



## Ed Ray Oral History Interviews, August 5, 2015

**Title**

“Welcome to Corvallis”

**Date**

August 5, 2015

**Location**

Kerr Administration Building, Oregon State University.

**Summary**

In interview 2, Ray reflects in greater depth on his Ohio State years, discussing his scholarly research in economics, his move into central administration, his development as an upper administrator, individuals who helped him to grow as he advanced in his career, and the administrative response at Ohio State to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Ray then describes his move to Oregon State University in 2003, beginning with his job interview and his acceptance of the OSU presidency. He recounts the process of transition that occurred upon moving to Corvallis, his assessment of the status of the university at the time of his arrival, and the movement toward growing the university as a tactic to achieve excellence. The session concludes with Ray's recollections of his initial idea for the OSU capital campaign and a brief overview of its impact.

**Interviewee**

Ed Ray

**Interviewer**

Chris Petersen

**Website**

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

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** Alright, today is August 5th, 2015 and we are in the Kerr Administration Building for our second interview with President Ed Ray, and today we'll begin—well, we left off our last interview with you as chair of Economics at Ohio State. And—

**Ed Ray:** I'll tell you a funny story about that.

**CP:** Okay.

**ER:** So, I was chair of Economics from 1976 to 1992, and when I first went there in 1970, there were three of us who shared an office; a fellow named Don Parsons, who's now at George Washington University, fellow named Ben Baack, who has since retired, I think, from Ohio State, and so in 1992 when it was clear I was going over to central administration, the Economics department had a dinner to celebrate things, and Don, who's a pretty forceful character, took some responsibility for orchestrating the evening so that at some point you get to the testimonials. And so he asked Ben to make a few remarks, and suffice it to say that after about fifteen minutes, Ben, telling a very compelling story of our time together, had reached something like 1978, and this is in 1992, at which point Don cut him off, said "alright Ben, that's enough." And I allowed as how I wanted to hear how the story ended, but—so, I'm not sure how much you want to hear about my time as chair or after, but if you ever want the long version, Ben Baack would be a good guy to look up.

**CP:** [Laughter] Alright, I'll keep that in mind. Well, I do have a couple questions that pertain to economics, and the first is that we talked some last time about some of the topics that you get engaged in as a researcher in economics, I'm wondering if there are a couple of pieces of that work that you're particularly proud of.

**ER:** Well, I mean it's really interesting when you do research, and as a department chair I saw this in a number of other people; you often feel most emotional or most attached to the work that was really hard to do, and you forget the fact that to the reader, they don't care how hard it was, it's how interesting they think it is. So, often people in research get drawn into trying to work in areas that really don't play to their strengths. And I had a number of colleagues who, you know, they're not very, they weren't very analytical but they wanted to do analytical stuff, or people who were pretty analytical who wanted to do sort of literary historical stuff, and basically misplaced their efforts, because it was the areas they were challenged in they felt strongest about wanting to be successful in. But at the end of the day, it's how people react to it and what they think of it.

And I think some of the work that I enjoyed doing, just because I enjoyed doing it, was some of the work Ben Baack and I did together. We did a piece on antebellum tariffs and the role that that may have played in helping to push us toward war in 1861. We also did a piece on, we called it "The Rise of the Military Industrial Complex in the United States," and it really starts with the late nineteenth century and the fact that when the Great White Fleet was created by Teddy Roosevelt in the early twentieth century, that was the first time in our history where basically we got on a path toward perpetually building our military capability. Then we had another one where we looked at the adoption of the income tax and sort of what were the antecedents to that, and another where we looked at the rise of Social Security, that it came out of the veteran's pension program that went back to the time of the Civil War.

So, those were kind of fun because they mixed economics and history, which I love. So, those were kind of fun papers. A lot of the work that I did that I felt good about was work dealing with sort of what are the factors that determine what tariff and non-tariff trade restrictions look like? Non-tariff restrictions could be quotas or they could be health quarantine requirements; you can think about a number of things. And it's really in that area, the non-tariff barriers, that most of the growth has occurred in the last fifty years.

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And so, one of the things I was able to do was get some data from the government on tariff/non-tariff barriers and do some econometric work looking at what were the factors that determined why things looked how they did. And I would say that the probably principal finding that I was able to show with the Kennedy round of tariff cuts, with the Tokyo round, with the Caribbean Trade Initiative, that in virtually every case, and I guess it would surprise no one to hear it,

but in every case, you could make an argument that the changes, as barriers came down, the changes were systematically biased to protect the industries that we had that were most vulnerable; areas like textiles, manufacturing in general.

And in an odd sort of way, if you think about that, if these are really industrial country versus developing country issues, what we were doing was tilting incentive structure for developing countries toward exporting the things that they were least capable in. We weren't giving them breaks in agriculture, we weren't giving them breaks in textiles, we weren't giving them breaks in areas where low-cost, labor-intensive production could be competitive; we were getting them to compete with us at things that they wouldn't be able to compete at very well. And to the extent that influenced how they industrialized, it really represented a distortion on the path to economic prosperity that they would be taking if it weren't for the incentive effects embedded in the trade structure programs themselves.

And just a quick funny story, I had a former colleague who was at the Securities and Exchange Commission, and I had gotten a call from someone who was a staffer of one of the legislators, a senator, and this would have been in about 1984, and he wanted to know where I got the data for this study, which obviously was all wrong, because we didn't do that and ba ba ba, ba ba ba ba ba. Anyway, the long and short of it was this friend of mine that helped me in meeting other people to get Department of Commerce data—so basically, all the data I used was government data. And so, that was the last I ever heard about that. They were sure that I had, I don't know, spirited data out of some place and was in violation of national security or whatever, but no, it was actually I went to the Department of Commerce and they sent me the data and I did some econometric analysis and was able to produce some papers that got published and so forth.

But research was very important to me. I loved teaching, and once I was department chair, I got—I basically was in a position where I taught at the undergraduate level and at the doctoral level a couple of courses that focused on international trade, trade policy and so forth. And it was a great experience. You never learn anything quite as fully as you do when you have to teach it, and so those were wonderful opportunities. I had terrific students at both the undergraduate and graduate level who would ask good questions, and I would try to answer them and there was more than one occasion where something I ended up working on that turned into published research really began with students in a classroom saying "well, why is that?" or "what about this, have you thought about that?" And you try to be responsive, and basically you end up trying to generate answers to questions. That's what research is about anyway, it's basically trying to answer questions and hopefully they're interesting questions and the results are interesting enough that people want to look at them and see what you got.

**CP:** Has your training as an economist made an impact on your perspective as university president?

**ER:** I think so. I mean, there is sort of a way of thinking about things that economists have, and there are lots of jokes about it, that engineers are linear and economists always think about things at the margin, are non-linear, so that's why they have trouble talking to each other. But yeah, I think there is a way of thinking. There was an economist—I'm not sure what she's doing now—Betsy Bailey who became the dean of the Business school at Carnegie Mellon. And back in the seventies when the women's movement was really coming to full strength, she wrote an article about economics man, and it was really cute. She argued that ninety to ninety maybe—ninety to ninety-five percent of the people who took economics couldn't make heads or tails of it and hated it. Then there was another two or three or four percent who thought it was an interesting paradigm, but they were pretty clear that isn't the way the world works, and so they did okay in economics but they didn't go on. And then there's that one or two percent that actually think that's the way the world works. They become economists.

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It's a little harsh, but there's probably some element of truth to it. So, I do find myself at times trying to appreciate the limits of where economic analysis will get you. It tends to be rich on analytics and short on understanding the human condition. I used to—so one of the courses that I taught for a number of years was an applied economic price theory where sort of basic microeconomics, and one of the examples—and this was a true case that I would share with students about the importance of understanding the context within which things operate—it was a story, I think it was out of the Philippines about there'd been this terrible flood and mudslides and villages that were trapped for days or weeks, people couldn't get out. And they broke through and got to this one shop, the general store in the small village, and they found that the owner of the shop had been macheted to death. And there was a note on the counter with money, and the note had a list of things that had been acquired; shovels, pails, et cetera, what the prices were, and the money was left there for it.

So, at first they couldn't quite figure out well, what is that, what's going on here? What they found out was that this shop keeper had a pretty good nose for economics, so he realized when everybody was trapped in the village and they needed to dig out their homes and so forth, that he had, at least for a period of time, his little local monopoly and he could double and triple the prices of shovels and pails. So, he did. Well, they killed him and the money that they left on the counter paid for the shovels and pails at the original prices.

And so, what I would tell students is you need to understand there's a social context within which markets work, and there is a legal and social structure that you take for granted that leads you to expect particular outcomes if you take particular actions, but they're not universal. You know, the rule of law and the sense of property rights and privacy and so forth, all the things that we take for granted within our legal, social contract play a tremendous role in terms of how markets work and how they play out. So, as an economist it drives me crazy when I hear people talk about the magic of free markets or the market will solve every problem. Markets work within well-defined rules of engagement and they work better or worse depending upon how effective and meaningful that structure is.

Adam Smith is credited with really creating modern economics, and people will talk about Adam Smith and the invisible hand guiding people to do what's best, but Adam Smith also wrote that it's rare that two or more people get together, business people get together for a gathering, that they don't begin to conspire against the common good. You know, this is about collusion and market control and oligopolies and monopolies, and that's human nature. So, why would you be foolish enough to think there is this objective, abstract mechanism called the market that always gives you the right solution, when in fact it's a human construct? If people don't obey the rule of law, if they don't behave in ethical and moral ways, you can get lots of outcomes you wish you'd never seen. So any—all interesting.

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**CP:** Well, you mentioned the move to central administration, and this came about after about sixteen years in charge of Economics. Was this something that you sought out, or did it find you?

**ER:** No, it's really interesting. I, in 1988 they did these things that we had four-year successive terms as department chair, it was really kind of interesting. So, in 1988 now I've been doing this for twelve years, am I going to do it again? And I was kind of in the catbird seat. I was getting research done, I was doing teaching, I was publishing, obviously enjoyed working with my colleagues, others in the university. So, I was kind of settled in and it finally occurred to me that there were people, colleagues, who were now full professors, who I had hired ten or twelve years before and they still had to ask me if they could do things. Well, I think I was a reasonable person, but it just seemed inappropriate that people should have to still be asking me. There ought to be a time when you give it up and you let other people be in charge. And so, I decided in '88 that that would be my last term.

And as fate would have it, Myles Brand, who became the president of University of Oregon and president at Indiana and then the NCAA, he was provost for two or three years. So, he actually interviewed me before I was reappointed, to determine if I was suitable to be the chair of the department of Economics, which I thought was a little laughable. Anyway, so I had decided I was going to step down, which would have been 1992 anyway. In early 1992, Fred Hutchinson, who was the provost, left to become the president of the University of New Hampshire—University of Maine. And Joan Huber, who was my dean, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, was asked to be provost. She was a former president of the American Sociological Association, a wonderful, very bright woman. Her husband, Bill Form, also was the president of the American Sociological Association. They're both still alive, great people.

Anyway, she called me up and said "I'd like you to come over to central administration and help with budgets and planning." And we were in the middle of '92. Most people forget that that's the dip in the economy before the big expansion for the next seven or eight years took hold. And so, I said "well, can I think about it?" and she said "yeah," you know, so I said "well, I'll come by your office later." And the simple reasoning was if I tell her no and the school's in a bad place, I now am a department chair, soon to be ex-chair, who has the provost mad at him. Probably not a good idea.

So, I agreed to do it. And this was May, so this was like two months before I was going to step down as chair anyway and just go back to the faculty. So anyway, I went over to her office to talk to her and I found out she wasn't there, she was over in the president's office because Gordon Gee, who was president at the time, had asked her to take that position. And she's told me later, she said that she told him she wouldn't take it unless I agreed to do budgets and planning, because she

didn't know anything about budgets and planning. So, she literally called me from the president's office to ask me to do this, so that's how I ended up in central administration. This was not a plan.

**CP:** Well, you occupied two positions; chief information officer from '93 to '98, and then executive vice president and provost from '98 to 2003. I'm interested in the learning curve for you and how you acquired your tool kit - the tool kit to become an upper administrator.

**ER:** Well, I am definitely not a geek, so for me to be chief information officer requires some explanation. So, I go over to central administration, I'm, I guess I was senior or just associate provost or senior associate provost; a year later I was made a senior vice provost. We had areas that we were individually responsible for. So, from '93 on, I was senior vice provost. I had a lot of work to do, kind of like Becky Warner here today. And then Gordon had heard that there was wisdom in consolidating computing, that academic computing and administrative computing, you really ought to have one university-wide operation for information technology. So, he charged the ten or eleven vice presidents that he had to have weekly meetings and decide how they were going to do this.

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So, the first year I was there and they're having their meetings. Anyway, they go to Gordon at the end of this and they say they agree that the two ought to be consolidated, and they didn't trust any of their own number to do it without diverting it to whatever their individual needs were. So, they told him "well, Ed should do it." So, that's how I became chief information officer. And I had enough good sense to know that I needed to get people who understood how to, in fact, operate administrative and academic computing. So, I quickly got people in key staff positions, and then once I was provost, I really had to get out of the business.

The first fellow that I asked to be the sort of titular head of university-wide computing went on to be the CIO at UCLA. The second guy I got to do it went on to be the CIO at USC some years later. So, I got good people in that position and got myself out of the center of it right away.

**CP:** We've talked a lot about mentors in our project; I'm interested in knowing if there was somebody who was sort of an administrative mentor for you, somebody that you took things from and, like we said, helped in developing your tool kit.

**ER:** Well you know, I think, I don't know that the term mentor is overrated, but I think at the end of the day you're responsible for what you get right and what you get wrong. So, if you're smart, you pay attention and you don't just learn from people who you admire and respect; you learn from people who are clearly dopes and getting things wrong, because you learn lessons about things not to do. So, the first department chair I had was really quite incompetent. He literally would ask people what they wanted to teach and then he would sort of assign them courses when they wanted to teach. We were on quarters there as we are here, at the time, and so when I first got to the position where I was going to take over as department chair, I discovered that we taught something like eighty-three courses in the fall, seventy courses in the winter and fifty-six in the spring, and the reason was because he ran out of money.

And my last year that he was department chair, he literally would give out teaching assignments quarter by quarter. So, during autumn quarter you'd find out what you were teaching winter. There was no hope of knowing what you're going to have to teach in the spring. So, it was pretty clear that was not a good model, and so what I decided, very simple adaption of the golden rule, is that I ought to try to be the kind of department chair that I would be proud to have as my department chair and I ought to treat people the way I would want to be treated if I were a faculty member in the department. And I quickly decided there were three things that are really most important to faculty; one is tenure and promotion decisions, obviously, another is salary decisions and a third one is teaching schedules.

And so, I became very open and transparent about how I made all of those decisions, and everybody knew everything that was going on. So, there was no queuing up for department information. I would go to the lounge, we had a lounge area, every day with my brown bag lunch and tell people whatever I knew that they might be interested in, or we'd just sit around and talk about other things. But very open-door policy, very accessible. So, I didn't have people lining up outside my office, rushing in, wanting - they'd heard this, they heard that. So, it was just a common sense way, I think, of trying to be the kind of leader that I thought I would want to follow, that that was probably a pretty good rule of thumb. And it

worked out well. I mean, I was able to get a lot of research done and teaching and family and outside activities, because people pretty much left me alone. There was no sort of desperate sense of "we've got to find out what the latest thing is."

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And I also discovered along the way that being open and transparent has a way of disciplining one, that if everybody knows what you decided to do for old Joe, then you need to be pretty sure you can defend it. So, it really helped me make some hard decisions. You always like to help your friends more than people who irritate you, but if it's all out there, you can't play favorites. You got to sort of treat everybody in the same way in a consistent, predictable fashion. And so, I think that alone, just being open and transparent and wanting to be the kind of leader that I would want to follow were very powerful devices for helping me to be effective in that leadership role.

And then I had some others who were kind of dopes in leadership positions. Joan was great. She was a terrific person, very thoughtful, very good. I can remember a couple of conversations in the executive committee there. One time the then president and provost were not talking to each other, which is a little risky for deans and chairs, and so I remember asking her "is this a good time for the peasants to keep their heads down?" And she said "yes, good time." So, she had good sense. And another time we were supposed to—we were told to do something by the then provost that didn't make a lot of sense, and so being a little, being who I am, I asked "well, how seriously do we need to take this?" And she said "you know," she said, "I've learned that mother doesn't always know best." She said "when I was growing up, my mother would always say 'anything worth doing is worth your best effort,'" and she said, "it took me a long time to realize that's not true. It's something you have to do. Doesn't have to be your best effort." So, she was very good that way, in sort of getting perspective on things.

I worked with Gordon Gee, who's now president of West Virginia. I think he's in about his sixth presidency. He and I had a good relationship because I was very candid with him, and I think over time he realized that even when I told him things that he didn't want to hear, that I had his interests at heart. I wasn't playing games, I wasn't grandstanding, I was just telling him from a side perspective, "Is this really what you want to do? Here's what you're getting yourself into." So, he and I got along well and he had some positive qualities that I think I admired and tried to mirror.

Brit Kirwan was president when I was provost; wonderful, wonderful, thoughtful leader, good values, just very effective. And I think I resonated with that. So, I think surely he and others had those influences on me.

**CP:** Well, one last question about Ohio State, it's about a moment in time. You were an upper level administrator at a major American university on September 11th, 2001, and I'm interested in knowing what that experience was like.

**ER:** Well, as life would have it, this is—people talk about the flagships. So, these are the AAU universities who've christened themselves the flagships. The rest of the world can decide on that, but Ohio State is the flagship, or declares itself the flagship, in the state of Ohio. I was at an AAU provost meeting in Newport Beach, California, on the morning of September 11th. My birthday is September 10th. So, I was to be giving a panel, part of a panel discussion among the provosts there at, I think it was a Hilton Hotel, right across the street from Fashion Island, where apparently a lot of sheiks and their wives, at least at the time, would fly in to buy very expensive clothes.

Anyway, I went out jogging and came back and a guy said "a plane crashed into one of the twin towers" and we talked about how a plane had crashed into the Empire State Building back in the forties and wondered what this was all about, went upstairs and then obviously, literally saw the newscast on CNN when they literally showed the second plane like, "what is this, what's that plane doing, why is it here?" And it crashed into the second building. So, not a very glorious story.

I was stuck; everything was grounded until Friday, was the first time that any flights flew. So, I would tell people that I was imprisoned in my gilded cage next door to Fashion Island after 9/11, and finally got out on Friday, and I got out by my secretary in Columbus, managed to get me booked on a couple of flights, or she was supposed to get paperwork so I could get on a couple of flights.

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And there was a flight leaving Los Angeles at nine or something, this was seven AM, so I threw everything together, I got in a cab, took a hundred dollar cab ride from Newport Beach to Los Angeles. As these things go, it turned out the only vehicles they were letting pull up to the terminals were buses and taxis. Everybody else had to do remote parking. So, I got there, I got to the counter and I told the guy they were supposed to be processing, he says "well, we don't have any reservation for you." And I said "well, what do I do?" He said "well, you got a credit card? There's nobody on the plane, we can put you on the plane," because everybody had been cancelled. So, I got a seat on the plane. It was total chaos in the Los Angeles airport. Long story short, I was supposed to fly from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City, I think, and then Columbus, Ohio. I got to Salt Lake City; they had a plane but no crew because everybody'd been grounded. So, some ten hours later or something, they got a crew, and I think I got into Columbus about two or three in the morning, starting out nine AM the previous day on that Friday.

So, that was what happened, and as a result, I also missed a memorial service that they had in the stadium on Saturday, because I had literally just flown in after being up all night. And then obviously, as with many other places, we did—in subsequent years—we did memorial services on the anniversary of 9/11.

An interesting story is that in spring of 2002, George W. Bush had only done commencements at military universities and colleges, and in spring of 2002 he was the commencement speaker at Ohio State University. And all the—you can imagine the security and everything; it was less than a year later after 9/11. Anyway, they had it set up so that the president of the United States—they switched things around. So, there are two things, I'll tell you first a funny story, then a really very moving story. The first was that because the chairman of the Board of Trustees wanted to sit next to the president of the United States, and the president of the university, Brit Kirwan, wanted to sit next to the president of the United States, they switched things around so instead of me being to the right of the podium, they switched me to the left and the president of the university over to the right. But the dopes who set up the cameras forgot to change the camera angle, so throughout the president's speech and everything else that went on, I was on camera because I was where the president of the university normally was supposed to be.

I have this, I don't know if you've seen my cap and gown, but it's Stanford, and Stanford's cap and gown is like the European fashion where your tie goes over the hood and it's really open in front, not zipped up like most American universities. So, there was this apparently brewing scandal when the commencement ceremonies first began, that Ed had forgot to zip his gown. And the president's staff was all hysterical about this and one of the vice provosts pointed out that no, that's actually the style, Ed did not forget to zip. So, they pulled themselves together and got over that.

But anyway, when the president of the United States got up to talk, and he gave a not terribly moving, but a reasonable speech about caring for each other and carrying on and so forth and so on, but when he got up to speak and he was introduced by the president of the university as the president of the United States, George W. Bush, I think there must have been, I think the estimate was close to forty thousand people in Ohio Stadium. It was done in a stadium, close to forty thousand people there. And he got up and people applauded and then it sort of died down. You know, it was polite applause. And then people started applauding again and then people stood up and for the next five minutes people just kept applauding, because he was us and we had experienced this awful, awful thing and he was us and we were unbound and unafraid and strong. And it was just an—it literally gave you chills to see that crowd stand up and understand, for them and for all of us, this was kind of this cathartic moment. You know, no, we're not going to take it. We are not beaten. Very, very powerful moment.

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**CP:** Yeah. Well, as we transition to our OSU, Oregon State, I'm interested first in asking you when you first started thinking that you might want to be a university president.

**ER:** Well, you know before you think of these things, people start thinking about it. If you're doing reasonably well where you are, people start calling you up and asking you have you thought about this, have you thought about that? So, it was really kind of funny. So, it would have been maybe fall of 2001 I got some phone calls, you know, "we're looking for a president or a chancellor, would you be interested?" So, I called Brit up, and I've apologized to him since, I called him, I said "you know, I'm starting to hear from places, what do you think?" And he said "well, you know," he said, "I'd like you to stay here." He says "do you think you can do the job?" And I told him later, I said "you know, my sort of"—I didn't say it to him, what I said to myself is "you bozo, I'm running this damn place and you're asking me whether I think I can do

the job." And I apologized to him a few years later—we're very close friends—I had no clue what twenty-four-seven is like.

I mean, even if you're the provost of a university as large and complex as Ohio State, you go home most days at the end of the day and you're with your family and you lead a semi-normal life. I mean, there's a lot of pressure, a lot of stress, but you have a life. In a position like this, you don't. I mean, it's sort of lived between the margins, in the margins, very demanding, very constant claims on you and on your time that you just can't imagine if you're not in the bubble, doing this twenty-four-seven. So, I've apologized to him since, that I sort of missed the point when he asked me about that.

So anyway, he left actually, at the end of 2002, went back to Maryland, became chancellor there, just stepped down now as chancellor of the University of Maryland system. He had been the president of Maryland at College Park before he went to Ohio State, at Ohio State four years and then off to the Maryland system. So, and then we had a new president, Karen Holbrook, who I liked a lot and worked well with. But so now it's two years later and I'm getting asked about presidencies. And I mean, that's how you get drawn into it. I mean, I knew that I would either stay there, and certainly step down as provost at some point, because I was going on six years doing it, or go somewhere else and do something else. And I felt, well, try something else, the next logical thing is a presidency or a chancellorship.

**CP:** So, the Oregon State job came open and you applied for it. Had you ever been to Corvallis?

**ER:** I didn't apply for it. I don't know, I might be the product of a failed search, because I got a call from the search firm, I think in, I don't know, March or April, asking me if I would be willing to talk to the search firm representative in Columbus, that he would fly out there and talk to him, that I'd been nominated for this, would I be willing to talk? And I said sure, you know, get me information. So, I talk to him and next thing I knew I was asked to come out for an airport interview at Portland, and then they asked Beth and I to come out. And it was kind of a circus event. I know you've talked to John Byrne, I don't know if he told you this story, but the way they had it set up, which was quite bizarre, so this was OUS. So, they had us all come out for a Thursday in which they had three finalists on campus the same day, and we would rotate who we would talk to and stuff. We didn't ever run into each other.

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I saw one of these guys at another table, because the dopes didn't want to go off campus, who were supposed to take me to lunch, so we went to the MU. Well, this guy was in the MU with somebody else. So, that was a little awkward. But they had all three of us there. And then I think it was Friday morning that they met with all three of us, like hour one must be so-and-so, hour two, hour three. And I talked to them, and I think last, and Beth and I went to, there was a place called something like Fox and Firkins or something. We went there to get a sandwich, and then I get this call that they'd like me to come back, they want me to take the job, blah blah blah blah.

So, I come back and I talked to them for a few minutes. So, they want to have a press conference, so they invite people into the Union, hurry up, hurry up to introduce the new president. So, it was like June 5th. So, they introduced me, I say a few things, do a little Q&A, and they all left, because it was their regular board meeting day. So, they all left. So, Beth and I are in the MU and it's like one-thirty in the afternoon and everybody left. Well, then it was sort of like well, we're not flying back till Sunday, so does anyone have an idea what we ought to do? And I think it was Tim White who was interim president, went back to being provost, who said "well, they're having casino night for seniors tonight, so you could go there and greet people, meet some students, you know. It'd be something you could do."

So, we go there, because we didn't know what else to do, so we go there and this fella comes up to me that I hadn't seen before and introduces himself, says "Hi, I'm John Byrne, I used to be president here." You know, well I grew up in New York, somebody walks up to you and says "Hi, I'm Abraham Lincoln, I used to be president of the United States," you tend to be a little skeptical. But I let skepticism slide, because I had no idea who'd been former presidents here. So anyway, we started talking and he sort of said "well you know, as long as you're here you might want to go over to Trysting Tree. The Alumni Association Board is meeting there." And so he said "just follow me in my car and we'll go over there." So, I went over there and that's where I met a number of people who were connected with the Alumni Board. Larry Giustina, I remember, was there. I'm not sure who all else was there. And I said hi to people and so forth, mingled a little bit.



And then he said "well, do you have any plans for dinner?" And I said "no, we didn't know everybody was going to leave right after I got offered the job." And he said "well," he said "why don't I call somebody up and we'll just go to Ruby Tuesdays?" So, he called up Carol Mason. Carol Mason had worked as his assistant when he was president, met us, so the four of us had celebratory hamburgers at Ruby Tuesdays on Ninth Street. That was our big celebration.

**CP:** Welcome to Corvallis.

**ER:** Yeah. So, it was a little different.

**CP:** Well, tell me about the process of transitioning then. You have the job, you're getting settled in - something that John Byrne actually told me in our interviews was that when he became president he had the advantage of being sort of a known quantity, so there wasn't a process of having to build up trust with folks, but you, as a quote, unquote "outsider" didn't have that advantage. I guess I'm interested in the process of settling in and building that trust.

**ER:** Well, you meet a lot of people, you listen, hopefully you're straightforward enough and consistent that people get a pretty quick read on who you are and what you're about. And so, I mean it's a process and you know, anybody in a leadership position, it's a two-way street. It's do people accept you as a leader and do you accept the challenges that you have and opportunities that you see? In a situation, and I think there are a lot of presidents for a lot of different reasons who last a year or two or less, and it's really about fit. And my sense was that this would be a very good fit, coming in. I'd sort of looked at the history and the performance of the place.

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And I remember telling Beth that by virtue of what I knew and the experience I had, that I could help this place do a lot of positive things. And I really liked the people. These are great people. I mean, what's not to like? It's a beautiful place. So, there wasn't a lot of searching out to figure out if we could be happy here and if we would feel comfortable and that this was a worthwhile undertaking. But you'd really have to ask other people, you know, when did you have a sense this guy was durable and not going to self-destruct? But it's like anything else, if you don't know a place, you're hopefully smart enough to listen and to talk to people and to be able to demonstrate you didn't just sit there and nod, you understood what they were saying, and what you were able to say back to them resonates.

So anyway, one of the funnier elements of the start was I, you know—so this is end of July I came here to start, and I decided I needed to come a month earlier than I originally planned, because I really wanted us to take up where the university had left off on creating a strategic plan. There was none. There was something called Vision 2007 which was basically about cost-cutting. I mean, there was no vision. So, I got people to go back and look at all the notes and conversations they'd had with people and then let's write a strategic plan. I had worked on what we call the academic plan at Ohio State, Brit and I and a writer named Chris Perry, who's now retired and living in Vermont, basically wrote their academic plan, or strategic plan. So, I had some experience in it.

And so, we took fall and then in early winter, January, February 2004, we put out the strategic plan for Oregon State University. So, there were a lot of conversations and a lot of drafts and discussion that included the faculty senate, that included the deans and the provost and their staff. So, that was a period of vetting where we had a chance to sort of create a common vision, where I could try to meet people where they were, where they could get a sense of what I would buy into. And so, that's probably when some of the feeling-out process got worked out.

But anyway, in mid-August I'd been here about two weeks, or maybe it was late August. Tim White says "well," he says "you have to give a speech, it's called University Day." So I said "oh," I said, "well, what kind of speech is that?" And he said, "a defining speech." Oh, great. So, I actually spent all of my spare time trying to figure out what I wanted to say to people. And it's really interesting, I mean if you go back to it, it's not great prose, but literally I said "whatever our aspirations are, we can't do it on the backs of students and their families." They had just implemented a ten percent tuition increase, there was a salary freeze and things were looking pretty grim. And so, I said "we can't do this on the backs of students and their families. The states are all cutting public support, that isn't going to end, we'll be lucky to keep them where they are. We obviously haven't been that lucky. We need to have a university-wide fundraising campaign. We have to figure out how to generate the resources and economize on costs if we're going to move this institution forward."

So, that speech ended up, I think in a lot of ways, sort of setting the base, case for what I felt we needed to do going forward. And I don't think we've really gotten off track terribly since. We have decided that University Day is a time where we ought to be a little more upbeat and celebratory, and I shouldn't depress people with all the things we've got to get done in the coming years. And so that's, we moved the State of the University address to the first meeting of the university senate in October, and University Day is more uplifting and positive and celebrates the accomplishments of faculty and staff. But that was an interesting transition.

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**CP:** I'm interested in knowing more about your assessment, and I guess probably the strategic planning processes' assessment of the strengths and the weaknesses of the university at that time. What were you really trying to target, in terms of improvement?

**ER:** Well, to be honest I would say that I had a sense that almost everything could be done better. And at first, I would tell people, about various aspects of our operations, that we weren't ready for prime time. And as I thought about that, I thought, "no, what we're really talking about is there's a level of professionalism in everything we need to do that we're not attaining." And now, that narrative has gone to talking about reaching a level of excellence in everything we do. And so, in virtually every direction, my sense was "we have wonderful people who are giving their all; very unassuming, very hard-working, but we're just not ready for prime time."

And examples would be things like university events. Well, we had people who were event planners, and they were pretty good at throwing a party, but they had no formal training in event planning and no idea other than they were pretty good at throwing parties, how to throw a party. So, you would be at these events and it's like hmm, not exactly. It's just not exactly. And that was true within the university, and the Foundation had interim leadership. The vice president for institutional—for marketing and university relations, Orcilia, had just stepped aside, or just stepped down at the end of December my first year here. So, we had an interim leader in the Alumni Association, an interim leader in the Foundation and a vice president for advancement, marketing and university relations who was just retiring. So, all three of those positions were empty. So, that was kind of interesting. But it gave us a chance to think about how we might do things differently going forward.

I found out when I got here that as an economy move, they eliminated the office of the vice president of research, and I said "well, why'd you do that?" "Well, 'cause it's to cut costs," and I said "no, you know, I really think we need a vice president for research in a research office," because an incredible amount of research was going on there. Obviously the faculty needed support from a dedicated source, so we recreated the University Office of Research. I remember one conversation with a colleague who was in a leadership position where I asked about something, I said "well, what are we doing about this?" and he said "well," he said, "it's not very good but it doesn't cost very much." And I laughed and I said "you know what, we need to figure out what's really important and then spend what we need to spend to get it right. We can't live by "it's not very good but it doesn't cost very much."

And so, there was a real sense that we needed to be more focused and purposeful and pick our spots. If you look at the first draft of the strategic plan, there's something for everybody in there if they want to find themselves and work hard to build something here, they can find it. It's not very precise. It really wasn't until the revision of the strategic plan that we were able to talk about "so, what are the signature areas where we really think we can excel and make a difference in the world?" And I had gotten this perspective, two perspectives from my time in Ohio State that I brought here. One was if we do what everybody else does with the limited resources we have, we'll never get ahead of anybody else in terms of our level of achievement. We'll always be chasing everybody else and they're a better resource than we are. So, if we're serious about something like a top ten land grant university as a goal—there's a funny story to go with that too—then we have to figure out what would it be in twenty or thirty or fifty years, what are the areas of inquiry that everybody is going to be very interested in studying and working in because they are going to be important topics for this country and the world, what are those areas? What are our strengths and weaknesses, and to what extent do we either have the capacity or the potential in specific areas to go there as opposed to worrying about what everybody else does?

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That was the genesis of a conversation about signature areas. What are the areas we have the potential to be important contributors to that will be important to mankind in the long-term? And let's do our damndest to go directly there, not follow everybody else before we get there. So, that really was the genesis for signature areas, and that had occurred to me on working on the academic plan at Ohio State; what is it that sets us apart, how can we distinguish ourselves?

And the story about top ten that's funny was, you know, when we were working on the original strategic plan, I said "well you know, so what is our aspiration? What's our goal?" So, people worked on some material, brought it back and it basically said "we want to be a really good public university." And I said "you know, 'really good' doesn't make the blood rush. We need something else, we need something like 'top ten land grant university,' what do you think?" And they said "oh, I don't know." So, they went away and they came back and said "we want to be a top twenty-five land grant university." I said "come on, nobody talks about top twenty-five. What about top ten?" So, they went away again and they came back and said "well, you know, you could make an argument maybe we're twenty-five to thirty-five, somewhere in there. It's not impossible, if we don't say we're going to do it right away, that someday we could be top ten."

And really the whole point about giving it a number is not that we really care about whether we end up twelfth or fifteenth, that'd still be awfully good in terms of the eyes of our peers, and it would be a statement about how excellent we are at the things we do. That's the point. It's not about rankings, it's not about bragging rights, it's about how effective are you at everything you do. And so, that's how we got to top ten.

But the other lesson that I picked up at Ohio State and brought here that I hope will serve us well going forward is that they have four regional campuses there; Lima, Marion, you got Newark. They have four regional campuses. And Mansfield. And the question that arose there was well, what are the regional campuses? I mean, they're not exactly—and really they were outgrowths of the early sixties when Jim Rhodes, who was governor of Ohio, had this vision that Ohio State would have two hundred thousand students, so it'll have all these satellite campuses around the state. Well, they did four and then they stopped, so they had these four that were kind of the northern ring around Columbus, all of them forty, fifty miles away. It didn't make a lot of sense. And they were always struggling to offer their own degrees and to be distinctive and so forth and so on.

And in the last conversations that I had with people there, to help them realize their aspirations, I had said to the deans of the four campuses, "how do you stop being not exactly? I mean, students are coming to your campuses because you're Ohio State University, but not exactly." So, students who can't get into Ohio State in Columbus are going to Mansfield or Marion, Lima, Newark, but you're not a destination of choice." I said, "You need to figure out what's distinctive about you that would make you a destination of choice."

Well, so when I came here, and it took a while and you can't do anything if you don't have effective leadership—and Becky Johnson is wonderful; she's doing a great job there, but part of the conversation that I had with her predecessors that they didn't pay any attention to and she certainly has, and has been very effective beginning to implement, was, so, why would Bend be a destination of choice? What are the programs the region and the state needs that you could have that don't simply duplicate what we do in Corvallis? So, they have a program in hospitality management, they have a program in renewable energy management engineering, they're developing distinctive programs that will fit the needs of central Oregon.

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And so, I'm very encouraged by that, but it was the experience in seeing these languishing regional campuses in Ohio, once I got to the position of provost and now I'm responsible for what they make of themselves, and figured out they needed to make something of themselves. That was an idea that I was able to bring here when we finally were able to break out and start developing the Bend campus.

**CP:** Well, a theme of all this is sort of the idea of growth as a strategy to achieve excellence, and you gave an address in 2009 that made quite a splash where you set out that program. I'm interested—this is the one in which you mentioned the number of thirty-thousand-plus students by 2025, et cetera, et cetera. I'm interested in sort of the background of—

**ER:** You know what, we're there.

**CP:** Yeah, we are. We are.

**ER:** And I know it shocked the hell out of people, but part of what I observed, you know, if you look at our aspirational peers, their average enrollment is about forty thousand students. We're now at twenty-eight, counting everything. And so, the point I was trying to make then, that I think got badly misinterpreted—I think, no one else may agree—was that there is a notion of critical mass and scale at which you operate. If the average, let's say the average Physics department has thirty-five people and we have twelve or fourteen, we're not likely to be able to compete with them in research and impact, in graduates and other things. There is such a notion that if you want to run with a certain crowd on a competitive basis, you need to think about, are there issues of scale and scope that you need to be able to be involved in?

I had started a program from strategic investments at Ohio State where—and this is at a different scale, obviously—the university would put up a million dollars in continuing funding for programs that could go to the next level of excellence, and the collaborating departments, colleges, schools, whatever, had to come up with a matching million dollars out of existing resources. So, they had to redirect to an area of focus they were going to look at to be excellent, and if judged effective or promising, the university would do a matching million. I had a blue ribbon panel of distinguished faculty do the judging. You know, who should we invest in? The first year we did four, the second year we did four, the third year we did five. They picked four and said "you could do this fifth one, but you need to stop, we've really kind of exhausted things on the horizon that look promising."

The first program that we gave this money to was the department of Psychology. And the department of Psychology decided that if they wanted to get to the next level of excellence, they needed to stop having all the fields that they had—they had twelve different fields of concentration—and that they needed to narrow that down to the three or four most critical areas that Psychology should be working in, because they simply didn't have the resources to be good at everything. They had seventy-five faculty in the department of Psychology. So yeah, the answer is maybe it's scale and scope, maybe you need size. If you don't need size, you better be very, very focused. If with seventy-five faculty they needed to go to three or four, you know, with the numbers we have, maybe we need one; what's the one area we're going to distinguish ourselves in?

So, that speech was intended to say this is, if nothing else, we've got to start looking like everybody else just to compete with them, or we're going to have to find some alternative to that. And I didn't have any quick answers on what that alternative was. And size does matter, but I think it's a combination of size and focus. When I told people that I wanted to explore what our enrollment potential was here, I told them that I wanted to have a sense of what the carrying capacity of this community is. So, now we're going to be thirty to forty thousand students. 40-40-20 made that even more of an imperative. If we're going to be thirty to forty thousand students, where are we going to have all these students? What's the carrying capacity of this community? And people did some work, and I don't know how precise the number is, but we came up with the figure of twenty-eight thousand here in Corvallis by 2025.

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And the idea was that if you went to all of our aspirational peers and you asked them, I would be willing to bet that they all would tell you they're too big. That they got too big, but here we are. And they're not going to go back, because they're living off that money, so they're not willing to get smaller. And what people here don't realize is I actually shrunk enrollment at Ohio State when I was provost. We reduced it by about four thousand students a year, because it was too big and too cumbersome and it was hard to get things to work. And then I left; now it's bigger than ever.

So, the idea here was well, okay so if something like twenty-eight thousand we think is the right number, we need to sneak up on that, because we don't want to get to twenty-eight and find out it should have been twenty-seven. So, that's what we're trying to do. We had the explosion in enrollment that we did between 2009 and now, really a year or two ago, we started to moderate it. But now we're trying to grow it, zero to one, one and a half, two percent a year so that we can accommodate that growth as we move toward twenty-eight thousand students in residence here. Now we're at about twenty-five and then we have students who are online and so forth.

But there was a point to it, it's still valid that you've got to figure out if there are scale and scope possibilities or if, through further focus and concentration, you really can go up against the best, at least in whatever areas you focus on. And there are implications for the size of the institution. Once 40-40-20 came along, if you believed it, then we needed just to

maintain our share by 2025 to have, all told, something like forty thousand students. So, in later speeches I talked about twenty-eight thousand here, seven thousand online, three to five thousand in Bend. We've since added maybe five hundred rotated through Hatfield Marine Science Center in the Marine Studies campus that we've talked about there.

So, we're going to be there, and the more integrated and collaborative all those parts can be, it just means we're able to create that kind of scale and scope possibilities without having to plunk it all down in one place. And given the way technology has changed, so much can be done online or in hybrid online/in person that you don't physically need forty thousand people in one place the way you would have twenty years ago. So, that's kind of where we are.

**CP:** Well, we have a few minutes left, but I want to make good use of our time, and one of the propellants of the growth, for sure, has been the capital campaign, and it sounds to me like the genesis of this was in that first speech that you gave.

**ER:** Yeah, I mean if you read the speech I saw we have to have a capital campaign.

**CP:** So, there was no plan afoot when you came here; that's kind of where the idea started?

**ER:** Well, it was just obvious we had to do that. Now, what I didn't understand was that not only weren't they—I thought "well, they don't even have a president at the Foundation, they have an interim president. They seem pretty unschooled." I mean, a lot of good development officers, good people; they had no idea what they were doing. They didn't have the professional training they needed and they didn't have the leadership they needed. And I thought, well—and they raised forty million dollars last year. Well, it's only later that I learned no, it's more like 29.3.

And so, I'm thinking well, if they raised forty million—I sort of worked with this fellow Jerry May, who is the vice president for development at Ohio State, had come from Michigan, went back to Michigan to become president of their foundation again, he's there now. He was the development guy, I was the guy on the academic side who worked with him on putting together a disciplined plan where you had people submit proposals for what they wanted to do, you had heart-to-heart conversations about what's doable, you set targets, you got people trained, you went after it. It was the Affirm Thy Friendship campaign, and that's part of the alma mater there; "affirm thy friendship, Ohio."

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So, it was the Affirm Thy Friendship campaign and it started out with a goal of eight hundred and fifty million. It raised 1.23 billion in 2000. So, I had a lot of hands-on experience doing that, and I had been involved in their first campaign, '85 to '90 as chair of Economics, when the goal was three hundred and fifty. But they raised four hundred and fifty and everybody was mad. And everybody was mad because there was no organization or discipline in the campaign; virtually all the money went to the medical center and Athletics. So, everybody else who thought they were going to get some didn't get anything, so they were all mad. So, they actually exceeded the goal and managed to get everybody mad at them in central administration. That point stuck with me.

So, when I came here I saw well, forty million dollars and they're pretty dysfunctional, so if we get organized, get some good leadership there, we ought to be able to do eighty million a year. The idea in any campaign is you try to double what your annual giving is. So, we could get to eighty a year, and then if we can do that for five years, six years, we can get four hundred, five hundred million dollars in a campaign. For a first campaign, that'd be pretty good.

So, then Mike Goodwin, Shawn Scoville and colleagues came along. We did the drill, we had people present, we explained what was doable. Just to give you an idea, the initial request from all the colleges and Athletics and everybody else added up to 1.3 billion dollars. We'd never had a campaign. 1.3 billion dollars and six hundred million in facilities. So, it was like no, it's actually going to be, we've got a lot of facilities, it will be a hundred and twenty-five million in facilities and a total of six twenty-five, and we're going to grandfather in the ongoing campaigns in Athletics and Engineering, where they've already started fundraising.

So, that was the expectation, that that could be done. Again, I thought they had raised forty million before I got here, so there was pretty good evidence that people were supportive, even if you had to just sit there and watch the money come in over the transom. Anyway, so we set the goal for six twenty-five, you know the rest of the story; passed that, set it at eight-fifty, passed that, set it for a billion dollars, passed that. It really has been an amazing experience. And I think it really has changed people's attitudes.

So, I mentioned earlier a fellow saying what we do in this particular area "isn't very good, but it doesn't cost much." I don't hear that anymore, and I don't hear people saying "good is good enough." I hear people saying "the sky is the limit; let's see what we can accomplish." We want to be world class, excellent in everything we do, because we serve other people and the better we are, the better we'll serve. It's just really been transformational, not just in terms of the facilities and the scholarships and the lives benefitted, but I think there is an attitude among alumni and friends of the university, and an attitude on this campus that simply did not exist before that campaign. It really has had a transformational affect.

**CP:** Alright, thanks. We're out of time, so we'll pick up with some other OSU stuff next time, thanks.

**ER:** Good. Sure, sure.

[1:14:32]