well as I do, though, that without a provost like Lou Anna, he couldn't do a lot of the things that he's been so successful at doing outside of the university.

Charnley: I'd like to thank you for the time and the insight that you've given; and I appreciate your contribution to the project. Thank you.

McNamara: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]

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