



Paul Risser Oral History Interviews, March 24, 2014

Title

“Coming to OSU and Establishing an Agenda”

Date

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Location

One Partners Place, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

Summary

In interview 1, Risser discusses his decision to pursue the presidency at OSU, his initial impressions of the university, his early points of emphasis, and colleagues that were important to achieving his objectives. He also reflects upon the relationship between OSU and the city of Corvallis, university budgets and funding, promoting and enhancing OSU athletics, diversity at OSU, renovating Weatherford Hall, and the creation of the Austin Family Business Program.

Interviewee

Paul Risser

Interviewer

Janice Dilg

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/risserp/>

Transcript

Janice Dilg: So this Janice Dilg with the Oregon State University Oral History Project. Today is March 24th, 2014, and I am interviewing former President of the University, Paul Risser, who's currently the director of the University Research Cabinet at the University of Oklahoma, and we are here in his office on the campus in Norman, Oklahoma. Good morning.

Paul Risser: Good morning. How are you? I'm glad you're here.

JD: Thank you. I'm very happy to be here. So I thought we would begin at the beginning of your tenure at OSU, and how you came to accept the presidency at that institution.

PR: Oh, okay. Well, it was a great pleasure, actually. I had been in several institutions, although I started here at the University of Oklahoma many years ago, in my professional career. And I was president of Miami of Ohio, which is, in my opinion, one of the great undergraduate universities. It has 20,000 students; it has a capped enrollment. There's always a long list of students who want to go Miami. I think we ran the university well. The students do well, so it's sort of an ideal community. And if you've ever been on that campus, it's—if you picture a Midwestern brick campus, that's Miami University. So I thoroughly enjoyed being there, and I learned more about undergraduate education there than I can ever have imagined.

It was interesting that when one would sit down and talk to faculty at Miami, they almost invariably talked about their classes and their students, what their students were learning, which I enjoyed. Although I must confess, I really miss the kind of outreach of a research university, and having being involved in research through my whole career, the idea of a campus which had a real focus on education, but not much focus on research and outreach, was a little difficult for me, just because I think research and outreach is such an important part of a university.

And so when the Oregon State opportunity came along, I'd known Oregon State as a university, and it really had an outstanding reputation, particularly in my field, environmental science. I knew a number of persons who actually knew George Keller, who was the Vice President for Research at Oregon State. And so it seemed of interest, and it made me slightly uncomfortable, because I'd only been at Miami—I was only there three years, and that's—in my opinion, that's too short for a presidency. But on the other hand, a good fit like Oregon State doesn't come along often, and so that's how I really got to Oregon State. And it was an interesting interview process, which actually I enjoyed, and thought it was well done. And I accepted the job, and the rest, as we say, is history.

JD: [Laughs] Well, and you had made some comments, when you first arrived, that the fact that it was a Land Grant college was factored into your decision. And I also discovered, during my research, that it's a Sea, Space and Sun Grant college, which, I'd never heard of those terms before. Could you talk a little about those four aspects of the university, and why that was part of what drew you?

PR: Sure. That's a really good, interesting point—a good point. And I said earlier that I sort of missed the research and outreach dimensions. In some ways, that's exactly what I was saying—that I had spent actually five years at the University of Illinois, which is a Land Grant university. I went to graduate school at Wisconsin, which is a Land Grant university. And my own field is sort of environmental sciences. And I suppose, in a sense, I grew up on a farm in Oklahoma, so the sort of Land Grant mission, which really reaches out to the whole state—and we used to say at Oregon State that the campus of Oregon State was, in fact, the state of Oregon.

And I think that sort of connection between the university and the people of its state—currently Oregon State's a national university, an international university, but there's a certain value proposition between the university and its—of a Land Grant university and its state. That seems really important to me. And the sort of Land Grant, which then became Sea Grant, and then later Sun Grant—the Sea Grant program's been around much longer than the Sun Grants. The Sun Grant in a more recent one; it focuses on energy. But to me, those designations were again a sort of a validation, but also an instruction for us to think broadly about the curriculum [0:05:02], and our research program, to certainly water and energy, and it's hard to imagine two variables today that are more important than those two.

And so having an institutional mandate to focus on the land, the water and the sun, and the energy—you know, that's a really nice composite of expectations. And to me, I found that very, very comfortable, and a really good context in which to try and lead the university, but a context in which the university could operate very effectively. So I presume you can cut out things here, so if I don't finish the question or you want more, and you need it, tell me you need more, and I'll be glad to do it.

JD: I will absolutely do that.

PR: Okay.

JD: But thanks for permission. [Laughs]

PR: Of course!

JD: So when you came—talk a little about how you found the campus, the culture, the attitude, the institution.

PR: You know, Oregon State was comfortable; it was comfortable for me from the very first day. It was an institution which, I think, was welcoming, and that's to its credit. But it just—it felt comfortable. And I think part of it was because that I knew the disciplines, at least we knew them quite well. I knew some of the people, or I knew their reputation. I didn't actually know John Byrne, but I knew of him, and so to me it was really kind of a comfortable place, so that's sort of one side. The other side was sort of me, and I could just see so much more we could do here, so many opportunities! And so I tried at the beginning to sort of listen, and to think hard about—about all the opportunities we might pursue at Oregon State. What were the most important ones? Because it was clear that John Byrne had done a super job, under really difficult conditions, in his presidency. And now we were at a sort of point where we could do some new things.

And the question was: I wanted to do the right new things, and do them in the right way. And so I spent the first part of my time there really sort of listening carefully, and thinking about what the opportunities were, sort of in the sort of geography, I'd say [unclear] geography of the state, and where the state was going, particularly economically, but also culturally. And you know, Oregon is this sort of wonderful cauldron of ideas, and I liked that sort of intellectual liveliness that you get in Oregon that you don't get in other states, and so it was a very nice combination for me.

But then I began to identify things that seemed really important to me. And certainly the number of students, which has actually been decreasing—that was an issue that was troublesome to me, because it seemed to me everybody should want to go to Oregon State. And so I began to focus on increasing our enrollment as sort of a first one. I think, secondly, the idea—and it really goes back to the earlier question about a Land Grant, Sun Grant, Sea Grant kind of institution, and I think making sure that our educational programs and research programs were connected to the external constituency also seemed really important to me.

And then I think Oregon had sort of been beaten down, really, by its statewide policies, and so I didn't say "Oregon State," I said "The State of Oregon," and in some ways that kind of contaminated, I think, higher education a bit, so it needed more self-esteem. You know, it needed more enthusiasm, and it needed more confidence to itself, and so part of what I tried to do is become kind of a cheerleader for the institution, which is always tricky for presidents. At the one hand, you want to change things; other hand, you want to be a cheerleader of what you're doing. And so that's always kind of a balance that presidents contend with, and if we do it right, then the institution benefits from it.

JD: [Laughs] And so how do you kind of self-regulate that? How do you find your way between those two paths?

PR: Yes, it's a really good question, because especially at Oregon State, which is—because of Ballot Measure 5, and it's sort of been beaten down and struggled a bit. And then, to be sort of straightforward about it, the FA program, particularly—not all athletics, but the football program, it had 26 losing seasons, and I can come back to that and talk about it, because it turned out to be a bigger issue than I anticipated when I got there. But anyway, all these sort of things needed cheerleaders. They didn't need more criticism. And so I tried really to be a cheerleader, and so we put together metrics that were really successes. [0:10:03]

We put together metrics that we thought we could work on, of which student enrollment was one of those—fund-raising was another—and began to focus on those where we thought we could make a difference. And so it was pretty conscious

on our part to say, you know, "There are things we can do, but it'll take a year or two or three to get to them. Right now, let's see if we really can't raise the self-esteem of this wonderful university," which frankly, is populated with so many wonderful people and programs.

And so the first emphasis, really, was, "Okay, let's put some enthusiasm here, and let's really be a cheerleader. We've got a wonderful gem here. Let's make sure it sees itself as its tremendous value, and so let's run with that." And so that was really the first focus. And then after we, I think, inculcated that idea, then we began to make some changes.

JD: Mm-hm. You were talking about "we" as, I assume, part of team that you were working with, to think about changes, and how you might go about them. Who were the people on the campus, whether faculty or admin, that you relied on, that you sought counsel from?

PR: Well, that's really a good question. You know, I guess the approach in university presidents it to take—we're all different. And I think I was trying to be a cheerleader for Oregon State, and that was really the main emphasis. But you know, in some ways, I'm not a huge outgoing cheerleader; it's just not my style, and I'm perfectly happy helping others promote our success. And so I think the success we had at Oregon State—and we were fortunate to have lots of it—really was based on the team. And frankly, we worked hard at putting together a team, and I can give you several examples of where I think the team work really worked well. And we never had lots of people.

JD: Sure.

PR: I've found lots of good support. I mean, Roy Arnold, who was the provost—you know, you go through life, there are just one or two people who fit the category of "you're really honored to have them as a friend." And I think Roy Arnold, for me, is one of those two or three. He was always completely generous with his ideas. He worked incredibly hard. He was sort of always there. He had the right ideas. You knew he'd do the right thing. You knew he would say the right thing. And so, you know, I've never really had a sort of confidante, or even a role model, but I would say Roy Arnold was really helpful to me, and he's one of those persons—one of those few people, frankly, I look up to, in that sense. He had this sort of funny sense of humor; he would say things that he thought were tremendously funny. I wasn't always—thought they were funny, but he thought they were so funny, I thought they were funny. You know, just a wonderful, delightful guy.

So he was, and George Keller, who was the Vice President for Research, was also helpful. We had a person in Student Affairs who I thought just did a super job, and we added some additional people as we went along. And I don't want to start a list of names, because I'll leave somebody out.

JD: Sure, sure.

PR: But an interesting—John Byrne and I, we've become—Shirley and John and Les, my wife, and I—I mean, we became really good personal friends. We didn't actually talk about the university very much. It was more of a sort of personal friendship. And so you might say, "Well, what does a previous president say to a current president?" Well, in the case of John and me, we had good times as friends, but we didn't actually spent much time talking about the university, and when we were there—actually, there were two other presidents in town, as a matter of fact. President MacVicar, who was still alive, and he was there, and Roy Young, an acting president—so we were fortunate in having three previous presidents in town, and we actually got together at our home, and enjoyed that.

But anyway, to answer your question, I mean, there were lots of people who were helpful. In fact, I would say everyone was helpful, but it really was a team, and so it's both sort of my style, which is, "not me; it's really we," and the fact that we had a team that I thoroughly enjoyed, and that's really been the motto I've used, career-wise.

JD: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. And a university is kind of a city unto itself, but University of Oregon also is part of Corvallis. How did you go about developing relationships within the city leadership [0:15:00], and business leaders and civic leaders, because that's a pretty dynamic relationship?

PR: Right. And you said the University of Oregon. Do you want to re-ask that question?

JD: I will say, Oregon State University sits in the city of Corvallis [laughs], and I'm sure that's a special relationship.

PR: So, it was interesting. When I was at Miami as president, we actually worked at the sort of town-gown. In fact, I would have breakfast every month with the city leadership. Now, Corvallis, though not huge, is much bigger than Oxford, Ohio. But nevertheless, I worked pretty hard with the town-gown relationships in Oxford, Ohio, and Miami University at Ohio, and I think that work paid off. On the other hand, at Oregon State in Corvallis, it's quite different. It was quite informal.

And so I didn't have breakfast with the city leadership; they were just around all the time. There were people on our faculty who were on the City Council, for example, or a mayor, and so there just was a lot of connections. And so unlike other places where I've been, the Corvallis-Oregon State connection was very informal—actually I'd say very complete, in the sense that there was really good communication. And so frequently I would talk with the mayor about what we're doing, and he or she—in that case, she—would say, "Here's what the city wants to do. Does that seem reasonable?" And it was a quite informal structure, and although I found it different, having just come from a place where it was quite orchestrated, I actually liked the informality. And I would say in the seven years that we were there, I don't think we had any misconnection between the community and the university, which to me is the ultimate test—not what you do, but what you get out of the relationship.

And I think it was one in which there was really good coincidence between what we were trying to do at the university, and what the city of Corvallis was doing. And I think it was also helped by having Hewlett-Packard there, which is a big firm, especially when I was there, and we worked regularly with Hewlett-Packard. And so making that connection among the farm community, of which a Land Grant university does, with Hewlett-Packard, probably the biggest business, with informality of the city leadership, university—it really worked quite well, but it was an informal rather than a structured relationship.

JD: Mm-hm. And you've mentioned a few times, you know, coming from Miami University. Your predecessor had been at Oregon State for many years, so you were kind of coming to a whole new culture. How did you go about establishing general trust, in that you would do would do the right thing, and your credibility with the faculty and the students, as well as the administration?

PR: Yes, well, that's really a good question, because I think new presidents always have what I'll say is both a challenge and responsibility—a challenge to say, "Okay, can this new guy really do it?" And that's the challenge. The responsibility is that the president has to act and behave in ways, and be successful in ways, that people have confidence, that this is the right leadership for the institution at this time, but frankly, universities frequently need different kinds of leaderships at different times. And so the leadership strengths and styles of a president—you have to manage the needs of the institution at that particular time.

When I went to Miami, the previous president, previous two presidents were actually there, as well, and the previous one was also a biologist, who I knew. And I guess it's interesting. I hadn't thought about it until you asked that question. I guess I've—since I've gone several places, and I've always had my predecessor there, I've always had really good relationships with them, but they've never been the kind of, oh, I would say teacher/student relationships, that I felt like I actually learned from the person whom I followed.

When I went to Illinois to run the Illinois Naturalistic Survey, again, I knew the previous director, and I would say in five years, we probably never talked about the survey. As I say, John Byrne and I didn't talk about the university very much. We laughed about things that only presidents would laugh about. Oops, I think I lost my—here—

JD: Here. Let me give you a hand. [0:20:01]

PR: Maybe I should have [unclear]. Thank you.

JD: Mm-hm.

PR: So John and I would laugh about things that only presidents might laugh about, but it really wasn't very much. So I think, well, it was a matter of, frankly, establishing myself as being understanding of what Oregon State was and could be, and being reasonable in terms of how we went about it, and then having a sequence of successes, which reinforced that we were on the right path. So I think it's—this sounds too much of a scientist here, but I think it's sort of evidence-based, you

know? It's: okay, if he listens carefully, if he has good ideas, if he can make the ideas work, and we have success, then to me that's the test of a good president. It's not other things; it's that essence.

And I think that's the way we went about it, and as I said, we had a really good team of colleagues in the leadership roles. Just by coincidence the other day, somebody sent me a picture of our leadership. I think it was my second or third year at Oregon State. And I looked at that list, and they just were wonderful people! You know, you could just see they were wide-eyed; they were energetic. You know, they were enthusiastic, and I sort of relived that [unclear] in that picture, which was I think my second or third year there. It just was a wonderful team of people. And so I think, obviously, having a good team is important, at least it is to me. And so having a team in place, and having successes, people say, "Okay, we're on the right track here. Let's keep going."

JD: Mm-hm. And you mentioned having ideas, and how do you go with—if there is kind of "a process," but just talk a little bit more—it's kind of a philosophical question—about how you go from an idea to implementation. There's a bit of work to go on in between, here.

PR: Oh, there is. Yes, right. This is my downfall. I have way too many ideas, and not all of them are practical, and some are unrealistic, and some of them are not a bridge too far, they're ten bridges too far. But I also think, if you want the campus, the university, to be energetic, and to try things, and have fun, you have to have ideas. I confess, I don't always have a good match between my [unclear] of what I think we can do tomorrow, and what we really can do tomorrow. But I also think that sort of injecting ideas is really important. But you're right; it's difficult, and sometimes universities do move slowly.

On the other hand, I think if you understand the universities, you know there are places that this person's willing to move more rapidly, or this is ready to go, or this project has lots of enthusiasm. And I would say even today, today I have some projects that I'm trying to accomplish here at this university, which are going too slowly, but then I have a couple of them in which my total job here is to keep all the cats herded in the right place, because everybody wants to go off and do it. Because I think, you know, part of leadership is being able to do both of those.

And I think some of the things that we did—well, I can talk about the student enrollment. That's probably a really good example. So when we looked at the numbers, they were actually going down. And to me, that was mystifying, because to me—it looked to me like Oregon State was a wonderful place for students to go. And so then the question is: so, what's happening, and how do we change it? And it isn't a single answer, like most issues. We thought there were some new ways to market the Oregon State University, and so we had [laughs]—I hate to admit this, but we actually convened in our home one day to try and think about new themes and mottos, and we were totally inept at it. [Laughs] I mean, we weren't PR people. I hate to admit what we would have on the chart. But in the end, we got some professional help, and we had this "Open Mind, Open Doors," which actually I think worked quite well for us at that particular time. We kept actually seeing it elsewhere, in commercial places, so maybe it was better than we thought it was. But the idea was to sort of rethink our marketing, so that was one point.

The second point is, we could actually look at the structure of our recruiting, how we went about our recruiting, and how we really deployed those resources, and it was obvious that there were some other ways we could do that. And the last two points to me are more interesting. Those are mechanical ones. [0:25:00] And it goes back to my earlier comment—I think Oregon State needed some cheerleading and enthusiasm. And so as we begin to do that, then more people said, "I can play a role on this, and I can talk to students." So the community sort of got behind it. But I think that the telling—the most important thing that happened was that the faculty began to see this as something that they could do, and that was important, and that, frankly, was absolutely wonderful!

There's a big open area out in front of the Student Union. I remember one day I was actually walking across that, and I happened to be situated so that I could see a faculty member coming down one angle of the walk, and a family who was obviously there with a prospective student. They sort of encountered each other in the middle of this open area, and I just stopped and watched, because I was over on the side. And the faculty member clearly sort of stopped the family and talked with them for quite some time, and then I saw him do this sort of gesture, and then he and the family walked off. Well, I mean, here was a case of a busy faculty member who saw an opportunity, who took the time to talk about Oregon State, and do more than just talk about it—took them off to show somebody. And I think our success—and our enrollment went up, and it's gone up ever since then.

So, I mean, it's a huge success, but to me it was—yes, it was part of the marketing, and the fundamentals of student recruitment, but in some ways it was the community, and particularly the faculty, who kind of as a team worked with this. And so I think when you think about institutions, it really is the people who make a difference. Yes, you have to get the structures right. Yes, the process has to be right. But you know, you can't put a structure in place to mimic what that faculty member did. And so to me, that was the sort of team effort that, frankly, we encountered over and over again at Oregon State, that really made us so successful.

JD: Mm-hm. Well of course, all great ideas need something to grease the wheels, and that's often funding. And you mentioned Measure 5, which was a property-tax-limitation measure that passed in Oregon in 1990, and your predecessor had been dealing with the restructuring and limitations of funding for what, about six years by the time you arrived on campus. Talk a little about budget, and what it was like when you arrived, and how you were able to do these kind of regenerative ideas in the midst of that limitation.

PR: Yes, well, it was a difficult environment, and as I said before, I gave President Byrne lots of credit for working through that environment. But it was also true when I got there that we simply didn't have enough resources to do what we could do. Yes, we could continue doing what we were doing, but the opportunities were so much greater, in that we needed more resources. And I have to say, I mean, we were not risk-averse. [Laughs] And when I look back on that, I think it was the right decision. It seemed like the right decision. I mean, one year we did overspend the budget, which we shouldn't have done.

So we were always right on the edge, but it just seemed we always had so much potential, and if we were too conservative, we'd never take advantage of that potential. And so I think in every case, we knew the risks we were taking, but we did—we did take some risks. So I guess that's one thing we did. And we may want to talk about athletics later, but there were some risks we took in athletics, which as it turned out were successful, but they were not without risks. And we looked at our fund-raising, and people had been generous to Oregon State, but there was at least an opportunity for those who had the wealth to be helpful, to be more helpful than they were, and we could see that. And we could also see that there were probably some changes we could make, in terms of, again, the sort of structure and processes, and the foundation that might help us. And so we made some changes in the foundation, and raised the intensity of expectations, both within the foundation and within the philanthropic community.

And we had some wonderful people who stepped right up and did it. We had a donor in engineering, for example, who essentially allowed us to do a whole new engineering building [0:30:03], which you sometimes say, "Well, are buildings real important?" Yes, buildings are important. We talk today about, in some ways buildings are more important now than they've ever been. We talk about teachers being part of the learning process. We talk about other students being part of the learning process. And now people talk about space as being the sort of third teacher in higher education. And so space was important, and so the fact that we had a donor who stepped up and allowed us to do an engineering building was important.

And as you know, we were able to do a number of other buildings. The building at the end of the campus there, the sort of iconic Weatherford Hall, when we arrived, was an empty building. And I can remember, last time I walked down campus, the first time I walked—we actually walked the campus by ourselves late at night. We got to the one building and it looked empty, and no, it couldn't be busy! How can a big building in a campus be empty? Well, today, it's full. And again, a donor—lots of donors were part of that process, but there was a lead donor who made that possible. So it's just not realistic anymore for public universities, even state research universities, to expect all the funding to come from state appropriations. It just isn't going to happen.

And so the philanthropic community, the donors for the university, take on, in my opinion, an even greater both responsibility, but also opportunity—that is, these gifts. And even the small ones, and I shouldn't even say "even the smaller ones," because the small ones make a difference, as well. They make a huge difference in whether the institution is sort of routine, or whether it can do the special things. And in Weatherford Hall, we brought together engineering and business, and that was, what, 12 years ago? And now people are catching on to that theme? So we were 12 years ahead of time! And I think that that philanthropic generosity has been really important to Oregon State, and so again, we don't take credit for it.

Yes, I think we put the process in place, but again, I think what we established was expectations and possibilities, and people could see that you could make a difference. We also tried to work as well as we could with—there was a statewide board. I think that's changed since I left Oregon now, so the structure's a bit different now, but there was a Higher Education Board, which essentially managed the state appropriations. Oregon State had the advantage, in that we essentially, to a large degree, managed the Land Grant: the Cooperative Extension, and research programs, and the forestry programs.

Those three programs went through the legislature, and they frequently had different hearings, and so we had a chance, really, to talk about Oregon State Land Grant mission, in addition to the traditional budget process—all those important, have to do them well. You have to build the bridges. You can't just talk during the legislative session; you have to talk all year—all those things. And I think we put in place good structures to make those happen, so.

JD: Mm-hm. And in the Oregon University System actually adopted a new funding model in 1999, as I'm recalling, or as my research, and that that kind of opened up some new streams of funding, and just kind of changed the landscape a bit.

PR: It did, and so I think what institutions need to do, of course, is if they can't foster those kind of changes, at least be alert to them when they come along, and take advantage of them. And part of the enrollment issue was this, in the sense we increased enrollment; that gave us advantages. And as we increased our research program—we haven't talked much about research yet, but our research program continued to go up and up and up, and has continued to, so Oregon State is one of the great research universities in the country right now, in terms of its size and total funding.

And so I think we were able to marshal those strengths of the university, in terms of its research programs, but particularly its enrollment programs and academic programs, to take advantage of the funding formula. And you know, we weren't asleep at the wheel. We could see the formula, and we could figure out which variables would be best for us, and I think we did manage that process pretty well. I wouldn't want to convey the idea that Oregon's ever been incredibly generous to its higher education system, because it hasn't been. On the other hand, you play the sort of cards that you have, and I think we played them quite well. [0:35:00] We also did some other things. I like the idea of the state board; that's fine, and you want institutions to work together.

But frankly, I wanted a board for Oregon State, and so we actually put together a board of advisers, which is a topic we might talk about some time. It was also, frankly, an attempt to say, "Yes, we'll be good players. We'll be good partners. We'll work in the system. On the other hand, that's not enough for Oregon State. We have aspirations for which we really need a board thinking about Oregon State." And so that's what led to what we call the Board of Visitors, which I think was a good move for us, as well. And it wasn't meant as a threat, although interestingly, the Board of Advisers' membership had bosses of either two or three of the statewide committee members on it, so the Oregon State board was actually populated by very influential people, and that's what we needed for Oregon State University. But anyway, it's all part of the sort of scheme of, "Okay, here's the landscape out here, and here's what we know about funding formulas. So how can we position Oregon State in the best kind of way, and what can we do to get Oregon State so that it benefits in a fair way, but also, if possible, advantageously?"

JD: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. So, well, let's talk about the Board of Advisers a bit. When you decided that that would be a good idea, what was the process of creating that, and how you went about populating that board?

PR: Yes, so it's interesting, because as I just said, it sort of implicitly implied some threat, because here was a potential renegade university going off on its own. Well, we didn't position it that way, and didn't want to. On the other hand, it wasn't just following the pathway through the state board. So where does it fit? And so frankly, it took some conversations. In fact, it took a year of conversations with the chancellor to get him comfortable with the idea that we were not going off as a renegade here, but there was good value and good reason for doing it.

And frankly, I used the Land Grant as a distinctive mission, because that kind of sets Oregon State aside from the other institutions, gives a kind of special meaning here. And my argument was—I must be talking too much. This thing keeps falling off. Okay, so the board to me was important, because I needed to have some influential, really good thinkers help—from the outside, help us, from the inside, think about what really was important, and if we were missing opportunities, or we could do something better. And as I said, particularly the Land Grant mission is somewhat distinctive, and so I used that as a rationale: that since we were a Land Grant university, we had this other realm of responsibilities, and having a

board which looked after everybody else, which was quite similar, unlike Oregon State, which was different—having our own board might be helpful. And in the end, the chancellor was agreeable, and we did.

And so there wasn't any prohibition. It was sort of a practical prohibition, not a statutory prohibition. And so then we thought really carefully about who it was, who would be really good, and I can say today that every person we asked agreed, which I thought was a wonderful compliment to Oregon State. And it wasn't a huge imposition or burden on them. We met a couple times a year, and we tried to make sure they knew what was happening in between times.

The most interesting one—we actually had a meeting scheduled on 9/11, and so it was in a facility on the edge of Corvallis, actually, in our experimental forest. And so we met that day, and all of us decided we didn't want to meet that day, and so it was kind of interesting that one of our Board of Visitors meetings was scheduled on 9/11. And of course, it was all unfolding as we began the meeting, and actually Les got a television and brought it out so we could see what's happening. But after we were there, gosh, 45 minutes, we all decided that really wasn't—as important as Oregon State was, we didn't need to be there that day, which was the right decision.

But in any event, the board was very helpful. You know, they weren't meant to be intrusive, and they weren't. [0:39:59] They just gave good advice, and so we suddenly had eight or nine of these really bright people, who thought about Oregon State. And we asked them to do some specific sort of reviews, of both programs and processes, but it wasn't meant to be an onerous situation. And they didn't have fiduciary responsibility for the institution, although we looked at the budget things together. So I thought they were a real value, actually.

And of course, they became great emissaries for the university community. So part of what we are getting from them, good judgments, and part of that was a chance for them to be a part of the university, as well. So I think it was good step. I, frankly, can't imagine Oregon State without having its own board. It's just a university that benefits from that kind of a structure, and so we should have it.

JD: And to kind of go back to fund-raising just a little bit—these are all fairly interrelated topics.

PR: They are, right.

JD: And you talked about that there'd always been donors, but you worked on kind of getting donations that were perhaps larger, or from different people or organizations. Talk a little about that cultivation process, and how you assessed that it was possible to perhaps request more from supporters.

PR: That was interesting, and if you—[laughs] if you listen to my speech here, my talking, what you'll see is—and I think what makes a university successful—all these parts go together. Maybe that's my ecological background, you know. So just think about that for a minute. Let's say you're a donor and you have significant wealth, and you can make a gift. So why would you want to do it? Well, you'd want to do it if the university looks like it's going in the right way, if it looks like there's a project where your gift can make a difference, especially over a long period of time, and if it will be appreciated. Those are the criteria, period. That's it.

And so my responsibility is to make sure the university is being successful, and people appreciate that. Nobody wants to give to an institution going that direction; they want to give to an institution going that direction. Secondly, to make sure we have projects where a donor can make a difference. Well, again, that's my responsibility, to make sure that we have ideas, that faculty and administrators are behind the things that we can do. And then I have to have in place a structure that not only—I guess structure's [unclear] the right kind of way, that's mechanics—but also sort of does the right stewardship, and makes sure that it's appreciated over a long period of time.

And so that's the institution, and my responsibility to make sure—those are the parts that need to be in place. So think about the things that I said. When I talked about being a cheerleader, I mean, it wasn't cheerleader just to be a cheerleader. If I'm cheerleading for an institution which is going up and up and up, what do donors think? "Well, I want to be a part of that." So it's all part of it; it goes together.

And if I have faculty members who are out trying to recruit students, why do they recruit students? Because they want students to come. Why do they want to come, students, to Oregon State? Because it's a great university. If I'm a donor and I talk to a faculty member, and a faculty member says, "This is a great university, and I want to give to—." You can see,

all these come together. And so I think the sort of momentum, people don't always appreciate how important momentum is for institutions.

And we haven't talked about athletics, but I'll tell you the same story, in some ways, in athletics, that yes, people will give sometimes because money is needed, but that's not as compelling as, "I can make a difference, and I'll be appreciated, and furthermore, maybe people will benefit for a long period of time." So I have some rules. For example, we entertained in our home, but I never asked for a gift in my home. I felt like there were lots of places where I can ask for gifts, in many cases in your office, or in your home. But when you come to our home, it's meant to be a friend-raising, not a fund-raising.

And so, you know, I think each of us have our approach, and part of it comes from, frankly, the donor having confidence in the president, as well as the institution. And so those are all responsibilities of a president, but in the end it's the generosity of the donors that make it possible. And there were many who were very helpful.

JD: So let's talk about athletics. That was clearly, as you noted earlier, a place there was a certain, perhaps, need for some regeneration [0:45:04], and certainly we all love to be behind winning teams and winning schools. So why don't you just begin with what the state of athletics was when you arrived at the university, and we'll go from there?

PR: Well, athletics was interesting, and it was somewhat of a surprise to me. I've sort of been around athletics. Actually, when I was here at the University of Oklahoma as a faculty member, I chaired the athletics council, so I've been around athletics, and when I was at Miami as the president, of course we had athletics, Division 1A athletics. And so it was certainly part of my background when I was—I think athletics actually reported to me as the Provost when I was in New Mexico, so I've been around a lot. But I didn't really focus much on athletics at Oregon State. I knew over the years they'd had a very successful basketball program in previous years. But what I hadn't realized is that the football team had not been very successful, and in fact the two connected words I kept hearing upon arrival was the "Hapless Beavers."

You know, it seemed sort of funny at first, but then the more I began to understand it, I began to realize, in some ways, it was a more serious issue than that. And the reason it was serious is because it sort of got in the way of everything else. That is, I can talk to a donor about all these wonderful things we're doing in engineering, or business, or in education, or in arts and sciences, or in our literature program, and the donor says, "Yeah, but what about the football team?" And so I began to realize—and when we talked to prospective students, you know, "Are you going to Oregon State?" "Oh, what a flippin' football team." I began to realize that this was a much bigger sort of obstacle than I realized before, before I arrived. But we talked about it, and began to think, "Well, we need to make some changes and do some things differently."

And remember, this is an environment in which resources are pretty constrained. And I remember distinctly on the football stadium, there was a building that we could build, which would give us really some nice coaches' offices that would look on the field, and frankly, we didn't have enough money to finish the project. And I sort of looked at the future, sitting there year after year after year, under the current circumstances, really was going to get in the way of everything else we were trying to do. And so finally we sort of took a deep breath, and said, "Okay, we'll try and raise the rest of the money," which we did.

But when I say we were living on the edge some of the time, that was the example. I mean, we, it was a risk for us. We built the building, and frankly, made some changes in both athletics and in the coaching program. And again, people began to sort of see the enthusiasm for what we were building at Oregon State, and so that permeates when you're recruiting football players, too. And although I didn't participate a lot in recruiting student athletes, I did a little bit of that.

Les and I decided that we needed to do our fair share, and so we went on every away trip with the football team, which if I had sort of said, "Okay, of all the important things I need to do, is this really how I should use my time?" the answer would have probably been no. But given the circumstances, it was the right thing to do. And part of it is because if we were going to make changes, we had to be fair about it, and although I'll never be a coach or an athletic director, I need to understand it well enough that I didn't make a mistake. And we also, especially my wife, got to know the families of the football players, and so it wasn't a case of sort of an outside president sort of parachuting in and making lots of changes. It was really: let's really understand this, see how we can be helpful.

And to make a long story short, we actually became quite successful. We hired a coach who's—Mike Riley, who's actually back there now, and Mike was quite successful. Then we hired Dennis Erickson. I don't know if I should actually tell the story or not, but I will in a second. Most of those were successful coaches, and Mike Riley is back there now, and so I think it's a reputable program, and so prospective students don't have to make excuses anymore about the athletic program. [0:49:57] And donors want to be—they want to be proud of their institution, and this sort of long losing streak—I didn't quite understand the depth of it. I should have. But that was a whole generation who never had a winning season, and when we finally had a winning season, there were grown men with tears in their eyes.

It was just—it's so important to people! And I don't think I quite understood it. I understood it maybe 80%, but not 100%. And so that was really important, and if you had watched the town of Corvallis the first year, versus, let's say, the fourth year, the first year there was almost no pageantry before a game, not much orange around town. By the fourth year, all kinds of pageantry and all kinds of orange. And people want to be behind the institution, and athletic programs, like it or not, right or wrong, are quite visible. And so although I spent much more time on it than I ever would have imagined, it was obviously the right thing to do.

And so I said earlier, presidents—different things are needed at institutions at different times. And I think having had a pretty deep understanding of athletics, even though I'm not an athletic director, it was really helpful for me to understand that, so I understood what needed to be done, and what needed to be changed. [Laughs] The other part was the band. My wife loves the band. Well, I do, too. Oh, my goodness gracious! And so the band was okay, but they weren't funded very well. And so I told you we did all the away trips. We came to Waco, to play Baylor, in September. In Waco, Texas, in September, it gets hot. And so our band came, and the only thing they had were these heavy suits that they wore in November in Corvallis. And so actually, Les and I went to one of these big-box stores, and had them make sort of T-shirt shirts, and we bought shirts for the band for the next day, for the Baylor game. So you kind of get a feeling of us, sort of where we were. I had the band—it actually came right along. It was quite good when we left. But anyway, that's more on athletics maybe than is necessary.

JD: Oh, no, it's great.

PR: It did sort of symptomize, I think, in a kind of symbolic way that the institution has to be successful in lots of different dimensions, because different people have different connections. And if the institution's done the right kind of way, it nurtures those connections with a whole host of friends, constituents, and so forth. Athletics is real important to some people, and so it has to have a measure of success. We don't have to win the conference every year, but we have to be competitive, and that's exactly where I think we need to be. And they are.

JD: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Well, and as you talked about, students who want to come who are athletes as well.

PR: Sure.

JD: Student athletes. And I guess I'm interested, too—football's always kind of a big part of a school's athletic program, but then there's all the other sports, and there's men's and women's. Can you talk a little bit more about that whole broad picture, about how you looked at all of those different pieces?

PR: Yes, and that's a really good point. So I talked about football just because it was so time-demanding for two or three years there. But, I mean, one of the beauties of Division 1A athletics—I mean, they're all—I actually chaired the institutional certification committee for the NCAA for six years, so I spent lots of time on other campuses, looking at athletic programs for the NCAA, and I think I understand athletic programs really quite well. But one of the values of Division 1 is that they have so many sports. And yes, I know about Title IX and all those implications. On the other hand, it gives so many students a chance to participate at that level.

And at Oregon State, I think we had both—we had strong programs for both men and women. The basketball program, women's basketball program, sort of went up and down during that period of time, but frankly, the men's went up and down during that period of time. We did hire a new athletic director, Mitch Barnhart, who was really quite effective—very energetic. Les used to laugh at us. We'd go to a basketball game, and the two of us would sit there and huddle, rather than watch all the basketball game. But, you know, it was just a matter of working together to make sure that we had it right.

The women's gymnastic team was absolutely fantastic. You know, I hate to say this, to admit this, but of all the things that were kind of fun for—actually, we did it as a couple [0:55:02]—we would go and give roses to the women gymnasts after they won. Of all the things that I did, that was probably as much fun as any. And so I think athletics is—it gets tortured in the news, for all the normal reasons. But if you get to know the student athletes, and how much they care about what they do, and how much they care about their team, how much they care about the institution, how hard they work—you know, it's a really important part of a university, and it's this idea—does it distract from academics? Should they be paid? I think those are distractions.

If you really understand the student athletes, and the value it is, both to them as individuals but also a team, and a chance to work [unclear] team, that's a really important value that I think they carry once they leave. And you have 300 students in that category year after year, and they build a legacy for year after year. So I guess I have sort of a, maybe, analytical view of athletics. I just think at this level it's important, and it needs to be done well. As I say, it doesn't have to be conference championship every year, but it must be done well, and we have to have good experiences for our students. We spent a fair amount of money on the scholarship dimension of student athletes, and I think we surely had good help. So, you can't penalize the athletes or take advantage of them. You have to give them advantages.

And I think we did that really well across the board—men, women, again, advising as well as making sure we had pretty good facilities, and the facilities got better as we were there. And so all those seem, in some ways, almost incidental, but at least at that time at Oregon State, we needed to have a successful program, to give those who wanted to be cheerleaders for Oregon State not only an excuse to be a cheerleader, but not something they had to explain.

JD: Mm-hm. Well, perhaps while we're on this discussion, this would be the appropriate place to talk about the new Beaver logo.

PR: Oh! Doesn't stick in my head as being a big issue, but I guess it probably was. Logos are always a big issue. [Laughs] I don't know of a single case where a logo change has been uncontroversial. But I do remember that, now that you raise the question. So we had this sort of happy beaver, which was sort of a cheerful little beaver, but it also didn't quite connote the kind of energy and direction, and the urgency we had in mind [laughs] for Oregon State. And so yes, we went through the logo change, and there were people who liked the old one and didn't like the new one, people who liked the new one, people who were agnostic—didn't care either way.

To be perfectly honest, I don't remember much about it right now, except I knew going into it—I mean, I'd been through logo changes before, and I knew that no matter what you do, not everybody's going to be satisfied. Also, frankly, it was a little bit of this—I didn't personally think the happy beaver was quite the image that we needed right now. Again, in some ways, if you're Harvard, it doesn't matter what your logo looks like, but if you're trying to build, it might make a difference what your logo looks like. And we were trying to change a number of things, so we wouldn't just be captured by the past, and so we did change it. As I say, I'm not dealing with the question very well, because it doesn't seem like a big issue to me right now, although at the time, I'm sure you—

JD: [Laughs] So would you agree or disagree that it's the angry beaver?

PR: Well, it's certainly an angry beaver. I think it's changed now again some, but I'm not sure. But I mean, it was different, and to me that was what was compelling about it. It was a little more directional, and with more urgency. That seemed important to me.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So as we continue to kind of address the different pieces, you've talked about student population, and getting those numbers going back in the right direction, and you also really started talking about academic changes pretty soon after you arrived on campus. Talk a little about sort of where you saw, that kind of academic standards and style of teaching that was occurring at the university, and the direction that you wanted to move in, and how you went about that.

PR: Right. In some ways this was the easy part, because I think faculty at Oregon State, by and large, are simply very conscientious, work very hard, and then they teach well. On the other hand, I think—and all universities faced, and are still facing, this issue—they seemed to be sort of traditional, in the lecture classes. [1:00:04] That's what I did when I taught, at least to some degree. Actually, my history is a little bit different, and so I didn't actually lecture very much, but

I did some. And so that was sort of the standard procedure, and yet we know now that students learn much better if they're sort of actively engaged, and interacting. That's sort of point one.

Point two is, institutions tend to have programs which are organized around departments, around topical areas, and yet we know today that many of the most vexing of our issues really cross departmental boundaries, topical boundaries. And so we begin really to think about both these dimensions, that is, how can we have more active engagement of our students—whether it was a lecture, or a laboratory, or a studio, whatever the experience was? And secondly, were there ways we could bring disciplines together which would really give our students an advantage?

And although I'm not sure we articulated it as well as we might have, there was also the feeling that students—we ought to be able to say, when a student graduates from Oregon State, this is what the student knows, and this is what the student will be able to do. So it's not just what they know, but what they'll be able to do. And so I think this idea of sort of a practical twist, of making sure that students can actually do things, that they're not sort of cloistered in a single discipline, and that they're actually engaged. Those were sort of the three points.

And so as I said, this was the easy part, because we talked about—the deans talked about, the departmental chairs talked about—and so they all sort of took on this responsibility as their responsibility, which is exactly where it should be. And so I don't take much credit for that. I mean, maybe helped articulate the issues a bit, and convey the idea that this is important, and like everything else about Oregon State, much of it is changing. I mean, if you think about the things I've talked about, lots of changes. But I think we did them at the right cadence, and at the right time, and so nobody felt sort of coerced in the process. And the same is true of the teaching, that really comes from the faculty, and their departments, and across our departments and colleges, and I mean, even across colleges in those cases.

And so what we have to do—when I say "we," I guess the administration—has to provide an environment which encourages that, and facilities that, and doesn't put boundaries around, or obstacles in the way. And I really think that's basically what we did. I don't think we did more than that. I think we encouraged it, tried to facilitate it, tried to not get in the way, and tried to say what was important. And it worked! I think Oregon State teaches really quite well. And we started a little bit of online classes when I was still there. That's grown. In fact, Oregon State today has one of the best online programs in the country. It's well-organized, and it's not Balkanized. You can sort of cross boundaries easily.

And so I'm not saying that started when we began to talk about these things, but it certainly is—it's part of the culture, and I think was the culture which has allowed Oregon State now to put together a very good online program. So to sort of repeat, I don't take much credit for this. I think maybe we tilled the ground a little bit, but more than that—the faculty really did that, and I think Oregon State's might be a wonderful teaching institution.

When we started this discussion, I talked about Miami being a really good teaching institution. I think Oregon State's a wonderful teaching institution—very different, very, very different—incorporates graduate programs. Miami had, I think, only three graduate programs. And I thought, you know, Oregon State—just, it's a different institution, but it teaches very, very well.

JD: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Well, I think having an atmosphere where faculty, other administration, staff feel that they can cultivate something new is not to be underestimated.

PR: No, you're absolutely right. And it's big; it really is. And there's a sort of corollary to that, and that is if something doesn't work and you're not penalized for it. If it's a good, bona fide, honest, conscientious try and it doesn't work, we all learn from it. And we're not going to get everything right. And so I think what makes the institution successful today is that if you're conscientious about it, work it out and it seems reasonable, try to do the right thing, and it doesn't work? [1:05:01] Okay, we learned from it, and we don't need to have long repercussions of that. And I guess I hope we inculcated that feeling, as well.

JD: Mm-hm. And were students brought into any of this process, or was it—? Well, I'll stop there.

PR: No, I think that's a really good question. Obviously, we're in this business because we love students [laughs], and I think each campus has kind of a different culture with students. And at Oregon State, the student body is very diverse, which is a real strength. It's diverse in the sense—it has kids who are in the well-to-do parts of Portland who are there, or

from small towns in eastern Oregon, very, very small towns, and lots of international students. So it's very diverse, which to me is a huge value. On the other hand, it makes it more complicated, in many kind of ways. So yes, it has a Greek system, and yes, it has an almost an anti-Greek system; it has people who don't think Greek systems are a contribution.

So I think one of the challenges we had, always, was to take this diverse student body and make sure it benefited from that diversity. And our Vice President for Students, Larry Roper, who's just, I think, retiring, was terrific—absolutely wonderful. And he worked very hard, understood all these dimensions very, very well. And when I look back on it, I think Larry did a good job sort of drawing students into these decision-making processes whenever we could, which was almost always. I'm trying to remember now when we actually put a student on the Board of Advisers, and I can't remember. I remember we were discussing whether we did or not. So we tried to include students every time we possibly could, but I also remember that in some cases, it was complicated.

I had mentioned earlier that I chaired the NCAA's Committee on Certification, and I remember I had gone to Texas Tech to do their certification, and my wife, Les, went along on the trip. And we had gotten there, and I was running this review for Texas Tech, and we just—not discovered, but there was a protest back at home, on campus, about a racial issue. And so my wonderful wife left and went back to be a part of it, because I obviously couldn't leave. And I think it wasn't either more or less than other racial issues, but it simply was part of the student dynamics, and it was a learning opportunity. And since I wasn't there—Les was—she said it was really quite remarkable that students sort of listened to each other. They sat down and talked about the issue, and she thought the whole thing was quite mature, in terms of, you know, it could have sort of spun out of control, and been a huge issue.

So I think there are always ways that student—I want to say this carefully—ways that student bodies can mature and learn from themselves. And that was the case when it actually happened, and I wasn't there, but I obviously heard all the reports. And so I think some ways that diversity I talked about in the student body at Oregon State is incredibly important. The world today is diverse, and our students go into that world, and so the better they learn both to participate, but also learn from that community, the better off they'll be.

And I think the institution—the university, we as administrators—have the responsibility to make sure not only that they are safe—I mean frankly, at least in my case, the biggest worry I have is the non-safety of our students. I suppose it's the parental that never goes away. [Laughs] But after that, the idea of giving them an environment where they can learn and grow, and be part of a community, just seems real important to me, and so I think we conveyed that really quite well. I took the example I gave you as a case where the students really rose to the challenge. They did a wonderful job. One year we had five students who died, for different reasons. They were at an avalanche, and car accidents, and it's just—it's hard for presidents to talk about that. [1:10:04] That's hard.

JD: And that was definitely a very unique year.

PR: Yes. I hate to say this, but every year, you may lose one or two students, but there were five that year. And there's probably nothing—I mean, none of those actually died on campus, but they're our students.

JD: Mm-hm. But it still affects—it affects the campus. It affects everyone.

PR: They're our students.

JD: Mm-hm. And just before we go away completely from the diversity issue, I know over the years, I think fairly universally across campuses in the '60s and '70s, there was a lot of civil unrest, and protests, and new organizations, student organizations, that were formed, the Black Student Union, kind of related to different ethnicities—Native American. And a lot of those groups that started out perhaps a little ad hoc really became part of college life and institutionalized. And I know that you signed a covenant, I think, kind of near the end of your tenure there. Do you remember what that was about, and—?

PR: Was that the one on Native Americans?

JD: It was about the cultural centers, that they would exist.

PR: Yeah, so yes, and it wasn't just Native Americans, but it goes back to my comment on space. I think we all bring our little biases along the way, and to me, spaces can be really important for lots of reasons. And so there was always: do we really need cultural centers? Could we put the whole cultural center in one center? If there's sort of a sacred spot, how reserved, really, is that? What if we have another project which impinges on that property, and so forth?

So it seems—again, that may be part of my bias here, but I just think having the space, having a place you can call yours, having a touchstone that's always in place, seems real important to me. And so it was this sort of constant conversation about—and did we really need these cultural centers, and how many did we need, and how should they be run, and so forth? And I think some of those variables will change over time, but there ought to be—we ought to always have a space. So yes, we did sign the covenant that basically said that, yes, we would have cultural centers.

It's been more than ten years since I've looked at it, but the idea at the time was that some of the variables could change; even locations could actually change if necessary, but there would always be a cultural center for different populations, communities, and I think that was the right thing to do. I should also say that we actually worked really pretty hard with the tribes in Oregon. In fact, one of my treasures is actually a necklace from the Warm Springs that they gave me one day, when I was over there in their part of the country. And to be honest, I didn't think I had done as much, maybe, for the Warm Springs tribe as even I should have, although I tried to be helpful. But anyway, that little memento is important to me, so.

JD: As you're talking about space, and you mentioned earlier Weatherford Hall, which is—is it one of the original, or one of the early buildings on campus?

PR: I don't know. I think it's at least one of the early buildings.

JD: And OSU is actually in some ways a bit unique, in that there's actually a historic district on the campus.

PR: Right.

JD: And I know that you talked about that building was empty, which I didn't know, but I know that there was a major renovation that went on, in kind of creating a space. Can you talk a little bit more extensively about that project?

PR: I certainly can, yes. And again, I'll say it again, that there were a number of donors who helped. The Austin's were clearly the major donors. And that actually happened near the end of my time there, and Ken and Joanne's—we had talked about this, gosh, maybe for a couple years. And actually that's part of fund-raising, is the sort of letting ideas gestate until they mature. And Joanne and Ken and I had talked about Weatherford Hall, and the possibilities, at least a year, maybe two years. [1:15:01] And shortly before I said I was leaving, they came and said, "We really like the idea of Weatherford Hall, and what do you want to do with it? We'd like to help." And they made a very nice major gift, so I want to make sure that I recognize that.

JD: Sure.

PR: She's gone now, unfortunately. But I still remember the first night we were there, as I told you. We walked; my wife and I decided to walk the campus. It was, like, 11 o'clock at night, and we thought, "Well, we'll walk our campus." And those of you who know Oregon State know you walk by the Student Union and the classroom on one side, and you get to this big intersection, and there's this huge, big building over here. And so we, "Well, what is this?" We walked over there, and it was all locked, and it was clear that it was empty. And so somehow this sort of iconic building, right in the middle of campus, being busy, didn't convey this momentum and urgency that we thought was so important.

But it was a difficult building, because it was a large building. It was the old construction, so it was actually a residence hall, so there were lots and lots of small rooms. And when you walk through it in its empty state, it was a bit eerie, actually. But it was clear that nobody really wanted to destroy the outside, the façade. It was also clear that the inside wasn't very useful. And so we did sort of a number of different sort of architectural looks at this, to see what might be possible. And paramount with this was the whole idea of—what now people talk about is the entrepreneurial world, of sort of bringing together, I'll say, engineering and business, although it's broader than both.

And I think one of the compelling stories in the business school of Oregon State is the family business program, which was not unique, but nevertheless was a strong sort of tie for people to understand—people who either ran family businesses, or knew a family business, who could see where a family business program was important. And they could also see, again, as I said earlier, that not just learning about business, but being able to do something was also important, and brought together engineering and business. And so this was—gosh, this was 15 years ago, and we're now right into this, so we were ahead of the game in terms of thinking hard about this.

But that was what was intriguing, I think, to the Austin's, because Ken was a tinkerer, made little things. And so it goes back to our discussion about fund-raising, that finding the right project for the Austin's—although they were very generous, in lots and lots of ways—was really key to them. They wanted to do something that made a difference, which fit their interests, and so that project fit their interests. And so we worked with both business and engineering to try and put together a program, and the idea was that students from both the disciplines could be there, could live there, that we would have what we now would call entrepreneurs, maybe a sort of entrepreneur-in-residence, who could also either live there, or come regularly for seminars or courses or short courses.

And that's the program that we created. As I say, it was a decade ahead of its time. It was around the building. It was funded by many, but particularly the Austin's, who had an interest in it, and it was a combination of across disciplines that I've talked about earlier, and so in some ways it brought together a number of the themes that we had been doing. [Laughs] Actually, I've only been back to Oregon State once since I left. Les has been back a couple other times. But I've only been back once, and it was for the dedication of Weatherford Hall. It was on a Saturday, before a football game, and the weather was awful. [Laughs] It was raining, cold; it was windy.

And so we were all sitting out there, and the speaker—I hate to admit this, I don't remember who the speaker was—but the speaker—so they went through all the introductions, as you always do at these, and the speaker got up there and said, "I think the biggest service I can do is to save my speech for some other time." He didn't actually give his talk. I wish I remembered who that was. I should look it up, because he was somebody that we all respected, and if he hadn't been somebody respected, he couldn't have gotten by with that.

JD: Sure.

PR: But we all thought he was terrific. Anyway, so the only time I've been back is for that dedication, and I assume it's continued to be a success.

JD: [Laughs] Well, I think on that note we should conclude our session for today.

PR: Okay. How'd we do? [1:19:52]