

Don Stevens

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Jeff Charnley,  
Interviewer

Charnley: Today is Thursday, April 19th, the year 2001. I am Jeff Charnley interviewing Mr. Don Stevens, former member of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. We're at his home in Lansing, Michigan. This interview is part of MSU's sesquicentennial oral history project commemorating the 150th anniversary of the university to be celebrated in the year 2005.

Mr. Stevens, you can see we've got a tape recorder here today for this session. Do you give us permission to tape-record this interview?

Stevens: Yes, I do.

Charnley: I'd like to start first with some personal and educational background. Where were you born and raised and where did you go to school?

Stevens: I was born in--well, the post office is Greenville, Michigan, but it was a farm about halfway between Belding and Greenville off west of the road, four or five miles.

Charnley: What year were you born?

Stevens: 1914. November 6, 1914.

Charnley: Did you go to a rural school?

Stevens: I went to a one-room rural school for eight years in Granton Township. There was a one-room school. We had one teacher for eight grades, and the teacher would sit up front and she would call the first grade reading and so forth up front and it worked that way. There was about usually around thirty up or down in the whole school, so some classes only had one or two, and some would have three or four, something like that.

Charnley: It's interesting you mention Granton Township, because my Chapin ancestors came from upstate New York, and they settled right there by Slaton [phonetic] Lake.

Stevens: Yes, I know Slaton Lake real well.

Charnley: It's Granton Township. My ancestors lived in Section 13, not far from the Grant Cemetery. I don't know if you know where that is.

Stevens: Yes, I've gone past it.

Charnley: So some of my relatives are buried right there, so I know Granton Township.

Did you go on to high school then?

Stevens: Yes, there were four of us children. My oldest brother, Frank, and my sister, he was about five years older than I am, and she was about four, but they started high school together in Greenville. They graduated in 1928. I started that fall at high school. I had finished the eighth grade out there in Granton Township.

Incidentally, at the end of the eighth grade, when you're going to high school all of the, over at the Township Hall, over in Granton Center, you had to go over there and take a test. People would come from the different districts and so forth and take the test for a day. You

never heard anything about it, what happened with the test, but anyway, we went on to high school after that. Fall of 1928.

Charnley: You went to Greenville?

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: What did you do after school?

Stevens: I drove, usually. We had a Model-T Ford in those days, and in the fall and in the spring I would drive. But during the cold winter months I would stay with my grandmother, my father's mother, Grandmother Stevens. She lived in Greenville and just about a block from the school. I stayed with her until the roads got passable, because in those days they didn't have equipment to clear the roads like they do now. It just wasn't practical, because there would be many days you'd never get to school if you had to drive eight miles through the snow.

Charnley: Spend all your time getting there. What did you do after high school?

Stevens: My mother had died in 1933, and that was the year after I graduated from high school. Of course, that was right in the midst of the Great Depression. I, of course, wanted to go on to college, but I didn't because there was just no money. The banks were going belly-up. I will never forget driving into Belding, because, as I say, we were about halfway between Greenville and Belding. My parents had business at the bank there in Belding, I drove my mother in to the bank, and I remember her going to the door, then turning and coming back with a sad look on her face. Whether there'd been a notice up there, the bank had been closed.

That was all over the country, they were starting to close. It just kept on. Until after the

1932 election, after Roosevelt was elected, he closed all the banks in the United States. Then the deposit guarantee, there's a name for it, was established. He recommended it, and it was established by Congress. Fortunately, it is something that has worked through the years.

Charnley: Did your grandmother ever get any of her money?

Stevens: That was my mother that I drove her there. I don't think it was money, I think she was in there to probably pay off on the mortgage. See, the farm people were losing their farms all around us, right and left. Most of the farms in that area, most of them had a small herd of dairy cattle, and then they had diversified farms. They would grow potatoes and beans and corn and wheat. A lot of the grain they would grow would be to feed the cattle. Times were really hard, and so I just never was able to go on to college.

Charnley: Did you work on the farm after school?

Stevens: I worked on the farm. I worked on the farm, yes, for about a year or so. My father went to live with my Grandmother Stevens. They moved to a little house that they got, it was about halfway between Belding and Greenville. It was at the top of a hill as you'd drive toward Greenville.

As I said, my father lived with my grandmother. She had a big house in Greenville, and she had been able to keep it, but this is an issue that's a sad thing in all of our lives. When my father was about sixteen years old, and this, of course, was the turn of the last century, it was discovered that he had cancer in his leg, leg bones. The cancer went way up to his hip, and finally they had to put him on a train all the time, because there were no surgeons in that area that could handle it, and send him to Chicago. So he had to go back into Chicago for all of the medical work and all the doctors, the surgery and everything else. Fortunately, it apparently got

all of the cancer. They got all of the cancer, but in those days, of course, they didn't have insurance like they have nowadays.

My Grandmother Stevens, her husband, my grandfather, Egbert Stevens [phonetic], his father, George Stevens, George Washington Stevens, had a hardware store in Greenville. But the medical expenses to help my father get well, to get through the operation and all that, and travels into Chicago and everything else, was so much that they had to sell the hardware. Then not too long after that, my grandfather died, and my grandmother, of course, was alone. She didn't have a lot, but she had a big house on South Lafayette Street, and she used to take in, she'd have teachers come down from the high school, which as I said before, was only about a block away, up a little hill. They'd come down for lunch, and there would probably be about fifteen of them around the table every weekday, sometimes those that stayed over some weekends.

She kept that going all through the years that I was in high school. As I said, I stayed there during the wintertime, when the roads were so bad with the snow and everything that you couldn't get in. The roads were gravel, but there was no blacktops or anything. So in the fall and in the spring you had huge big ruts and mud you'd drive through.

So soon after I finished high school, she was unable to keep her house going anymore, so she sold it and my father and my brother, oldest brother, Frank, had got married, and he was operating the farm. We was able to keep our farm, where many around us was losing their farms. I think they must have rented, I don't think they bought it, a house, we called it the Fox Farm. As a matter of fact, it was a fox farm. They had these little dens. There were no foxes there, but for somebody they were trying to make money, make a living raising foxes.

I lived there with them for a while, and I worked around in different farms for about a year or so, and then my dad and my grandmother moved to Grand Rapids. So I went to Grand Rapids, too. My dad worked in several different places. He worked, but mostly in a combination small neighborhood grocery store and meat market. I worked, I got a job in a grocery store and meat market, and worked in one store for about, Stellard's [phonetic] Market, for a couple of

years. Then I went over to another market, the White Front Market, Samorak's [phonetic] Market, Harry Samorak.

We knew the Samoraks, because they used to come around to the farms and buy cattle and so forth and take them in and butcher them. But they'd buy them from the farmers, then they would take them in. They ran the store. I got along well with the Samoraks, they liked me and I liked them. I had a friend that was working at Grand Rapids Creamery, delivering milk. His name is Stekadee [phonetic], Cap Stekadee. I don't know what I was making in those days, the wages were so low. But he was making about \$40 a week, and that sounded good to me. So he said, "Why don't you apply for a job over at the creamery."

Wait a minute, I'm skipping something. First, I worked, after I left the grocery stores, I worked for a laundry. I worked for the American Laundry for four years and I had a laundry route. I'd pick up laundry and bring it back to the laundry to have it washed, and then I would deliver it back to them. It was partly residential and partly I'd go down to the offices downtown and so forth.

As I say, I worked there for four years, and that's how I got acquainted with Stekadee. He talked me into going over to the creamery to apply for a job, and I did, and I started working there in 1941. I'd went to the laundry in '37, so that was four years. I went to the creamery in 1941. I continued there and I had a milk route out in what we called Homemaker's [phonetic] on the--let's see, on the west side of Grand Rapids. I had that milk route for about four years, and then we got to 1944, just before the 1944 election. While I was at the creamery, we organized a union.

Mrs. Stevens: Tell him about the time that you married me.

Charnley: That comes in there sometime. I'll have to go back. I'll bring that out, I'll bring it up, but I want to finish this now. Let's see, what was I talking about?

Charnley: You talked about the organization, union organization.

Stevens: Right, union organization at the creamery. The president of the state, at that time it was the CIO Council, it was before the merger of the AFL and CIO. The president was John Gibson [phonetic], a fellow by the name of John Gibson, who later became Secretary of Labor. He asked me to go to work for him in the 1944 election and I did.

Then I'll deviate here and tell a little bit about when I was working for the laundry, we used go down to the Regent Roof Garden. They had dances down there at Regent Theater on the roof. You'd get on the elevator and go up to the roof. What would happen the guys usually would go alone and the girls would come along. One time, one Saturday night I was there with--well, our farms were right next to some Swiss family, Wittenbach [phonetic] their name was. I used to go down there with Leo and Walter Wittenbach.

One Friday night, I met and I danced with a girl. There were two sisters, there was her sister, Claire, and her sister, Gertrude. Gertrude was a tall girl. You couldn't miss her in the crowd, you know. She had blonde hair. I danced with Claire, and a couple of times, I suppose. I didn't think much about it, and the next week we went down there, and of course, Gertrude, because Gertrude was a little taller than the other girls, than her sisters. So I thought it was the same, the girl that was with her was the same girl.

I started dancing with--my wife's name was Wanda. She kind of abbreviated that later, after about twenty years, and she became Wendy.

Charnley: So you started dating her sister?

Stevens: Yes. So anyway, I started dancing with her, and I started talking with her. I said, "It's nice to see you again. I saw you last week." She says, "I wasn't here last week." They looked a

little bit alike.

So anyway, so we ended up, we drove her home. Well, that's actually we started going together. We went to together, let's see, that was, I think, in '36, January about. That was a tough winter, I remember, because we used to go out, the Whittenbachs I mentioned before, there was another Whittenbach family that lived over by Lowell [phonetic]. We used to go out there in the wintertime and, boy, as I said, the roads were terrible.

Charnley: They're hilly down there, too.

Stevens: Yes. In those days they didn't grade them very much. You'd go down the road and if it was too bad, if the stress too bad, what they would do is open the fence, and you'd drive out through the farmer's field until you could get back on the road. That's the way you had to get by.

Charnley: What year were you married?

Stevens: In 1937. See, we met early in '36, and we were married in 1937.

Charnley: You both had a house in Grand Rapids then?

Stevens: Yes. Yes, I lived with my father and as I said, I was doing these odd jobs and so forth. When John Gibson come up, that's how I happened to get started in the labor movement. He come in and I went to, so in 1944, I guess, oh, that election, I just worked for him a little while just through the election. Then after a couple more years, I went back to the milk route, you know, I was peddling milk.

The director of the union there in Michigan, see, when they first organized they called it the United Dairy Workers. It was not an international union, it was what you called a local



industrial union affiliated directly with then the CIO. Ray Scoggins [phonetic] was the president of that dairy, Local 83 in Detroit. They organized locals all in Michigan. We had one in Grand Rapids, one in Flint, and all over. Ours was 386. It remained 386 for a few years, and finally there was a merge, it merged with an international union. They figured they needed, it would be better if they were affiliated with some international union. We started, we finally ended up in the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union.

So we were in 385 of the RWDSU as they called it, Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union. That included people that worked in, one in New York, and Macy's, and the big stores around the country.

Charnley: Did you ultimately work for AFL-CIO?

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: How did that come about?

Stevens: Roy Scoggins, they'd organized these unions, local industrial unions around Grand Rapids, and they organized the creamery in Sharon, Michigan. He called one day and wanted to know if I wanted to go to Sharon with him, for a meeting of that local union up there. So I was up there, and on the way home he asked me if I would like to go to work for the union, for the international union, Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union.

I thought, yes, because I was interested in union, and I was interested in the organized union. Of course, then it was all pretty informal. The dairy workers weren't considered interstate commerce, so they weren't covered by the labor laws that were in effect at that time. So we already had not a little strike, just a little slowdown there at the creamery. The way we voted, in order to get it settled, they decided we'd have a vote, and so what they voted on, they took the

milk caps and you'd vote yes or no. The union yes or no. I remember it voted yes. Just one person, we never knew who it was, of course, one vote no. So that's how we got started in the union.

I was president of the local union, which included several dairies around Grand Rapids. First, I was chief steward of the Grand Rapids Creamery Union. There was another fellow by the name of Lyle Cameron [phonetic] was the president. We continued that pace for a while, and that's when, as I said, Roy Scoggins asked me if I would like to go to work for the international union and I did.

But then, just like a lot of other things, especially when they're Democratic, you know, you have factions. We'd call them right-wingers and left-wingers and that sort of thing. But anyway, so it was a cut and dried faction. It ended up that Cameron and I were on opposite sides of the fence. So we fought it out, and he went on to, first, to work for the international union. He got himself into some trouble. Finally he got pretty well booted out.

But anyway, during that fight one time his group tried to kick me out of the union. So they had a meeting and Roy Scoggins came in. I'll never forget, he came in, and I'm quite sure--well, I might have been saved anyway. But he come up and it was all over, and it ended up no charges worthy of trial, that sort of thing. So it kind of put me in a little bit of the driver's seat there for a while.

I continued working there. As I said, I think I worked until Roy Scoggins came up. We got elected, and it's funny how, we had an election for the State CIO Convention. So my local was a small local, we only had about ninety members, I guess. This is in the Grand Rapids Creamery. We had a local in Grand Rapids, and you have another local at Joppey's [phonetic] Dairy and another local at Crogerly [phonetic] Creamery. I organized most of those locals. The first one was at Grand Rapids Creamery.

Let's see, I'm trying to think, what was I talking about.

Charnley: You were talking about the State CIO Convention.

Stevens: Oh, yes. So we were delegate, we were eligible for a delegate to the State CIO Convention. So I ran, whether somebody asked me to run, or I just decided to run myself, I don't know. But anyway, I was elected out of the ninety-odd workers there by just one vote. So I went to the State CIO Convention.

Charnley: Do you remember what year that was?

Stevens: Let's see, yes, that was about '44, I think. Yes, '44. That was the year I was elected. They had president, secretary, treasurer, and then they called them, they had seventeen vice chairmen and vice presidents, you know, they called them. But later they changed that to just board members. But anyway, when I was elected they called them vice presidents.

So when we got to the convention, it was decided that there should be a dele--that the Grand Rapids area and the Muskegon area, through there, should have at least one person on that seventeen member list of vice presidents. So there was some support for two or three people come along. They had an election, and I won that one by one vote. By just one vote.

I went onto that convention, and I continued to deliver milk until, I think, '46. That's when Roy Scoggins asked me to go, to go to work for the International Union. I continued there. We had, as we organized, we had some very exciting strikes there in Grand Rapids. One of them was at Joppey Dairy. We had all the dairies organized there, except Joppey's Dairy. When you're organizing--so we went out one morning, and we talked to the guys and so forth, and they sounded interested.

But anyway, we kind of hung onto their horses, they used horses, until Pete Joppey, the owner of the place, he was Dutch, Pete Joppey. He had a fellow working for him that was a sales manager named Gus. I don't remember his last name. His name was Gus. But anyway, Pete

would call him "Us." "Us" and "Yards," he would say. He would end up doing that. But anyway, finally we ended up organizing the Joppey's Dairy, so we had all the dairies there in Grand Rapids.

That's about the time that I went to work for the international union, which included the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union. '57 is when I was elected to the board. That continued down for several years about, with nothing too exciting happening.

But in 1957, going to the State Convention of the AFL-CIO, which had just merged then. See, the national AFL-CIO and the state and the national CIO had merged in '55. So all the states didn't get the merger completed. It was about 1957 when they got it completed. As I said, went to that convention and I was elected as a delegate. I continued working for Roy Scoggins, for, let's see, '57.

Oh, the other thing that come along. At the Democratic Convention that year. See, the board members to the universities are elected at the conventions. Well, they're not at the conventions, they're nominated at the conventions. At that time, see, as I said, the National AFL-CIO and the AFL-CIO had merged in '55, but it wasn't quite completed in 1957. They were just getting ready to complete it here.

That year the AFL had picked a fellow by the name of George Dean [phonetic] to run on the State Board of Education. In those days there were three members of the State Board of Education, they were elected at large. I think one every two years or something like that. They picked George Dean to run. So at our convention there was a movement on that if the AFL was going to have a counter date on the ticket. See, that was a spring ticket. In those days, the spring elections elected several of the officers, and that all changed later. I come to that.

But so at the convention of the CIO, which was still called the CIO, in 1957 the CIO people wanted a counter date, too, on the ticket. It maneuvered around. There was another fellow by the name of Bill Glenn [phonetic].

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Stevens: --support. In those days, not just left-wingers, but outright communists, that were trying to get in, maneuver their way into the unions. Bill Glenn was close to those people. I don't think he was a communist, but he was supported by them. So we had, it was a choice between me and him, get back to this one vote thing, and I was selected by one vote then of the delegation along the lake there. Grand Rapids, Muskegon. So this one vote thing got to be a habit.

But anyway, so I went on the board. When I was first elected it was just with the CIO, but by the time I served a little while the merger, the AFL and the CIO were merged. So I was elected to the State Council. First, the CIO, but then just before the year was out they were merged and became AFL-CIO.

Charnley: Where were the headquarters?

Stevens: The headquarters was in Grand Rapids where I worked, yes.

Charnley: How was it that you ultimately became nominated or came to the board of trustees of Michigan State?

Stevens: The way I got that was pretty much the same way. Because the AFL had a candidate running for State Board of Education, the CIO wanted a candidate, too. That's where my contest with John Glenn came along, but I was picked, as I said, by one vote, to run for the Board of Trustees of Michigan State University. In those years there was only six members on the board, two elected every year. So I was elected in 1957 in that spring election. It was a six-year term, because as I said, in those days there was only six members on the board.

Then I continued on that and I was working for the International Union Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union, they called it, which included all kinds of retail and wholesale stuff.

Charnley: Do you remember your first meeting after the [unclear]?

Stevens: On the Board of Trustees, yes. There was a fellow from Grand Rapids, he was a businessman, that was running for reelection on the board, but the Democrats sunk that election. So that one wasn't a close one, but they sunk that. That's when I was elected then in the spring election. I think it was the first, we used to have the first Monday in April. There was made a change by the Constitutional Convention.

But anyway, yes, and the Democrats won that election, so I was elected that spring to the Board of Trustees of Michigan, well, they called it State Board of Agriculture in those days, because Michigan State, as you probably know, started out as pretty much an agricultural mechanic, which was thanks to Abraham Lincoln, you know, he established those land grant colleges.

Just a side on it, that bill passed establishing land grant college during Buchanan's term, but he vetoed the bill. It was passed again when Lincoln was president and he signed it. That's what established all the land grant colleges. There was other legislation, of course, national legislation, that stopped at the university. Most states have both, a land grant college and a state university. Some are joint, like Ohio State, and there's a few others, they're combined. But it was those things, and as I say, Buchanan had vetoed that bill, but Lincoln signed it.

Charnley: That was the Morrill Act, right?

Stevens: Yes, the Morrill Act. Yes.

Charnley: Do you think your farm background helped you in some of those early years, just in understanding it?

Stevens: Yes, but then when I left high school, we're getting back again, when my father then got married again. My mother had died, I think I told you, in 1933. About, I don't know, four or five years later he got married again. I stayed with them for a while, and my grandmother did, too. But eventually both of us thought it'd better if we--finally they arranged to have her go to a--well, it wasn't a retirement home, but it was a private home that was run for people. We'd go see her. It was a nice place.

Charnley: Your grandmother?

Stevens: My grandmother, yes. My grandmother Stevens. She lived to be ninety-eight years old.

Charnley: When you went to your first board meeting, had you met President [John A.] Hannah before that?

Stevens: Oh, yes, I had. I didn't know, not very much, but at the first board meeting in January of 1958, of course, he was the president. Hannah had done, as I'm sure you know, president, I don't know just what year he took over as president, but, before he was president, he was secretary to the president. I think it was [Robert S.] Shaw. I think it was Shaw that was president. He was secretary to the board of trustees, or the State Board of Agriculture, because the name change didn't come at that time.

So I went to the first meeting and I went up with Kellogg Center, who was operating then,

we went up there the night before and stayed overnight. One of the other Democratic members, a fellow that had been elected a couple of years before me, Conard Smith [phonetic]. He was a veterinarian from Piconning. That's over on the east side of Michigan, north of Saginaw. He come in and he knocked on my door, and I went down to breakfast with him, one of the trustees' breakfasts. Then we'd have an open trustees' meeting. That wasn't nothing very excited happened there.

As far as the board is concerned, things went along very smooth, until Hannah--oh, I was elected chairman. Now, at Michigan State they have an automatic system, where it rotates.

Charnley: The chairmanship of the--

Stevens: Yes, chairmanship automatically rotates. But before that you had to be elected by your fellow board members. I was elected chairman after, oh, let me see, let's see, I went on in '58, it was probably around '60 or '61, something like that. So I think there are too many exciting controversies, [unclear] Hanley [phonetic] would usually come in with his recommendations and we'd discuss them and ask questions and try to find exactly what it was.

Oh, they had been a secretary of the board had left, Kyle McDonald, retired, I guess. Of course, there was a movement on to, we had to get another secretary. This was the first time that I started having controversy with some of my supporters, my own supporters. There was a partiality to elect a fellow from Grand Rapids by the name of Tom Quimby [phonetic], as the secretary of the board. I'd been on long enough, and I'd read enough about the trustees, and what the responsibilities and so forth are, so I just knew that--and I knew that it wouldn't--you see, they always had [unclear] that we pretty much informal. But there'd always be sort of a committee that represented the faculty and students, and alumni and so forth, that would make recommendations.

I just knew it would be the wrong thing to put, push for the Democrats, although we did



have a majority, I think, of about four to three. There was six on the board. But anyway, we had a majority. It might have been four to two, I guess. But anyway, they elected, finally they--yes, he wanted Jack Breslin, and Jack Breslin was appointed secretary of the board. I supported that. It was the first time I got pressure to do something that I didn't--because I always, I like to figure that I do the right thing.

So we went on a few years, quite a few years, I think it was eleven years I served on the board, and I was reelected in 1963 to the final spring election that elected the board members.

Charnley: This is before the constitution?

Stevens: Yes, the Constitutional Convention went on to ballot the same day that I was reelected to the board, and that was a close one. I just squeaked in by maybe three or four thousand votes, so as they say it was close, but it was fairly close. But the Constitutional Convention, up until then we'd had just six members on our board. The University of Michigan always had eight. Wayne State, I think, had had, I'm sure, six or eight.

But anyway, the Constitutional Convention passed and that established the board, all of them had eight members. Two elected every two years. After, let's see, after 1963, oh, there was Democrats that came on the board, I think in that '63 election, although I'm not quite sure. I might have been later on in the first fall election. The Democrats had continued in the fall to win the election.

One year there was a fellow by the name of Clair White from Bay City was elected and he became a member of the board. Clair White was all right. He was a friend of mine, but he was kind of a noisy guy, and he wanted to tell the president what to do all the time.

Then I think in the next election there was another fellow by the name of Warren Huff from Plymouth, and Frank Hartman [phonetic], from, let's see, I'm not sure where Hartman was from. But anyway, they were nominated by the Democrats and they were elected. This was in

the period when I first went on the board until Hannah resigned.

Hannah ran a good ship. To a lot of extent the president now, [M.] Peter McPherson reminds me, the way he operates reminds me of Hannah. He's on top of things. He runs it and he always had pretty good support from the board.

I was elected chairman then, I guess probably just before Hannah decided to leave. Now, the reason he left, because Nixon had been elected president. I remember, I was a good friend of Gerry Ford, when he was a congressman in Grand Rapids. Because when he ran for Congress, we had an old congressman there in that district by the name of Bartel J. Junkman. It's spelled like, it sounded like Junkman, but it was spelled Junkman, with a J. Junkman. Bartel J. Junkman. The Democrats had tried to run everybody against him and the Republicans had tried, a lot of Republicans had tried to run candidates against him, but they never were successful, until Gerry Ford came along. Gerry Ford, one time I was sitting up there, when I was working for the union, the International Union, but I was stationed in Grand Rapids, in an office there in Grand Rapids. Gerry Ford called me up. I can't ever remember meeting him before this.

He said, "I'd like to talk with you sometime." So he came over and we talked, and he told him what he was there for, that he was going to run against Bartel Junkman in the primaries, in the Republican primaries. He wondered if there was any chance of getting any labor support, because he wanted to get support from as many people as he could, and labor has [unclear]. Of course, we had a mayor in Grand Rapids by the name of George Welsh [phonetic], who hated Junkman, too, and he would support anybody that was running against him.

Charnley: The Civic Auditorium was named after him.

Stevens: Yes, George W. Welsh. I talked to him for a while, and I said, "Well, let me talk to some of the people." So I did, and at that time, Leonard Woodcock [phonetic], who you've probably heard of. He just died recently, a wonderful man.

Charnley: Who's that?

Mrs. Stevens: He did die?

Stevens: Yes. He died while we were in Washington. It was in the *Washington Post*, as a matter of fact.

Charnley: Not too long ago.

Stevens: Yes. We were down there to Sylvia's the last time. Yes, he was, I think, eighty-nine years old when he died.

But anyway, he was regional director of that region of the UAW, regional 1D. He had a staff of people, guys that I knew, because we were all working out of the same building. It was up on Sheldon [phonetic] Avenue then. So I said, "Let me see what they have to say." So I talked with, I got a few of them together, we just went to lunch, Leonard Woodcock and Kenny Robinson [phonetic] and one of his staff members, and a few others. I told them that Gerry Ford wanted to know if we'd support him. We talked a while, and Woodcock finally said, "Jesus, let's take a shot at it."

So I called Gerry back and we took it--we also had a couple other things. We had a state senator, I think his name was Feinstrom [phonetic], that the Democrats and some Republicans had been trying to get out of their way for a long time. So we had a Vietnam vet by the name of Louis Shuey [phonetic]. We got him to run in the Republican primary against this state senator, but nobody could give him a chance to win at all.

But anyway, Gerry Ford won that nomination, he won that Republican nomination, and that was in 1948. Yes, 1948. Louie Shuey defeated Feinstrom, and of course, went on and he

served a couple of terms in the Michigan House, two or three terms. I'm not sure how long.

Another side thing on that, after the nomination, after Ford had been not only nominated, but elected, after the November election and he wanted, of course, he won the Republican primary by defeating Junkman and went on to win the election. I don't know who the Democrats had up, but I think the Democrats only won that district once, and I think it was back in mid-thirties during the Roosevelt landslide, I think they won it once. But I can't remember who it was. It might have been McAllister [phonetic], a fellow by the name of McAllister.

Charnley: I know they didn't win again until after Watergate.

Stevens: Yes, that district, yes. Gerry Ford served--the Democrats won after Watergate. Gerry Ford was in there.

Charnley: He was vice president.

Stevens: Yes, he became vice president, he was appointed vice president by Nixon. Oh, yes, and then after that, of course, Dale Vanderland [phonetic]. Was his name Vanderland? Vanderveen [phonetic], I think it was. Vanderveen was a Democrat, was elected after the Watergate hubbub.

Charnley: '74.

Stevens: Yes.

Mrs. Stevens: You must have been there, too.

Charnley: I wasn't, I was in Europe at the time, but I know a little bit about it.

Stevens: He's read enough about it, yes. Vanderveen was elected, Dick Vanderveen. Dick Vanderveen was elected and he served a couple of terms. By that time I had become real active in the Democratic Party.

Charnley: At the state level?

Stevens: At the state level and of course, supporting national candidates, too. But that picture up there, of course, was taken the year Soapy Williams was elected.

Mrs. Stevens: Which picture?

Stevens: Soapy and Nancy and Judy, my daughter Judy, who is now sixty-one years old. It was June of '57.

Here's another thing, a side on that. Gerry called me after he was elected, and wanted me to come over to his house. He'd just got married and he had an apartment up on Cherry Street, so he invited Wendy and me to come over. He also, that night he had invited, I don't think he told me he'd invited him, a fellow by the name of Jack Stilles [phonetic], who later become, when Gerry finally became president, after the series, after the Watergate jumps and so forth, his, I think his top guy, whatever it was. So we went over there and had a nice evening with Jack Stilles and his wife, and Gerry and Betty Ford.

So I'd kept in contact with Gerry through the years. Whenever I'd go to Washington I'd get in touch with him and every once in a while he'd call up and want to know if there was any particular thing. He was a pretty good congressman.

Charnley: Did you know Phil Beulkin [phonetic]?

Stevens: Oh, yes. Yes. Beulkin, the law firm.

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: Ford came into that law firm just a little while before he was elected to Congress, or some years, I guess, before he was elected to Congress. Amburg, Beulkin and Law [phonetic]. Yes, Amburg, Julius Amburg. Boy, he was a brilliant man. A smart man. Yes.

One of the time when I was organizing, we organized the White [unclear] Company, and it was an old mill owned by the Whites. Whites, there were two bachelor brothers. It was one of those old-fashioned mills that was run by water wheel and all that sort of thing. You could go up there and it would shake, the mill would shake. That was one of the units of that local in Grand Rapids that I organized.

But when you mentioned it today, the law firm, Amburg Beulkin and Law [phonetic]. I remember Julius Amburg, and we were getting a contract with those workers there. He'd get up and he'd pace back and forth and be dictating all the time. He was an interesting fellow.

Charnley: Did you have any contacts with Gerry Ford when you were on the board at Michigan State?

Stevens: When Hannah left. We had Gerry Ford in there one time to speak at some affair or something. Of course, I talked with him and so forth. But when Hannah left, I called Gerry, and I told him--oh, Nixon had been elected, you see. Hannah hadn't left yet, but he was talking about leaving. He called me over to lunch at Carl's house [unclear]. I was chairman of the board of trustees, what do they call it, I guess, State Board of Agriculture or the board of trustees, but anyway sometime they changed the name in there. Oh, at the Constitutional Convention.

So let me see, so by that time it was the Michigan State University. There was no longer a State Board of Education, they changed it to Board of Trustees of Michigan State University.

So anyway, I called Gerry and told him I'd like to talk with him sometime, when he was going to be in Grand Rapids. He had an office on Cherry Street. So he asked me to come up there, and so I went up there, and I told him, I said, "I think Hannah's going to be leaving," because he had told me confidentially that he was going to be leaving. He told me why he was leaving and it was because that he was hoping, he hadn't received any word yet, but he says, "I think if they think I'm free I may get some appointment into the administration." He said, "I've been on here years as president or secretary of the board," for I think twenty-nine years. When he was secretary of the board, he practically ran the university from what I hear.

I wasn't around in those days, of course. So actually he was president of the university for a long time, actually all the time, and then many years before he was president. He operated, practically, run the president's office from the secretary's office.

So I told him, "Gerry, I think, what I think is if they're looking for a darn good person in the administration they ought to take a look at John Hannah."

Now, I don't know whether that had anything to do with it or not, but anyway Nixon appointed him head of the Agency for International Development. Of course, he went on and did a great job around the world really establishing that so it was a good functioning organization in the parts of the world that needed assistance. I often thought, Gerry never told him that he said anything about it, but I'm sure other people talked with him, too.

But anyway, then let's see, from then on, let's see, where are we then? Before Gerry was in Congress and Hannah was leaving. Oh, and this is where we had a big controversy, about picking a successor to Hannah. Clair White, who I mentioned before, was a great pusher, of course, for Walter Adams. I liked Walter Adams very much, but I had my questions as to whether or not he was the right guy to be president of the university.

But anyway, I knew I was outnumbered on that one, so we made him not president, but he

was acting president for a year, about a year. Then I think we did actually change that to president before the year ran out. But there was a lot of--he had always said that he didn't want the job as president, but he did. I knew he did. He never told me he did, but I knew he did, because I knew the maneuverings he went, because he was quite a politician. I mean, he had a lot of contacts around the university, and not everybody around the university liked him.

You've probably heard of Charles Killingsworth.

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: He was head of School of Labor Industrial Relations, which had been established at MSU. He called me up one night and wanted to know if I'd come over to his house. I said, "Yes, sure." So I went over and what he wanted to talk to me about was, the way he put it was, he and Walter Adams were friends, but he didn't want Walter Adams president of the university. He said, "Don't make that man president of the university." He said, "And Walter Adams is a friend of mine."

But anyway, so then it come down to who was going to be president and we had a search committee. The whole board of trustees interviewed several candidates. We had a fellow from Arkansas, I remember, come up that we talked to, and we interviewed several.

Finally, we had this interview with Clifton Wharton. We went to New York, and I met him in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. He made a good impression on me, and some of the others, but you had this click. This was when the development was for Williams, you know, to be president. I supported Soapy Williams always. A great supporter.

I remember so well when in 1948, early in 1948, when he walked into a Democratic meeting in Grand Rapids and he come in and, "My name is Soapy Williams and I'm running for governor." Nobody ever heard of him, nobody there had anyway. They knew he wasn't going to have much of chance.



But anyway, he ran, and by God, he won it. He got reelected six times, although two of those reelections were recounts, [unclear], paper skin recounts. He ended up, the first one, I think, he was 5,000 votes behind Harry Kelley [phonetic], who had been governor. He came back and ran again. So they had the recount, and I got a call from Gus Shole's [phonetic] office, Gus was president of the AFL-CIO at that time. He wanted me to go up to Grand Haven and work on the recount. It was all paper ballots in those days. I guess they had some machines, but most up in Grand Haven was all paper, and a lot of it around the state was paper.

So we'd go up there, I'd drive up to Grand Haven at night, and then I had a meeting in Traverse City. I was negotiating in Traverse City with some dairies up there. I'd have to go back at night to Traverse City to try to keep the wheels on the buggy up there. Then I'd go back and work on the recount all day. On the way back from Traverse City, going in with the idea of getting back to Grand Haven that night and getting into a motel or something. So back to the motel I was staying in and work on the recount. I heard on the radio on the car that Harry Kelley had thrown in the sponge, and that Williams had been elected.

Of course, the same thing happened the next election against Paul Bagwell, the Republican candidate.

Charnley: He was a Michigan State professor, wasn't he?

Stevens: Yes, he was. He was a professor at MSU. That was close, but it wasn't quite as close. Williams won that already and he went on to win six of those two-year terms.

Charnley: In 1969, when Hannah retired, did Williams every approach you personally?

Stevens: Not at first, but there was so much pressure from Democrats. I did talk with him personally on that. It happened this way, at the State Convention of the AFL-CIO, Gus Shoale

[phonetic], who was pressuring me. He was my boss, I worked for him. He asked me, he said, "Are you going to support Soapy for president?" I said, "Well, they have a procedure adopted down there representing faculty, students, alumni, pretty much all the university community." I don't know, it was about eight or ten on that committee. We'd pretty much agreed that we would listen to candidates, at least, that were nominated by that committee on that list. It might be two, and it might be two, three or four.

So I said, "Well, if he's on the list of this university-wide advisory committee," whatever they called it, "then we'll take a look at it." Oh, man, were they mad. They said that I would do just as they told me, but I didn't, and he wasn't on the list. So we [unclear] people. Wharton was on the list. When it came time to--

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: This is tape two of the interview with Don Stevens.

When the last tape ended we were talking about President Wharton's selection and his interview and that sort of thing.

Stevens: Yes, we went to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, the whole board, down there, to meet with Wharton. He come in with this wife, Dolores, and there were several other candidates from different areas came in and were interviewed, too. I can't remember who they were.

But anyway, it boiled down to a choice between Wharton and Soapy Williams, Governor Williams. He wasn't governor anymore, but he had been governor for twelve years. Prior to the meeting, everybody knew when the meeting was going to be. They had, this is no kidding, I went to a meeting, and I was working for Gus Shoale and they had a meeting of the State Council, State Labor Council, and Gus was a very determined guy, and a guy that I admired very

much. But I sure had disagreements with him once in a while.

I was sitting up there right by him, and he'd play me, "Are you going to vote for Soapy Williams for president for the Michigan State University?" I said, "Well, we'll look at him, and if he's on the list of the committee representing the university-wide people, faculty, students, the whole thing."

So then they had the labor convention and Gus arranged for me and Soapy Williams to go up to his room and meet. So I talked to Soapy for about an hour, and I told him, I said, "Soapy, if you're on that list this university-wide committee that they've agreed to adhere to, to only choose a candidate that was approved by that group, I will. But if you're not I'm not going to." Just the two of us, and I told him that. Oh, man. He didn't get mad. I'll give Soapy Williams credit for that. He never said an unkind word to me.

But I got pressure from the Democrats from all over the countryside that you can think of. There was another Democrat that voted with me, too. Who was it? Oh, Blanche Martin, the dentist in Lansing.

Charnley: He was on the board?

Stevens: He was on the board then. He had been elected, and as a matter of fact, I got him to run, because I wanted to vote another Democrat off the ticket that I thought was treating Hannah unfairly.

This is a side thing, too. One time I had, this Clair White, who I mentioned, and Warren Huff, and Frank Hartman, they were three Democrats, and the other two were Blanche Martin and myself. I'd got Blanche Martin to run and he was nominated at the convention, and I got enough support to do it, to keep him. So when we got ready to pick a president, there was three Republicans, Stephen Nesbit [phonetic] from Fremont, Michigan, he was with the Gerber Food Company up there, and Dennis Thompson [phonetic], who was from the Lansing area, and Frank

Merriman, a farmer from over by Deckerville.

So it ended up that the three Republicans, Blanche Martin and I voted--well, they got to the meeting and one of the Democrats, it was Frank Hartman, I remember, he says, "I nominate Soapy Williams." So I had to vote against him. Not only did I not vote for him, but I had to vote against him. Somebody else nominated Clifton Wharton. Maybe it was Blanche, I don't know.

But anyway, there were five to three vote, the three Republicans, Blanche Martin and me. Wharton mentioned that down there. Five votes, you know, that he--

Charnley: That put him in office.

Stevens: --that put him in office. I remember he [unclear], Don Stevens, Blanche Martin, Steve Nesbit, Ken Thompson, and Frank Merriman. I remember him saying that down to that meeting that they had, that affair they had for him.

Charnley: This is a convocation that the university hosted for the president?

Stevens: Yes, right. Yes, that's right.

Charnley: October of last year?

Stevens: Yes. That's right, you'd called my wife and said that you were trying to get to me. I didn't know there would be so many people around, but I was busy down there talking to people all the time. Jack Stever [phonetic]. Do you know Jack Stever?

Charnley: I've met him.

Stevens: Right. Nice fellow. I remember he came up, he and his wife.

Charnley: Carolyn?

Stevens: Carolyn, yes. She was the ombudsmen there at the university.

Charnley: So when President Wharton came that five-three ratio made it--

Stevens: They did everything they could to make life miserable for him. But on the other side, I want to mention that when Hannah was still president, the three, three renegade Democrats, were just on him all the time. Hannah about in, I forget what they were after him for. He had a fellow that was treasurer of the university by the name of Phil May, and they figured that Phil May was using the university to promote his own interests or something. But I never felt it was anything worth squabbling about.

They were vicious on Hannah. They were coming out, and of course, the student newspaper was carrying all kinds of stuff about Hannah. The three Democrats, Hartman, Huff, and White, just lead mostly the wildest on this Clair White, and just blistering Hannah.

Anyway, I came out and I thought, well, I'm not going to stand for this crap anymore. So I issued a press release saying many things about Hannah, about how he had served on the university, about how he'd served the country. He had served under Vice Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. That was in the paper. Hannah wasn't here at the time.

Then they organized a big rally around the university and they asked me to come down and speak to it. So I went down and I got on that stone. I don't know if you know which one I'm talking about.

Charnley: The rock?

Stevens: Yes, the rock. I got up on the rock, and [unclear] people, and I was defending Hannah. I did. Of course, that got a lot of publicity. We were sitting there, we lived out in Okemos then, we had a house out in Okemos. We were sitting there during this hubbub, and Hannah come back and he'd seen the paper where I had made this statement saying my support of him. He and his wife, by golly, they drove out there to the house, and he wanted to thank me.

Charnley: Interesting that you had a long experience in working cooperatively with Republicans in spite of the--

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: --some other things. It sounds like it went back to Gerry Ford days and others.

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: You didn't fear the Republican Party as much as maybe some of the--

Stevens: No.

Mrs. Stevens: The Democrats.

Charnley: --some of the Democratic Party.

Stevens: Yes. See, there's factions in the parties.

Charnley: Sure.

Stevens: Democratic Party and Republican Party, you have factions. I fought in the Democratic Party. Man, I had some of my most vicious fights in the Democratic Party, and I wasn't always on the winning side. But that's democracy.

Charnley: How would you characterize when you--you were chairman of the board when Dr. Wharton came.

Stevens: Right.

Charnley: How would you characterize the mood on campus when he arrived?

Stevens: There were some groups that were trying to stir up trouble, but it wasn't too bad. It wasn't too bad. The most of the damage around college campuses it happened about--let's see, he arrived in what year?

Charnley: 1970.

Stevens: 1970. That was at the end of the--they were still having riots all around universities and so forth at that time. I don't think there was any great demonstration against him. I can't remember any great demonstrations against him.

Charnley: Students were protesting the war.

Stevens: Oh, they protested the war in Vietnam mostly.

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: I was against that war in Vietnam. You see, one of the controversies that Hannah did during that time, he wanted authority to expel students. He wanted authority to just--he was a civil judge--whether a student should be expelled or not. That how I happened to get up on the rock. I spoke against that, on this one I didn't agree with Hannah, because I thought that it should go through a procedure before, a student should have some rights to defend himself. You might expel some real guilty ones, and you might expel a few innocent ones, just thinking that their guilty. So that's how I happened to get up on that rock to that rally, because the rally was called pretty much to support the action against Hannah on that one. But anyway, it worked out all right.

Then I went over to the--I left the AFL-CIO. In 1970, when I ran for renomination of Democratic Convention the last time, this is after the Soapy Williams affair and so forth, there was a big move on to black my--actually I wasn't too anxious to run again anyway. But when they started a big move to stop my nomination, I thought, to heck with that, I'm not going to be kicked off this thing. If I'm going to leave, I'll leave of my own free will. At least, I mean, I'd try not to get kicked off.

So I started a campaign, I went around to different unions. I'll never forget I went to the ASMA, State, County, and Municipal Workers, and I went to their president. I knew him, Bob Grovner [phonetic], the local guy. I said, "Look, I'm going have some support up here, because I know they're trying to boot me off." Even my, the people I was working for, or working with, that was a chance for them to get back at me for not making Soapy president of the university.

So he said, "Yes." He said, "We're having a conference here and the president, the international president, is going to be in town, and he'll be at that meeting. So you come down."



So it was a funny thing, I went down to that meeting, it was a state meeting, Bob Grovner was there. The head of the international union, God, I can't think of his name. But anyway, he got up, and I'd never met him in my life, but Bob Grovner talked with him, apparently. Because I was there and Bill Marshall who was vice president then, who later became president of the State AFL-CIO. Bill Marshall was down at the end of--he was on the group that was trying to boot me off, to stop my renomination.

But what I was doing was going around to the unions, the individual unions who I knew for years, and organizing support for myself. I had a lot of people helping me. Joe Wolf [phonetic] was his name. Joe Wolf was the International president of the State, County and Municipal Employees. He gets up and makes a big speech about me. Don Stevens this and Don Stevens that. Then, of course, I remember one thing, he said, "One thing about Don Stevens, he never forgot where he came from."

Then there was a kid by the name of Jerry Conjarski [phonetic] that was working for that union, working for Bob Williams of the state branch of that union. He jumps up in the middle of the fat farm and he says, "I move that we support Don Stevens for renomination of the board of trustees." So that was a start.

I was over in Minnesota that year, directing. I had left the AFL-CIO because, they never fired me, but I just didn't want to work under the conditions that they--the pressure they had me on not appointing Soapy and all that. I just didn't want to work under those conditions.

But anyway, it's good to have friends in high places, but I got--I'd had a conference in the upper peninsula and we come home on Saturday night and I didn't even have a job. I come back from my last conference, you know, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I got a call from, oh, what the heck is that guy's name. Emil Starr [phonetic], who I knew through the years, when I was Education Director of the State AFL-CIO. We'd had our conferences, national conferences, and I got to know Emil Starr among other people, there.

I come back from the upper peninsula and we were standing out there at our house in

Okemos and the telephone rang and I answered it. He always called me Donny. He said, "Hey, Donny, how'd you like to go to the University of Minnesota?" There was another fellow that was involved here by the name of Bill Kinsley [phonetic], who had been an AFL-CIO staff here in Michigan, but he left and went to work with the OEO and he was in the Office of Economic Opportunity, and he was in Europe for quite a few years trying to rehabilitate those countries after World War II.

Then he had come back and he was director of the Office of Economic Opportunity Branch in Appalachia. He had talked with--he knew about the problems that I was having. Your support will crop up when it's unexpected. So he talked to Emil Starr and he said I understand they're looking for a guy out in Minnesota. So that's how Emil happened to call me. He said, "Hey, Donny, how'd you like to go to Minnesota?" I said, "Well, it sounds good." He says, "Well, it's got to be approved. They've got a committee, and they got about a half a dozen guys coming in they're going to interview, but they want you in Chicago on such-and-such a date." So I said, "Okay, I'll be there."

So I went over there and they did, they had--I don't know who the other people were, but anyway, I think it was all cut-and-dried before. But anyway, I was picked to head that Office of Economic Opportunity. It was headquartered at the University of Minnesota, but it covered Minnesota, Wisconsin and Indiana. I don't know why they jumped over Illinois, but they did. It covered those three states. So we had to go. She went, too. You went to meeting with me over in Wisconsin, down to Indiana and so forth.

I was over there a year, and then I came back. I could have stayed longer, if I wanted to, but then we'd have had to move over there. Then I checked with--do you know Bob Greene [phonetic] here that used to be at the universities?

Charnley: I know of him, but--

Stevens: Yes, but anyway, I talked to Bob Greene. I said, "Jeez, I hate to stay over there in Minnesota. We'd have to move over there and everything else." So he called up, he got a guy by the name of Bill Ford, who was with the Michigan Employment Security Commission. He was a Republican, but he was head of the Michigan Employment Security Commission. He said, maybe I can get Bill Ford to look at you, maybe he'll give you a job. So he did and I worked for him for two years.

Then at the end of the second year, Oakland University, and while I was on the board at Michigan State, Oakland University was established. First it was MSU Oakland for a few years, and then Woody Viner [phonetic] was the chancellor over there, we called him a chancellor while it was a branch of MSU. He wanted it to be a university of its own. He talked to me about it and we talked enough and we supported him. I don't know how the board split on that, or whether it did split. It might have been unanimous.

But anyway, it became Oakland University. I've had some people question whether or not, because--whether it was a wise move or not to make it. But I always and I still think it was a good move, because Oakland University has pretty much thrived through the years. It's gone on very well. I think much better than the several branches that the University of Michigan has in Flint and Dearborn. I think they got three. Maybe not, but anyway in Flint and Dearborn. But anyway, that's when Oakland University became established.

Woody at [unclear] was over there for two or three years. He come to the university, Michigan State University from Nebraska. But he was appointed head of the State University of New York, and so when he went down there, Don O'Doud [phonetic] who was at Oakland University, was sort of his assistant over there, took over as president. See, then after they became a standing university, Oakland University, they changed, they didn't call them chancellors anymore, they called them presidents. He became the president of Oakland University.

Charnley: What year was it that you had the difficult, or you had the difficult final election?

Stevens: Oh, that was 1970, the last time I ran. Yes. I mentioned the fact that I went to the State, County and Municipal Employees Union in the International president [unclear] got up and supported me, and I'd never him in my life. But he did that on the basis of what his local people had told him. So I talked with several other people, and I called up, you probably know about Doug Frasier [phonetic].

Charnley: Yes. At that time, Doug Frasier was vice president of UAW. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Charnley: When the tape stopped we were talking about the 1970 election and how you had a tough time getting support.

Stevens: Oh, yes. I was over in Minnesota, so it wasn't easy. I'd come home weekends. I'd drive home one weekend, and fly home the next. They agreed that they would, when I took a job over there, the one I mentioned that Emil Starr helped me get. The director of that program, his name was Jack Flagler [phonetic], and he was pretty good. I'd fly and I'd have to buy my own ticket, because they wouldn't pay for me to transfer. But I'd come home one weekend and I'd drive home the next. Now, I just how far it was, 603 miles from the university to where I lived out there. At that time we'd sold our house in Okemos, we lived up on Mount Hope in an apartment there.

That was [unclear]. I didn't want to stay over there. They wanted me to come. First, I just agreed to go for a year, and then they said, let's look at maybe staying longer. I really didn't want to, because we'd had to have sold--we still had the house in Okemos.

Charnley: Did President Wharton support your candidacy?

Stevens: Oh, yes. President Wharton, let's see, yes, he was president then. He didn't, he supported it, but it wasn't--

Charnley: [unclear].

Stevens: There was limits on what the president of a university could do.

Charnley: Sure.

Stevens: Yes. But anyway, we went up there and I got this movement started. First, I called up Doug Frasier and I said, "Look, I know what they're trying to do. I know what Gus and Bill Marshall and so forth are trying to do, they're trying to bounce me off, because I wouldn't support Soapy Williams for president." This was a few years back. He said, "Well, let me think about it." He said, "I'll get back to you." He wanted to know where he could reach, and at that time, as I say, I was coming back and forth from Minnesota. I said, "Well, how about I call you, because I'm hard to reach." He said, "That's fine."

So I called him in a couple weeks and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what I've done. I've appointed a committee of four or five people," but he says, "let me just say this. They lean heavily in your favor." See, the UAW is a powerful force in the labor movement in Michigan. Then with the State, County, Municipal Workers there was two big ones right there.

So anyway, at that convention and I was renominated. I was renominated and it didn't make me too happy with some of my friends. But I pretty much ran for reelection because I didn't want it left that I was pushed off the board by my own people.

Charnley: What was the end result? Did you win by a wide margin, or do you remember?

Stevens: Pretty good size. Pat Carrigan was elected the same year, her first term, it was my last. I guess, maybe it was her only. No, I guess, she served two terms.

Charnley: She was from Ann Arbor at that time?

Stevens: Yes. Yes. She was from Ann Arbor, and boy, I'm tell you, in those days she was really a go-getter, let me tell you. She has her health problems, and she's slowed down a little bit. Boy, I'm telling you, when I first knew her, man, she'd walk and she could just stomp right over everybody.

Charnley: She was the first woman on the board, wasn't she?

Stevens: We'd had women on before. As a matter of fact, the woman, I'm trying to think who it was, it was a Republican. Oh, it'll come to me.

Charnley: There was one other woman.

Stevens: That had been elected before her that I know of. Let's stop this thing for a minute and let me think. [Tape recorder turned off.]

...elected and she served, I don't know how long, on the board, the State Board of Agriculture, as it was known in those days. I don't know of another woman before Pat, but Pat was elected, of course. Pat was a terrific person, very smart. As I say, she was elected there with me.

Charnley: Could we talk a little bit about the unionization efforts of both the faculty and also the staff at Michigan State? That obviously occurred while you were there. What accounted for the anti-union sentiment within the administration? Or was there any anti-union sentiment that you encountered?

Stevens: There are several different unions. We had a union of the offices of clerical employees, the group they called it. Then they had the grounds crew and those workers. I never felt any great resistance from the administration to the unions.

Now, one of the things that, in Michigan, in addition to Soapy Williams, another good governor, great governor of Michigan, was Dar Milligan [phonetic], a Republican. He said he was elected lieutenant governor the last Romney term, then Romney went on to Washington and he became governor. He was elected to three four-year terms, so actually he was on the board--he's the longest serving governor of Michigan, I think, in the history of Michigan. I'm not sure. But I'm almost sure that he's the longest serving governor in the history of Michigan. In other words, he served fourteen years, three four-year terms, and the last two years of Romney's. See, Romney was appointed by, was it Nixon? One of the presidents.

Charnley: HED, I think it was, President Nixon.

Stevens: Yes. Health Education, yes. [unclear] was a good governor, I want to tell you. He was a Republican, but he was a good governor. Still lives in Traverse City, as far as I know. Those were the two, as far as I'm concerned, the best governors. I remember governors going way back to the thirties. I remember Frank Murphy, but he only served, I think, one term, and then he was elected or appointed by Roosevelt as attorney general and eventually appointed to the Supreme Court. But he was a great governor, but he only served one time, because he moved back and forth.

Those days Frank Fitzgerald [phonetic], the Fitzgerald family from the Grand Ledge [phonetic] out here, his grandson, I think, was on the Supreme Court or something just real--up until recent years. I think there was a Fitzgerald that's one of his descendants, I think, that is [unclear] now, because of term limits. They used to be able to serve a long time. But now because of term limits, they disappear.

Charnley: Did any of the MSU unions at that time look to you for support, or did they [unclear].

Stevens: No. No, they didn't ask me. They were pretty liberal. They knew that if they were going to organize a union that they had to do it on their own. I wasn't going to be an organizer for the union. I supported, of course, the movement, and in recent years I'm not just sure how many of the employees are organized now, but I think quite a few of them.

Charnley: Right now there's an ongoing movement to organize the graduate teaching assistants.

Stevens: I read about that.

Charnley: The other thing that's come up was the issue of faculty union, the faculty associates.

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: Dr. Phil Course [phonetic] was one of the leaders of that union.

Stevens: Do they have a faculty union now?

Charnley: No.



Stevens: They don't?

Charnley: No, that was voted down, but I wondered if there was any activism while you were on the board?

Stevens: Yes, [unclear] and so forth. Of course, I would have, if it came to any issue on the board I would certainly have supported their action. But I can't remember them referring an issue.

Charnley: That five-three ratio after Pat Carrigan was on the board in terms of supporting President Wharton, that ratio continue?

Stevens: Oh, yes. Yes, the people that were opposed to him, including the Democrats, Hartman, White, and Huff, they did everything in their power to make life miserable for him. But they were so unreasonable that it never, they never gained much footage. Wharton, I'm telling you, you got to give him credit.

I'll never forget, Warren Huff, and I've been trying to find out how he is or whether he's still alive. I'm not sure, but I know Clair White's gone. Frank Hartman's gone. I don't know if Warren Huff is still alive or not.

Charnley: I believe he is. Pat Carrigan indicated that he was.

Stevens: Did she say anything about his health?

Charnley: She said he was still living in Ann Arbor, I think.

Stevens: Yes, he had a place in Ann Arbor and he had a farm up there someplace.

Where was I?

Charnley: We were talking about some the issues that came up on the opposition that President Wharton faced.

Stevens: Oh, yes. One thing I wanted to tell you, Warren Huff sat there at the meeting and just come up like this, you know, and he had a book there. He just ripped into Wharton something terrible and he ended it up, and he was a clever talker. He said, "You know, you're running this university just like the people that put this book together. They got it bound upside-down and backwards." Every--

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

Stevens: When he first came I was chairman of the board, but then he after--he was here, what, about nine or ten years, wasn't he?

Charnley: Seven years, I think.

Stevens: Seven years, yes. After about four or five years, he called me up one time and told me that this thing in New York, this probably must have been about five and a half, six years after he was here, that there was a chance that he would be offered a job in New York.

Charnley: As State Chancellor of--or--

Stevens: Chancellor of the State University of New York.

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: Anyway, he was, and he took it. But I'll tell you, those three guys on the board, those three Democrats, they just did it, especially Warren Huff, and Clair White while he was around. But I managed to get them off at conventions. I got Blanche Martin to run to knock off--well, there was--who was this guy--there was this man from--maybe you better stop a minute, let me think. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Stevens: Was a businessman. He had all kinds of operations going, so it was--Hannah had a delegation go to Africa and he included two trustees, Alan Holland and me. That's how Blanche Martin happened to get on the board. Holland was working with those guys, that was making life miserable for Wharton. So I went over to Blanche Martin, and I'd see a piece of paper, I didn't even know Blanche Martin, but there was a big piece in the paper one day about Blanche Martin. I think it was probably in the *State News* about how he'd been--of course, he was a football player and he was a good one, too. Then he was a dentist. It was about him being a football player and then a dentist and so forth.

So I clipped that out and I made copies of it. I went up to the convention and I wanted to Alan Holland off that board. I didn't have--I went up there, you know, not knowing whether it would be successful or not. But anyway, Blanche went around, and he'd had an accident. He bruised his Achilles tendon, ripped it, and he had to have a big heavy cast.

I went to the convention and, by golly, he was nominated. Alan Holland's off the board, you see. That was one. Removed one of the thorns. C. Alan Holland, that was his name. Blanche was elected.

Then after that I didn't run for chairman, so after a few years, Pat come on in 1970, I said,

didn't she? Blanche was elected chairman for a couple of years. Then it went step by step. Warren Huff came up for renomination and I can't just remember how we did it, but there was a lot of people supported me in this move to get him off, because he was making life so miserable for Wharton. But anyway, he was knocked off the board by the Democrat Convention. See, Alan Holland and Clair White, anyway, we knocked them off one by one two years apart, you see, because they never run at the same time.

Then, of course, you had the Republicans who would win some of those elections. It ended up there were times when you'd have a Republican majority. It was an eight-member board then, sometimes five to three, and sometimes the Democrat majority five to three, or six to two, or something like that. But usually outside of a few things, very few issues were settled on a partisan basis.

Charnley: How was it that you ultimately left the board?

Stevens: Let's see, I left the board in '78, yes, at the convention. I just decided, I'd won the '70, I was able to get through the fight in 1970. I might not have run in 1970 if there hadn't been this fight to push me off. So I thought, well, heck, I think I, there's no reason for me to, I think I've been here long enough, let somebody else have a chance. Oh, I know, and there was a girl by the name of, she served on the board, but anyway, she was an active gal that was a single gal. But anyway, she was elected. I guess, by some of those guys somewhere in there that were removed one by one by the Democrats, and pretty much at my initiative.

Let me see, I've got a book here that might have her name.

Charnley: Okay.

Stevens: Hold on. The Democrats won. You see, on this business of--this question about the

advisability of electing trustees or not electing, I think there are pros and cons to all that. If the governor or the president, if the governor would appoint them, they would all be pretty much at his political leaning and so forth. If they're elected, why, there's always the acquisition, you know, that the parties would have influence that it shouldn't have.

Hannah was a delegate to that Constitutional Convention. There was a great movement to take the board, the election of the board, the movement out of the partisan politics. But they didn't do it, they left it as it was.

As I was saying, when I left the board, this woman who's name I'm trying to think of, was elected and she served very well. At the time she was elected she was--I'd never heard of her, never mentioned her before, but her name came up and she seemed like a real good candidate and we supported her at the convention. She was nominated and the Democrats won that year. She's off now, and she got married, I think. She may have still been on the board when she got married, but anyway she wasn't married when she went on the board. But she's a very, very good person. A very good person.

Charnley: After you left the board, did you have any other contacts with the university?

Stevens: Yes. Of course, we get invited to a lot of affairs. The president, they always have before the Michigan State game, they always have an affair, there at Kellogg Center. It's a nice affair. We always get invited to that. Occasionally, there are some other things that they invite us to, and we go when we can. I used to be very interested in the football and basketball teams. I support them. We don't go to all the games, we go to a few. But a lot of now we watch on television. I have season tickets, if I don't use them, I give them to my--like Chris here, that was here a minute ago, my grandson.

We're going to go away for awhile, that's why we'd bought a dozen eggs, and I thought, hell, I don't want to leave them. We're going to Sylvia's next Thursday, this is Thursday, a week

from today. We're going to be there until the 8th of May. Then we go back on the 25th of May, we're going to Peggy's, who lives in San Diego. My daughter Margaret lives in San Diego.

Charnley: You're pedaling a lot.

Stevens: So we're going out there. I thought, my, God, we won't be using but maybe a few of those eggs. So I told Chris yesterday I said, you stop and pick those eggs up if you're over here, I don't want them to spoil. So that's why he stopped here today.

Charnley: In looking back on your work as a trustee in association with Michigan State University, is there anything that you think stands out the most, or what you--

Stevens: Yes, I think probably two things that I think stand out the most. One is my support for Hannah. My support for Hannah through the years, because in my opinion he was a great president, a great man. He did an awful lot. He built the university from a little agricultural college, to what the university is today pretty much. Of course, it's developed since then. It grew all during the Wharton years. I think McPherson is doing a very good job.

Charnley: The support for Hannah was one thing.

Stevens: Oh, yes, support for Hannah, and Wharton. Support for Hannah and Wharton when they needed it. I think in both cases it was to the good of the university that we did, that I was able to, and there was enough that agreed with me. There was a group of us that supported them. Usually, I never had many disagreements with Hannah at all. I had more disagreements with my so-called friends than I did with Hannah.

Wharton was always my--but when he said he was going down to the State University of

New York, one that's--who came in after Wharton?

Charnley: President [Edgar L.] Harden was one term.

Stevens: Oh, yes, Harden. Yes, that's right. It was Pat Carrigan was on the board then and John [B.] Bruff and I don't know, but Pat may have been chairman at that time. But anyway, she called me one time and she said, "Well, it boils down to Hannah or Jim Miller." She says, "Which one?" I said, "Well, gee, hard to choose, for me to choose which one, because I like them both." Jim Miller was there at the university for a long time, very able guy.

But anyway, I said, well, I guess--

Charnley: Are you talking about Harden?

Stevens: I'm talking about Jim Miller, the other person. I said, "Well, I think maybe--" See, Harden had been president of Northern Michigan University and he did a good job up there and so forth, so I think maybe from experience of the university's leadership and so forth Harden might have the advantage. She was chairman or chairperson, as we called her. She had done Bruff and several others on the board, the people that were on the board at that time. That's how they brought Hannah in. I remember they asked him, Pat told me, they asked him if he would serve, you know, as president.

Charnley: President Harden?

Stevens: Yes. President Harden, if he'd serve, well, first as acting president, because they wanted to go through a procedure like they did when they picked Wharton. He said, "Well, I'll only come on one condition, if its unanimous." Let's see, was I on the board at that time? Yes, I

was. It was a unanimous vote, yes. So Harden served, but he wasn't president very long.

But I remember when I was still on the board, and Pat and John Bruff and Harden, the three of them would drive--I was over at Oakland University then. We'd meet over to the Foxsil's [phonetic] Restaurant. That's the place where Jimmy Hoffa was picked up and disappeared from the face of the earth.

But anyway, we'd meet there and go over the board actions and so forth and things that were going on. Harden got along, I'd say pretty good for a while. Then did Mackey come on after him?

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: Yes, then Mackey, I had nothing to do with that, of course, but he come on and as far as I know he seemed to be a pretty good president. Then after Mackey it was, let's see--

Charnley: John DiBiaggio?

Stevens: John DiBiaggio, yes. I didn't know too much about DiBiaggio, but there's Mackey and DiBiaggio, and then I guess then is it McCurthen [phonetic], did he follow them?

Charnley: Yes.

Stevens: Yes. That's one of the good things, I think. See, you ever hear of Jack [John D.] Shingleton?

Charnley: I've heard the name.



Stevens: Yes, he was on the board, you know. He was one of the Republican members of the board. Joe Ferguson. Those two were, at least, looking at it from a distance, I think, well, pretty much responsible for bringing McPherson here, because there wasn't any great controversy, but they were looking for a president. I don't know if Joe was chairman of the board or Jack, but they were both on the board. Joe was a Democrat, Jack a Republican. They brought Cecil Mackey, right?

Charnley: McPherson.

Stevens: McPherson there following Cecil Mackey, yes.

Charnley: DiBiaggio resigned.

Stevens: DiBiaggio, yes, he left. Where did he go?

Charnley: He went to Tufts.

Stevens: Tufts University, yes.

Charnley: He was Blanche Martin's instructor in dental school.

Stevens: Yes, yes.

Charnley: They're connected.

Stevens: Blanche told me that. Blanche told me that, yes. See, Blanche used to, he was quite a

guy. He's a smart guy. He's a great athlete, as you know. He used to go into Detroit, University of Detroit. He'd drive in there two nights and teach at the dental school. He worked hard all of his life.

Charnley: Lots of energy.

Stevens: Yes.

Charnley: I want to thank you on behalf of the project, and I really appreciate the time that you've spent, and also for the insights that you've shared.

Stevens: I hope it's helpful.

Charnley: It certainly is. Thank you.

Stevens: Nice to meet you, too.

[End of interview]

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