

DOROTHY GONZALES

December 21, 1999

Jeff Charnley,  
interviewer

**Charnley:** Today is December 21, 1999. I'm Jeff Charnley interviewing Ms. Dorothy Gonzales, the chairperson of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. We're here in Bessey Hall in Michigan State University in East Lansing. This interview is part of a project to commemorate Michigan State University sesquicentennial in the year 2005.

Ms. Gonzales, you can see we're using a tape recorder today. Do you give me permission to tape this interview?

**Gonzales:** Yes, I do.

**Charnley:** Would you tell me a little bit about your personal educational background? Where did you go to school?

**Gonzales:** Do you want to start with kindergarten all the way-- [Laughter]

**Charnley:** It's up to you entirely.

**Gonzales:** Well, I was born and raised in San Antonio, so I started kindergarten and grade school in San Antonio, and we came to Michigan when I was about ten years old. So grade school was at this little one-room schoolhouse outside of Jasper, Michigan, called Reed School. From there I went on to Sand Creek High School and then on to Sienna Heights University in Lenoway [phonetic] County. From there I went to Central Michigan to get my master's.

**Charnley:** Did you take on-campus classes, or did you do some of them off campus?

**Gonzales:** I was commuting. At that time I was here at Michigan State, working.

**Charnley:** When did you finish your master's?

**Gonzales:** I finished my master's in 1989.

**Charnley:** And in what field was that?

**Gonzales:** It was in business administration.

**Charnley:** Your professional work experiences, what have you done?

**Gonzales:** I've done everything from working with schoolchildren in recreational settings during the summer to working on the assembly line, trying to put myself through school at Ford Motor Company in Saline, Michigan, working on the midnight shift, trying to make my way through life. That's when I knew I needed an education very badly.

From there, I came to Michigan State to work. I worked at the Office of Supportive Services. From there I went to work for the Speaker of the House of Representatives for the legislature. After that, I went to work with Governor Blanchard when he became governor. Then after that, I transferred over to a permanent position that didn't have to depend on term limits or anything else, with the Department of Community Health.

**Charnley:** So your Michigan State University experience here, how many years did you work at the university prior?

**Gonzales:** It was almost two years at the time when I was asked to join the Speaker's staff. But I've had an interesting history of--I've never left Michigan State, because during the time that I was here, I always served on certain committees, certain work groups. Ever since 1979, I've had a relationship with Michigan State University, so I feel like I've always been part of the university for the last twenty years.

**Charnley:** Your work at the Office of Supportive Services, what were the main things that you did?

**Gonzales:** What I did was focus on bringing students onto campus who are nontraditional students and not necessarily those students that have a high GPA or whose families have had the opportunity to go on to higher ed. So with those kinds of students we have to spend a lot more time giving them support, encouragement, and making them feel that they can be successful here at Michigan State and how to do that.

**Charnley:** That office is still in business?

**Gonzales:** Yes, it's still in business. It certainly is, and it's grown. Now that we have the technology, it makes it so much easier to work with these students. But, I mean, the need is still there. We haven't outgrown the need for trying to provide support services.

**Charnley:** When were you elected to the board of trustees?

**Gonzales:** In 1992, in November.

**Charnley:** You took office on January 1st, is that right?

**Gonzales:** January 1, yes.

**Charnley:** January 1, 1993. How did you come to be nominated for the board?

**Gonzales:** Well, it's a very long, tedious process, and most of these positions usually go to people who are of different means or maybe contributors in a large sense to either the political party or the institution and etc. But our party felt that it was time to have an individual who exemplifies all of those things that Michigan State is about.

You know, my family and myself, I tell people I'm a granddaughter of immigrants and I'm a daughter of a migrant family. I mean, that's how we ended up coming to Michigan, and we always struggled to try to get ahead, and education was really the whole crux of my family upbringing, because they realized that with education, it would open up opportunities for their children. So knowing the land-grant Michigan State University, it seemed like it was a fit for Dorothy Gonzales to have the opportunity to run for the MSU board.

I think I surprised everybody when I did win. [Laughter] And I think one of the things that stands out in my mind when I look back at this is the fact that I got more votes in that general election than President [Bill] Clinton did in Michigan. [Laughter]

**Charnley:** So there was some ticket splitting there. [Laughter]

**Gonzales:** Yes, there was. When I had the opportunity to be at the White House, we were sitting around a table similar to this, just having a conversation with some individuals that he brings in on a regular basis to try to seek advice and how are things in the hinterlands and what am I doing and stuff, and the first thing he said to me is, "I want to again shake hands with the woman who got more votes than I did in Michigan." [Laughter] So that always stays with me and makes me feel really good.

**Charnley:** That's great. Did you campaign at all?

**Gonzales:** Yes, absolutely. You know, when you run for a trusteeship, you have to run statewide. So I spent almost every night out on the road from the time that I was given the nod at the September convention at the Democratic convention to go ahead with the election, until November. I was on the road every single day.

**Charnley:** Were you involved in any debates or anything like that with other nominees or candidates?

**Gonzales:** Yes. With the other candidates, yes. We had several debates around the state, and then we had about three or four here on campus.

**Charnley:** So that was part of the process.

**Gonzales:** Yes, it is.

**Charnley:** The partisan politics at that time, do you remember any of the key issues? Did you have a particular platform that you were emphasizing?

**Gonzales:** One of the issues that, of course, I would always challenge and debate is the issue of affordable tuition and of having an inclusive campus and giving more credence to diversity. Of course, the open meetings, at that time, I wholeheartedly supported, which I think that a lot of the public understood that, too, that if we do things behind closed doors without having public information or scrutiny, then it might tend to lead to some negative decisions. I think that was part of the platform that people supported about me, number one, that I was a woman, and I happened to be from a background that knew what it was like to struggle to try to get ahead and put yourself

through school, and also the fact that I believe in having things more open when decisions come around, such as hiring a president. I think that was one of the big factors in my getting elected. Or maybe I was just lucky. I don't know. [Laughter]

**Charnley:** What do you see just in terms of your overall special strengths as a board member, out of your almost eight years?

**Gonzales:** I think some of the strengths that I bring is that I try to have respect for people. The way that I was raised within our culture, it's more of a collective versus an individualistic approach that you see quite a bit with, I guess, today's dominant society, you know, this rugged individualism and not necessarily sharing or being inclusive and having a cooperative manner in the way that we discuss things and settle things. I've never believed in being combative. I guess maybe that's part of my social work, too, but at home we were always taught to be very respectful, to listen to each other, definitely obey your parents, and that everybody is worthy. The fact that my parents and my grandmother still tells me to this day, she says, "You're not there as an individual; you're representing your family. The Gonzales name is very special to all of us, so you always have to think very carefully when you say and do things, because it's not just a reflection on you; it's a reflection on all of us. We're all very proud that you're there, but carry yourself with a lot of dignity. We don't want to read about you in the papers in any negative way."

So that cooperativeness and trying to speak to individuals on a one-to-one, and if I have disagreements with anyone, I never do it out in public or during a board meeting. I will talk to them individually, individual, quietly, maybe sometimes behind the scenes, and try to just work it through, and if it doesn't work, then I just kind of leave it alone and maybe come back to it later. But I think it's with a lot of diplomacy and respect, and I've been brought up with it. It's given me those tools to manage through the maze at times.

**Charnley:** In your educational background or family upbringing, is there anything that maybe you can think of that best prepared you for your role on the board of trustees? Anything that stands out?

**Gonzales:** Again, I think I would have to refer back to the strengths of my family, and my role models were always women. Number one, my grandmother, who's ninety-six years old.

**Charnley:** Is she still living?

**Gonzales:** Yes, she is, and has always said to us that self-respect and dignity was utmost that a person could bring forth about themselves. She says when you do things that are negative or not positive, she says people will remember that forever, versus something--you know, she says. So just those kinds of things, and she says strength comes in many different ways, shapes, and sizes. Sometimes I sit back and I reflect on that, and I say, "Now I know what she means about those things."

Also, I guess, being in the human services field, I tend to work a lot with people and human behavior and study human behavior going to school and just working around other individuals when you're trying to work your way through the maze of a bill or trying to garner someone's votes or making them understand what the long-range impact would be of such a policy. So I think it's learning through trial and error that I've been able to kind of maneuver myself around with different decisions affecting this university.

**Charnley:** So the political experience you had in the legislature you've found useful?

**Gonzales:** Yes, I found useful, and the other part of that is that I had been exposed to the political process since I was small, because in my grandmother's neighborhood, people were always active about voting, about getting involved, if the trash wasn't picked up, things like that. I mean, when you're poor, you have to be advocates for other people, of yourself. And also because of my father, who worked with the UAW and who was a factory

worker, and I can remember his committee meetings, and sometimes we'd go with him. When they would go out on strike, we would go with them, and I thought walking around with a picket sign was just normal. So I kind of grew up with that.

During the time that there was a grape and a lettuce boycotts with the [Cesar] Chavez movement, my family was always very active with that, and it was just natural for me to be involved in issues that address equality and inequality. So the awareness of political things that cause people either in a positive or negative way was always part of our learning experience within our family.

**Charnley:** So your father was active in UAW?

**Gonzales:** Yes, he was active in the UAW. My brothers worked in the factory, too. And when I did, too, I was a union member. So it was just natural to gravitate towards those issues of equality and equal rights and equal pay and that people should have representation and a voice.

**Charnley:** Since you've become a trustee at Michigan State, what would you say has been your main interest, or several main interests, that you can think of that have been issues that have been--you've mentioned a few already, but in terms of your actual duties, are there any that you feel that you've really made a contribution?

**Gonzales:** Well, one of the things that I continue to stress quite strongly is the whole effort of outreach, that we, as a decision-making body, in order to make more coherent decisions and policy, we need to be out there. I had always encouraged the board to go out and do outreach ourselves, that getting away from our comfort zones of the board room where people tend to come to us all the time and everything is at hand, and not everybody knows about the fourth-floor administration building on Thursdays and Fridays when we hold our meetings, and especially people who are somewhat disenfranchised from Michigan State University. They see this kind of as an ivory tower way off in East Lansing, and how do you get there?

So I was successful in our November meeting in taking our board members to southwest Detroit, which happens to be one of the more low-income areas in the city, and exposing them to the populations that live there and how is it that they manage on a daily basis, where they live, how they live, where they work, and some of their needs. I think it gave them a whole different perspective, being in Detroit those two days. All my colleagues were just very grateful that I persisted with that issue. I would tell them, "Please indulge me. This is my last meeting. Let's just go to Detroit."

Now they have made that commitment that they will continue to do that, and I think that's important, outreach is very important. If we don't understand where some of our students live and where they come from, how can we help them once they get here on campus? Mainly, how can we get them here on campus if they don't have the same kind of equal footing as other students do? That's been one.

Of course, diversity is another one, because of who I am and, again, where I've come from, that many times a person's background and nationality impedes a lot of positive things happening to that individual, and when they get here on campus, what is it that we need to do in order to help that individual succeed?

**Charnley:** Are there any specific issues that you've encountered while you were a board member, specifically on the issues of diversity, where you feel that you made a contribution?

**Gonzales:** Spending time educating individuals about where it is that certain populations live, how they live, and how they value education, and how do the classrooms and the material need to be tailored to meet the needs of those populations is very different from the standard mainstream approach. So those kinds of issues I have discussed at great length with different colleges and individuals that are interested in those issues.

**Charnley:** The issue of retention?

**Gonzales:** The issue of retention, support, yes.

**Charnley:** Have you had any dealings with that or interest?

**Gonzales:** Yes, and I worked with the people in admissions to reconfigure what we do and how we do outreach. I mean, we use the word "outreach," but I think sometimes that it really needs more work so everyone understands what outreach really means, that you have to leave your office, you have to go out there, you have to actually meet people, shake hands, touch them, talk to them.

**Charnley:** In doing some of this personally, yourself, how have people reacted when you've been in that setting?

**Gonzales:** I think sometimes it comes as a big surprise to think that a board member is actually out there doing these things or takes the time to do it. I think there's this kind of misconception that because we're board members that we aren't human, I guess, and that we're not out there trying to beat the bushes and trying to help bring students into Michigan State. For me, it's having contact with the people that are responsible for me being here, and I think it's very important for us, as a land-grant institution, to be connected to our communities. It's very important.

**Charnley:** Your relationship with the faculty, what have been your main contacts with faculty members, just in general?

**Gonzales:** Depending on what day it was. [Laughter] I've had contact with almost all the colleges on campus. I usually go to almost all of the events that I'm invited to, because that's another way of conveying to our faculty and to our staff that I really value them, I value the work that they do, the contributions that they make, and besides, I want to get to know them, and I want to know how I can be helpful to them. So I see it as a two-way street. I don't want to be treated like this, you know, "trustee." I want them to see that Dorothy Gonzales really cares about them as individuals and also how can Dorothy Gonzales help you be more successful as far as what you're doing? If that

means you want me to come and talk to students, I will do that; if it's parents, I will do that; those kinds of things. Where there's orientation or welcome week, I do all of that because I believe that's my role.

**Charnley:** In talking about some of the academic issues, you've mentioned land-grant philosophy several times. What do you see maybe as our priority in maintaining that land-grant mission, or do you see that as important, maintaining that?

**Gonzales:** It's very important to maintain that for the future because that's what this institution was founded for, those working-class families back when, to have the ability and affordability to send their kids to Michigan State. I worry about that sometimes because of tuition increases, although we do have the tuition guaranteed, but when you stop to think, you know, fourteen or fifteen thousand dollars a year, that's a lot of money to many families, and certainly if we don't find ways to support those families, we're going to start losing that battle to working-class individuals in sending their students here to Michigan State.

**Charnley:** The tuition guarantee. So you were supportive of that?

**Gonzales:** Yes. I have been very supportive of it, because, again, trying to cap tuition is a high priority for me, because inflation keeps going up. You know, you want to buy milk, it costs three or four dollars now, a loaf of bread the same. What do you sacrifice? You don't want to feed your family in order for them to come to Michigan State. That's not the way it should be. Everybody should have what they need in support as far as in order to eat and live and also get an education.

**Charnley:** It's kind of a balance sometimes between undergraduate emphasis toward undergraduate education, graduate education, outreach. Where do you see that balance or that interplay between research institution, undergraduate institution, extension work? Is there any particular way that you see as the best way?

**Gonzales:** All of it impacts on each other. It has to be a continuum across the board. You know, you have to do the outreach in order to get to the families and the student. I look at it as a family. I don't look at it just as a student, because you are impacting the family when you're reaching out to the student. When the student gets here, there has to be certain supports in place to make sure that they succeed. And it goes on down the line. So I see it as a continuum, working together, not a piece here and a piece there. The more that we can collectively provide that transition for the student coming in if they want to go on to graduate school, if they want to obtain their doctorate, etc., etc., we should make that, I guess, a kind of a seamless system in order to do that, to provide those supports.

**Charnley:** International studies seems to be an area that's emphasized by the current administration. What has been your position on the role of international study at Michigan State?

**Gonzales:** I think it's been very positive for Michigan State, and it's always good when students can leave their own turf and their safe environment and go elsewhere and to understand how other people live, understand their culture. That's an education in itself, and I think it definitely enhances that student's ability to have a broader view of the world, other than just East Lansing and Michigan.

**Charnley:** That's not all there is? [Laughter]

**Gonzales:** [Laughter] No. But then along with that, I have shared with the president and others, I said, "You know, there is a lot of culture here within this country and within this state, and even though maybe some of those students can't go overseas, we should make them have a good cultural experience right here in Michigan because of the large Arab-American community that we have in Detroit, the large Hispanic population we have. We still have seven reservations in Michigan that are populated by Native Americans, and we have a large Vietnamese, Asian

population that is here. Just across the street we have the Islamic Center. I've asked people before, "How many of you have ever gone to the Islamic Center when they send out invitations to come and visit?" We ourselves need to be tuned into everything that we preach to our students. I think it starts from the top to bottom, and everybody should benefit from that kind of an experience.

**Charnley:** Have there been any international trips that you took associated with the university or not?

**Gonzales:** I have tried. [Laughter] I have tried, but, unfortunately I have a real job and I do work, and I'm not old enough to retire. So when I get past that stage, maybe I'll be able to travel, because these trips are usually like ten days or more, so it makes it very difficult for me to be gone that part of the time.

**Charnley:** In talking about some of the issues that you were involved in on the board, one obvious one was the departure of President [John A.] DiBiaggio in September 1992, and the selection of the new president coincided right with your joining the board. What do you remember about those early meetings or about the selection of President [M. Peter] McPherson at that time?

**Gonzales:** Long, lengthy meetings. [Laughter] I think the conflict that I had was because I was the only one that believed in the Open Meetings Act. I wanted things to be more open so that it wouldn't create this whole atmosphere of mistrust and secrecy from board members and the search committee, which was really hard to handle for people, because they wanted to, of course, get the best candidate, and people felt they had the right to go behind closed doors. So I was always outvoted.

And then, of course, the names that surfaced in the newspaper at that time just made things even worse, and I kept reverting back to the fact that if we had been up front and had this discussion open, then it wouldn't have happened. Somebody wanted to leak the names to the paper. But in the final analysis, I think that we made the best decision by hiring President McPherson. He was definitely the right choice.

**Charnley:** What was the chair when you joined the board? Do you remember that?

**Gonzales:** I think it was Russ [Russell G.] Mawby.

**Charnley:** On the issue of President McPherson's leadership, how would you overall assess his leadership in this time since he's been here?

**Gonzales:** The man must not sleep or eat. [Laughter] I think he literally works twenty-four hours a day. I thought I had terrible hours, but this man beats me. He really is committed to this university. I have never witnessed that before in a leader here at Michigan State. He knows everything about the university, and he makes it his business to know. The fact that he's so great on finances, I think has been such a positive for us. He knows where every nickel is in this place.

I just really respect and admire his ability to run this university because he digs in and he wants to know how things are done and why, and he's part of it. You can call over to the office sometimes at ten o'clock at night and he's still there. I'm trying to leave a voice mail, and Peter answers the phone. [Laughter] I think he's been very instrumental in getting the university moving forward into the next century.

**Charnley:** How would you assess his working relationship with the board?

**Gonzales:** I think sometimes it's a little touchy. I think it can be because--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

**Charnley:** We're talking with Michigan State University Board Chairperson Dorothy Gonzales, and when the tape ended we were talking about Peter McPherson, President McPherson's leadership style and relationship with the board. Would you like to talk a little bit again about his relationship with the board?

**Gonzales:** I started to say that sometimes they can be a little touchy or frustrating for board members because he's a hands-on CEO and he understands so much about operations, and maybe he moves a lot faster than what we're ready to settle on the issue or whatever. And I think he comes from a background of being in charge and not necessarily having to deal with these eight people and getting the nod before he moves forward. Sometimes it gets a little touchy, but I think, overall, if you ask my colleagues, everyone is very appreciative of his leadership, and he has really moved Michigan State forward. Just the fact that we've raised so much money to build the building that we're building and his contacts with the Federal Government has been so positive because he knows who to call for what. Building the science building, you know, the new Lear [phonetic] Center, has just been just very successful. He's been very successful.

**Charnley:** Have you worked with him in any other financial areas on the board?

**Gonzales:** I sit on the Finance Committee.

**Charnley:** You're on the Finance Committee?

**Gonzales:** Yes. I keep telling him, "I don't know why we have people like Cambridge and people from out of town to come and tell us when you know all this stuff already." [Laughter] They come with their recommendations, and of course he checks everything out and asks these questions, and then I keep saying, "Why are we paying them?" He's very good at the finances.

**Charnley:** The issue of athletics obviously comes up and the board has to deal with that. What do you see as the role that athletics should play at a Big Ten university like Michigan State?

**Gonzales:** I think that athletics has a role to play at Michigan State, because, of course, you're always going to have individuals who are very interested, and of course our alumni fans enjoy it, too, but I want to see every athlete leave here with an education. Not everybody's going to make it into the big leagues and not everybody's going to be making big money, and I at least want to know that when our players leave, our youngsters leave, that they do have a diploma in hand and an ability to support themselves and to go on to other things, that it isn't football, basketball, or whatever, to be an educated person in the best sense.

**Charnley:** Have you found that this position is similar to the other board members, or have there been some controversy or conflicts over those issues?

**Gonzales:** I think the bottom line with all of us is that we do want our students to go away with an education. The question is, how do we do that and how do we ensure that every young person that leaves here leaves with an education and that diploma in hand to pursue other avenues if they don't make it in athletics.

**Charnley:** The Clara Bell Smith Center, we have experience in ETL in terms of working with students and their writing, was the board supportive of that idea or a separate facility to assist the athletes?

**Gonzales:** The fact that Steven Smith was able to put forth the money helped a lot in the decision, I think, because we didn't have to go out and raise the money and we didn't have to spend inordinate amounts of time trying to figure out how we would do that. And when somebody can come forth and say, "Look, this is what I want to do with my donation," it just made sense to do it. Of course, again, for me it was the reinforcement that our students were going to be educated. I mean, that's why they're here, and we know that their schedules are strenuous and

somewhat difficult, but having the center there with all the latest equipment made it more viable for them to do that, thanks to Stephen Smith and his family.

**Charnley:** Community and public relations, also, it seems to me, are important issues for the board members that you have to deal with. Some of the key issues recently, you've mentioned diversity issues, minority enrollment, and retention. Were there any issues in dealing with community and public relations in your tenure as either board chair or as a trustee that have stood out to you, that have been important, that should be part of the record that frequently people ignore when they're looking at the history of the university in the last few years or even recently?

**Gonzales:** We have had a discussion to the fact that we have to spend more time and dialogue with community groups, like with the city of East Lansing. We had dinner with some of our colleagues from the city council not too long ago, and just talked. We all realized that we need to have more time to do that. But one of the things is that it's hard, given the time that we're all here, since people come from different places, and those of us who live here, of course, it's not that hard, but because we all don't live here, and if we want to have meetings with so-called community groups or other people from the city and just have dinner together, for heaven's sake, just so we can talk, it makes it difficult to arrange those kinds of meetings or dinners.

But we have made it a priority for us to follow up on those kinds of gatherings in this next coming year, because it's important. I value the input in talking to community groups and other individuals, because someone can always come up with ideas or try things that we haven't done before, and I think that part of that is, too, that they can feel part of the MSU family, too, when we can be more inclusive and thank people for working with us, for us, and sharing their knowledge.

**Charnley:** In your role as an East Lansing resident, too, you have that perspective.

**Gonzales:** Yes, I do, every time I go to the post office or to the store or the cleaners. [Laughter]

**Charnley:** So you're recognized in the community?

**Gonzales:** Yes. That is real strange. I mean, at first I could not get used to that. [Laughter]

**Charnley:** Fame or notoriety?

**Gonzales:** Yes. Sometimes I'd rather they didn't, but usually when I go pick up my mail every morning at the post office, somebody will stop and tell me if it's good, bad, or whatever, and I just listen and thank them for their input, even though I might not agree with them.

**Charnley:** The riots, of course, forced the board to at least address the issue, the serious issues that were involved in that. What's your assessment of how the board has handled that as a recent town-gown issue in the community?

**Gonzales:** I really got a better sense of it by attending all the meetings that we had around campus. I went to all of the forums that we held on campus, because I had been inundated with so much information that I didn't know what was true, what happened first, who was involved, who wasn't involved. So when we set the forums up around the campus to talk to the students and to talk to others, I started attending those, because in order for me to be coherent about what happened or didn't happen, I needed to know what happened, because I was not around when it happened.

At that time we were all in Florida because we were at the tournament, and there was no way that we could get home. So what we saw was on TV, what other people said, and what the media said. Listening to our students and the communities and others, I think people tend to forget that it was not the majority of our students that were involved. These were a lot of outside individuals, and I think it took a very negative, punitive attitude to this

whole--why do we call it a riot? I don't know. I think calling it a riot really created a riot, I guess is the way to put it.

I didn't want us to have a knee-jerk reaction to this kind of negative behavior from some students, and I wanted us to spend more time educating those individuals involved and those individuals, I guess, that had been arrested and took part in whatever, because substance abuse is just a piece of the whole picture, and in order to keep this from happening again, you have to talk about issues of what that means, of safety. People can die from drinking a certain amount of alcohol, I mean, what it can do to you, etc.

So my whole push with the administration and with the president was that you expound on it, on the whole issue of safety. You know, if you drink, you could have an accident. You could be watching somebody else, like some of the other kids were doing in the riot, and you could have gotten--and some of them did get burned just by watching, those kinds of things. But, you know, we're here to educate in the broadest sense, so under that whole umbrella of education, it has to be about alcohol, it has to be about behavior, it has to be about expectations and standards and how we expect our student body to behave and respond in those kinds of situations.

We've started doing that, and we did that and are continuing to do that, and letting individuals know that there are repercussions if you do break the rules, like anybody else. But I didn't like the negative, punitive, knee-jerk reaction that we had with this when it first started hitting the papers, and I was just so tired of watching those videos on the cable.

**Charnley:** On television.

**Gonzales:** It feeds on itself and it feeds this frenzy. I just wanted us to put together a plan of action, what we intended to do, and it had to be on a continuous basis throughout the school year and make it part of our policy and people understand what the rules are and let's move on, let's move forward.

**Charnley:** Have any responses been addressed to you personally, or have they been pleased with the board's actions, or has it been mixed?

**Gonzales:** Well, yes and no. It's been mixed. I mean, there's some people who want the kids' heads, you know, and then there's some individuals who think we just automatically should expel the kids, our students from the university and those kinds of issues. Again, I think it's been a very punitive reaction to the action that took place that night. I just think that some of it was very severe.

**Charnley:** The issues of technology sometimes raise money issues in terms of decision-making, technology versus things like faculty salaries. What has been your position on technology, computers, in terms of educational support, or do you see that it fits in here at Michigan State?

**Gonzales:** I don't know how we lived without them. [Laughter] I have a computer, and I'm on that all the time with my work. At home it's like we can't live without them. You go pump your gas with a little computer.

**Charnley:** It's a Y2K movie. [Laughter]

**Gonzales:** That's right. It's the way of the world now. There's no getting around it. You have to be computer-literate, period. How we do that is the question, and not necessarily raising the stakes for students that might not be able to afford it. But when we stick to that policy that there will be a financial-aid package along with students who can't afford to have a computer when they come to campus, that is more reassuring to me. It's a must. I support that whole issue of technology. It's a must. But how we carry it out is a question for me because, number one, there are a lot of students who--I was just talking to a communication class two weeks ago, and not all students were aware that they must come with a computer.

**Charnley:** This is the new proposal for 2001?

**Gonzales:** Right, for 2001. There's still a lot of questions in their minds, especially if you're sharing a dorm room.

What if everybody comes with a computer? Where do you put all these computers? And I hadn't thought about that, and I said, "Gee. That makes common sense." There's four of us in a room and all four of us have to have a computer? Now, where do we put all these computers? What kind of computer are they going to have to have? Can they go on over to Best Buy and buy one for \$400, or do they spend \$200?

**Charnley:** Or \$2,000. [Laughter]

**Gonzales:** Or \$2,000, right. So I don't think that we have ironed out all the kinks on that piece, and I think once we do that, that everyone will understand what the standard is or isn't. If there are four or five people in a room, no, I don't think everyone needs to bring a computer. I think you could share.

But the other part of that was, too, that the students were wondering if they were going to do away with the labs, the computer labs, and many of them say that they would still want the labs because at least they can go to the lab and work on their papers or whatever if they can't do it back in the dorm room because their suitemates are in bed or whatever. So they raised a lot of questions for me that I hadn't thought about before.

We just have to do a better job of communicating and getting the information out to the students and their parents as to what kind of a computer they should bring, what is the standard. There will be a financial-aid package for those students that can't afford a computer, that are on financial aid, and will we still have the labs or not the labs, and those kinds of issues. Once that's communicated and everybody understands, I think it will go a lot smoother.

**Charnley:** The issue of the future is, obviously, an important one for university leaders to consider. In your experience as both a trustee and also in the last year as chair, are there any things that you think in the future of MSU it's even become more important or more evident to you that we should emphasize as a university?

**Gonzales:** I think that Michigan State has really proven to be a leader in the whole area of land-grant institutions, that just because you're a land-grant institution doesn't mean you can't go on to bigger and better things and think big. The fact that we have built partnerships with other institutions has really put us out in the forefront, like with DCL, with Wayne State, and with U of M trying to do collaboration on this virtual university, just joint projects with others, exploring ties with Grand Valley and some of the other smaller colleges in the western part of Michigan.

Our ability to raise the money that we have for the support on campus for our buildings and our science and research, Michigan State stands out among other universities of really looking to the future and being very progressive. Even when I hear that from some other institutions where my other colleagues are, "Every time we pick up the paper, we read something about Michigan State, that you're always doing things, you're looking at this and looking at that," I think that's just very positive for us.

**Charnley:** In terms of size, looking at the university, do you feel we're at the optimum size? Is there such a thing, 40,000? Is there a size that might be too big or a goal, or are we at just the right stage? What would you see?

**Gonzales:** I don't think that we want to be any bigger. I think that we like the way that it is. If we had more students, I don't know where we would put them, number one, but I think that it's the right size. Forty-five, forty-six is accommodating for a campus and for the students. I think if we started looking at higher numbers, then we would have to start asking ourselves where do we put them.

**Charnley:** So it's not just a function of "bigger is better"?

**Gonzales:** No. I don't think so, because then we'd have to start thinking about okay, we have to build some other dorms. I don't think that we want to do that right now.

**Charnley:** In looking at the opportunity that you have through this interview to share some insights or anything like that, is there any overarching item that you would like to mention that you haven't talked about before, in terms of both your roles on the board? If you could assess in just a few words one of these twenty-five-words-or-less questions, how would you assess your time on the board? What have you gained from it or learned from it?

**Gonzales:** It seems like the time was very short now when I look back at it. But I have just gained a wealth of experience and knowledge just serving as chair, the opportunity to meet so many people and talk with so many individuals who make things possible here at Michigan State, from internally with our staff, our faculty, the students, but also people who support us financially. It's just been a real thrill for me, really, to be involved with this university and the people that support it and are part of the Spartan family. I've just really enjoyed it. Hopefully, I can continue doing that in the future.

**Charnley:** I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk about your experience on the board, and I want to thank you very much.

**Gonzales:** Thank you. I appreciate it.

[End of interview]

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