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Interview with John Turner

**Interviewed by Professor Clarke A. Chambers
University of Minnesota**

**Interviewed on August 26, 1994
University of Minnesota Campus**

John Turner - JT
Clarke A. Chambers - CAC

CAC: This is Clarke Chambers. I'm interviewing Regents' Professor John Turner of the Department of Political Science. In the way of introduction, I would say that there was cut earlier a more than two hour interview with John some five or six years ago that's also on deposit at the University of Minnesota Archives. There, we explored a wide range of interests about scholarship, and teaching, and governance of the university, and community outreach, and other serious matters. This morning, we had thought to zero in, as kind of a postscript, on several issues that are, perhaps, more sharply in focus with the passage of time. We've talked about an agenda that we will begin the conversation with.

John, I know that, as you've just shared with me, you were active in a variety of capacities during the [President C. Peter] Magrath Administration in the evaluation of Mr. Magrath as president of the university. That would seem to be a logical place to begin. I give the initiative, the lead, to you. I may intervene once in awhile with questions.

JT: Certainly. When President Magrath came to Minnesota, he said he wanted to institute a policy of having a review of his performance at the end of five years. I think that this is a good idea for top administrators because it calls their attention to strong points and possible areas of potential improvement. As a matter of fact, I think that this now is policy for most top administrators in the University of Minnesota. I think you have to give President Magrath credit for instituting the policy.

At the end of the fifth year, the first evaluation of President Magrath came. I don't know much about the procedure. The only thing I know about that evaluation was that the regents' professors were called to a dinner meeting of two regents and Duane Wilson, the executive secretary of the regents was there and took notes. Preparatory to that meeting, Al Nier, a regents' professor, and I got together and we wrote a memorandum. The memorandum pointed out the areas in which

President Magrath had been strong and other areas in which improvement, we thought, could have been made. Nobody else knew that we had done this. When the meeting was opened for discussion, I got the floor and pointed out what Al and I had done. I asked permission to read it because, it seemed to me, that that could then be a framework within which discussion could take place. As it turned out, I think that it was a good idea because it did focus the discussion considerably and I think the regents derived considerable benefit from it.

CAC: This was a very small group that was present at this meeting?

JT: Only two regents, yes.

CAC: Okay.

JT: That's because of the state law. If you get more than that, it gets to be a public meeting.

CAC: Okay.

JT: Most of the areas that we had cited for potential improvement did not appear in the final report of the regents. I was told, but this is mere hearsay, that that report of the regents for the first five-year period had been rewritten several times. The second review came, of course, in 1984. The history of that is a little more open . . . at least, some faculty members know a little bit more about it, including myself.

CAC: The procedures were in better shape by then?

JT: Yes. There was a question in the minds of some faculty members as to whether or not President Magrath was going to undergo another review at the end of the second five-year period. He had achieved important gains during that second five-year period; but, there was kind of an unrest among the faculty, the feeling that his leadership was a little weak and not based upon principles . . . a little bit too political, as people said. There was a procedure at that stage where individuals could submit questions to the president in the senate. I wrote a question asking him, in view of the fact that he had committed himself to a review every five years, if he were going to submit to a review this time. Normally a question to the president is signed by one or at most two people; but, this particular question was signed by at least a dozen, including some regents' professors. When he addressed the question in the senate, he said that he would undergo a review. At this point—this is in the record—Paul Gasman took the floor and asked the president if the faculty could have more of a role in the evaluation this time than was the case before. The president, quite rightly, said that that could be the case. It was then a question of setting up procedures and the Faculty Consultative Committee [FCC] assumed that responsibility.

CAC: Were you serving on the Faculty Consultative Committee at that time, John?

JT: Yes, under the very able chairmanship of John Howe, who did a remarkable job. I was serving on the Faculty Consultative Committee as vice-chair of the senate. I wasn't a regular member. I was the vice-chair of the senate.

CAC: But, you went regularly to the meetings?

JT: I never missed any.

CAC: Good.

JT: I served as the vice-chair of the senate two years in row.

CAC: Okay.

JT: We talked about procedures and what we would like to see, particularly, with respect to faculty input. Then, John Howe appointed a committee of three people, including himself, to go to a committee of the regents and discuss the review with them. What we wanted to be sure of was that the review represented a wide sample of opinions and attitudes of individuals within the university community. John Howe was a member of this committee that went to see the regents. I was a member and there was one other person, but I've forgotten what the name was. It was a man, but I've forgotten who it was. We were fairly strong with the regents pointing out to them that there was quite a lot of feeling about the previous review, that the faculty had not been well enough within the orbit. They accepted that. They said that they would like to have more faculty input.

CAC: Is it relevant to know who the regents were who were present at this first informal meeting?

JT: Yes. I can think of some of them.

CAC: It was more than just the two? This was a larger meeting? More of the regents were present?

JT: Yes, but it wasn't all that much larger. Irv Goldfein was there and Wenda Moore. I don't remember whether there was another one there or not. I think there was.

CAC: It was a small group selected from the regents then?

JT: Yes. I think the meeting was rather satisfactory. I think the faculty members got a little more confidence about what was going on. The regents were very amenable to suggestions. We proceeded then to carry out what we thought was the regents' mandate. I'm giving you my recollections.

CAC: Sure, that's all we can get.

JT: The Faculty Consultative Committee for this purpose, the purpose of appraising the president and honing discussions and so on, was increased by adding to it the previous chairs of the Faculty Consultative Committee back to the time of the previous review.

CAC: Ah! Okay.

JT: So, we must have had about five more. Those people came to every meeting. It was also decided that faculty members would be encouraged to write in to the regents' office telling how they felt. I think about twenty or twenty-five people did. I didn't see any of the letters; but I was informed that most of those letters were quite favorable to President Magrath. We also decided that little teams from the Faculty Consultative Committee enlarged would pull together officers at various parts in the governing process as, for example, the chair or SCEP . . .

CAC: Which is the Senate Committee on Educational Policy.

JT: . . . and a whole variety of people.

CAC: Probably SCRAP, too, right . . . the Sources of Planning?

JT: Yes. I can remember participating in one of those. I don't remember participating in any others; but, I may have. There were a good number of these and the people from the Consultative Committee did not participate in the discussion. We merely opened it up, saying in effect, "The regents are conducting a review of the president here. We'd like to get your reaction. What has happened to you? Have things gone well? In what areas could they be improved?" That kind of a milieu was established. In the one that I attended, the general tone of the meeting was quite negative and strongly so. They were from people . . . I have in mind, for example, an associate dean who under normal circumstance might not have been expected to take a strong negative position on this issue. I think you know what the feeling was . . . a feeling that decisions were a little too political and not grounded on sound academic principles, nothing really guiding them, and that sort of thing, and that sometimes there was a shifting of position, and that a lot of time when academic leadership was needed, it was the faculty that gave it and not the president. That was the feeling that some people had. The Faculty Consultative Committee enlarged met as a group to discuss its position on the president at the very beginning of the review process when the gentleman from the University of Wisconsin [Joseph Kauffman] came to conduct it. It was a meeting that lasted about two or three hours. I thought it was a fruitful meeting in the sense that it was objective, we pointed out.

CAC: This was a person hired by the regents to head it as an outside consultant?

JT: Yes. I've forgotten his name. He wrote a book titled, *At the Pleasure of the Board: [The Service of the College and University President]*. I don't remember his name but that's the name

of the book. I thought he was a very competent gentleman. We discussed that meeting first. This was before we had any sessions with any of the faculty in these little team groups that we talked about. Then, we had a meeting right at the very end. Now, before I talk about that, let me talk about the regents' professors.

The regents' professors met informally as a group because they knew that they were going to appear before a two-member committee of the Board of Regents to discuss the review.

CAC: How many regents' professors were there at that time, approximately?

JT: About twenty.

CAC: And most of them showed up for this meeting?

JT: All but one or two.

CAC: Good.

JT: It was a solid group. We discussed the thing at that meeting. Again, I thought it was an objective analysis; but, the weight of it tended to be on the negative side. I think, in a fine sense—this is my own interpretation—it could be looked at this way: that some people had said, "Yes, we've had ten years and things have gone reasonably well; but, we don't really think that he is the person who should lead the university for the next five." I think that would be a fair assessment of the attitude of some of the people on the FCC and probably some of the regents' professors. We met with the two-member committee from the Board of Regents at a dinner meeting. Quite a bit of that discussion was negative . . . quite a bit of it.

CAC: I gather not sharply negative? It was clear and explicit, but not hostile by any means?

JT: Not hostile at all . . . mostly a concern about his professional future and the future of the university. No, not . . .

CAC: Issues of initiative and leadership were central, if I read you correctly?

JT: Yes, without any question. Yes. Then, we had a meeting of the enlarged Faculty Consultative Committee. This was the last thing on the review. The leaders of that group—we had met earlier—informed the person conducting the review that there was unanimous feeling on the part of the group that it would be better if the president did not serve out another five-year term, but that the transition should be done in a humane and sensible way, as for example, by suggesting to him that perhaps he might start looking around for another position. When the gentleman from Wisconsin heard this, it took him off guard. He had not anticipated that this point would be made to him. But, you see, we had quite a bit of evidence. We had had this

faculty input. The meeting we had before we met with him—it was an evening meeting—was a long one and it was very thorough and very fair talking about the sorts of things that the university needed at this point and kind of an ideal type of leadership that would be desirable in order for us to achieve our academic objectives.

CAC: Were there position papers or memoranda?

JT: No.

CAC: This is all spoken? It's all oral?

JT: I kept a folder on the whole thing when I was on the staff.

CAC: Keeping your own notes?

JT: I'm retired now. I kept my own notes and the original copy of that question to the president for example. I had them in a file and when I retired, the archives were interested in my archives because they're about a lot of things. I weeded stuff out; but, I had a file on the presidency. I sent it forward; but, I sealed it for twenty years.

CAC: Okay.

JT: The stuff that I'm talking about now is the stuff that is fairly thorough in my memory; but, it can be reinforced by my file. I think, at that point, that the appraiser went to President Magrath and gave him the news. Now, a member of the Board of Regents, a couple of weeks later, asked me to go to lunch with him—it was a man—and I did. He wanted to discuss the transition, the changeover.

CAC: He was not delegated by the Board of Regents to meet you?

JT: No.

CAC: It was just his own interest.

JT: I'm doing this to fill in something.

CAC: Okay.

JT: I did not, at that point, tell him anything because all of us on the Faculty Consultative Committee were under an agreement not to say anything. We took an oath to keep everything quiet.

CAC: Sure.

JT: I lived up to that oath. I never even told my wife about anything. If you will recall, Professor Chambers, when you asked me to do this, I said that I wanted to talk with John Howe and get his permission before I did this.

CAC: Right.

JT: So, I have lived up to it.

CAC: I understand.

JT: I did not tell this regent anything; but, I'm a pretty good questioner and I got some things from him. The regents didn't know what happened. They never voted on Magrath. They never got out the report that they said they were going to get out at the very beginning of the review. It never came out. There was no report. I think what happened, on the basis of what I've just told you, is that President Magrath heard about this . . .

CAC: I see.

JT: . . . and also heard about the job at Columbia, Missouri, and just resigned. That's what I think happened.

CAC: The chap from Wisconsin never made a formal report in writing to the regents?

JT: I can't answer that. I don't know.

CAC: Okay.

JT: That's all I want to say about it. It was a sensitive and very, very difficult kind of thing to carry out, to become engaged in. I think it was done fairly, honestly, and objectively taking into account the sensibilities of the president and the needs of the university.

CAC: Persons listening down the line . . . I'm reflecting on the fact that when Mr. Magrath came here, he was very young, one of the youngest presidents we had invited to serve in that capacity and even after nine or ten years, he still had a lot of his career ahead of him . . .

JT: Yes.

CAC: . . . whereas, in many cases, when presidents here or elsewhere are reviewed, they're in their mid to late fifties or their sixties, which is quite a big difference of what options they have.

JT: He was in his mid fifties when this happened. I don't know whether in your oral history process you have interviewed any of the regents with respect to how he became a candidate.

CAC: You mean originally when he came?

JT: Yes, in 1974.

CAC: Yes, I've picked up some of that; but, as you know, I've been at this for about six or seven weeks . . . that's all. My major business is still ahead.

JT: Yes. The regents meeting was reported in the press. That's all I know about it. There was a man by the name of [Richard] Ciard who had originally dropped out and then came back in, but he came back in too late. That's one of the reasons why President Magrath was selected.

CAC: I think a lot of that is in the record.

JT: Yes.

CAC: That's an interesting story and it fills in again the informal parts of how great institutions function and how they proceed.

JT: I think you have to give plaudits to the faculty on this thing. It was a sensitive issue. They hated to become involved with it.

CAC: Of course.

JT: But, it was important, I think, for the president to go through that second five-year review because that's become policy to the university now for administrators. If we hadn't gone through with that, it wouldn't have become policy. I think it's very important for the faculty to evaluate their administrators. It took a lot of time. I came to have an enormous amount of respect for my colleagues and their integrity.

CAC: Right.

JT: It was great.

CAC: It wasn't part of your experience nor directly of mine but the departure of Mr. [Malcolm] Moos was not the same procedure. Neither departure was happily done. I think probably the departure of Magrath was very smoothly and very diplomatically done.

JT: Compared with the Moos one. The other one took place in the senate. It was a motion given by Walter Heller. I was there. I was a member of the senate at the time. The academic vice-president, and his assistant, and one or two other people had resigned.

CAC: Yes.

JT: Regents' Professor Heller got up and made a motion that we investigate the leadership crisis in Morrill Hall and that's what did it.

CAC: That was more of a public occasion without formal procedure.

JT: Yes. The one person who was active behind the scenes in this was the late Al Nier. I know this because he told me.

CAC: Let's talk about a few other things. All of us are concerned and I've picked up in a number of my interviews, although I'm just barely scratching the surface so far, that there is an acute awareness by various people, not only faculty but professional and administrative staff as well, of the persisting crisis that the university has faced the last ten years, the last twelve years. Developments don't often have a beginning date like the beginning of a war. I find a general—I won't use the word malaise because Mr. [President Jimmy] Carter appropriated that—uneasiness not necessarily with given individual deans or presidents but just with the directions the university had taken in some regard. Could you share? You've been very close to these matters and very reflective and thoughtful about them.

JT: There are some things that have bothered me; but, I want to offer a caveat to start with.

CAC: Okay.

JT: I have retired now for six years. I made up my mind when I retired that I wouldn't become involved in any university affairs and I haven't.

CAC: But, you're often on campus and you listen carefully.

JT: I'm often on campus. I don't participate in discussions. Because I don't go to the Campus Club as much as I used to, I don't think I have a very good sample. On the basis of impressions, let me say a few things. I sometimes worry about the standards of the university. It's very important for the faculty to ensure that those standards be upheld, that they not be allowed to go lower. I just read *Brief* yesterday where it said that there's some talk about abolishing the Graduate School.

CAC: I missed that.

JT: [sigh] That would be a tragedy to this university. As a matter of fact, I was opposed even to the decentralization of the Graduate School because a strong Graduate School is there to uphold the standards of professional education against weak departments. You don't need a strong Graduate School for strong departments.

CAC: [laughter]

JT: It's the weak one where you need those because they start just giving degrees. When you have an influx of foreign students, as we have now, where a lot of it is based on kinship and things of that sort and the kind of political considerations that take place in places in China, and Africa, and the Middle East and so on, you can end up being a diploma mill. It's very important that we do this. I walk around the offices in the Social Science tower or other buildings in the university and while I'm waiting for an elevator, I happen to see the class lists. You see thirty people on a class list and most of the grades are *As* and *Bs*. I wish I could have had students like that when I was on the staff. [laughter]

CAC: [laughter]

JT: I have been told—I haven't investigated it—that the average grade in the university, at the present time, or maybe it's just the Arts College, is 2.78 or something.

CAC: Yes, *B-*.

JT: Yes, it's a *B-*. It's not a *C*. It's a *B-*. My friends tell me that it's an insult to a person now if that person is given a *B*, that they complain about it. That's kind of too bad.

CAC: Particularly if they're graduate students.

JT: Yes. Some people say, "The students are trained better and we teach better," so, that that explains it. I don't accept that.

CAC: There are statistics on this. I don't have them in my office this morning. It seems to be that it's a gradual erosion that begins in the late 1960s. Do you have any explanation for this development? It isn't peculiar to one department by any means . . .

JT: No, no.

CAC: . . . although some departments are much slower at getting on the curve.

JT: It isn't only true at the University of Minnesota. This is a national trend.

CAC: Right, right.

JT: There are measurement problems here. I don't know that anybody has ever studied this. I would anticipate that, in some respects, during the Vietnam Era there was a fear of students, a fear of collective action, and that some of our standards went down at that point. Some of the standards at the University of Minnesota went down during this period because we had a double transcript. Do you remember that?

CAC: Go ahead.

JT: A double transcript . . . under which we kept the regular transcript here in its full form; but, when we sent it out to anybody else, we removed the *Ds* and *Fs*, or removed the *Fs*, or something. We had a double booking system.

CAC: Okay, I'll check that.

JT: I know. I know. I was in the senate when the head of Admissions and Records came in to make that retroactive prior to 1970. I moved a reference back and I gave a very, very strong speech in the senate and it unanimously went for a reference back. A reference back is a particular type of motion.

CAC: Yes.

JT: It means, in effect, that you cannot consider this motion again until you make a study of all of the other concessions that we made during the Vietnam period to find out what their impact is on the academic program. That killed it right there. We did that. We instituted the four-credit instead of the three-credit system.

CAC: You bet.

JT: Let's not kid ourselves that we demanded extra work because we didn't. We were diluting the quality of the B.A. program by about one-fourth.

CAC: Both of these things came in the late 1960s, early 1970s?

JT: Yes, but, I don't think we're getting away from them very much. I look upon it in a rather professional sort of way. When a doctor looks at a test and makes a diagnosis, he's got to make sure that . . . he's certifying something. When we are evaluating a student and we give that student a *B* when he should have had a *C*, we are making a false evaluation and we are certifying that that student has a certain degree of ability that he or she does not have. I would consider this to be very unprofessional.

CAC: You're speaking of an erosion of grades at both the graduate and undergraduate level?

JT: Yes. In recent years, I've seen more at the undergraduate level than I have at the graduate level.

CAC: I think the expected grade for graduate students is *A* and anything lower is [unclear].

JT: Yes. The University of Minnesota has a proud past. Its standards have always been high. We have placed an emphasis upon excellence and quality. I think it's important for us to keep it that way. That's all I have to say about that.

CAC: I know that you're concerned, as many, many persons are, on holding the strength of the central liberal arts in a large university. One of the first effections in the early 1960s is the Institute of Technology, which takes the basic sciences out of the Arts College, right?

JT: Yes.

CAC: And then, biological sciences not long thereafter and there's a general sense that, again, this goes to the 1960s and 1970s, that the disciplines that are central to a liberal education have if not been ignored have been neglected, relatively speaking. I know that's been a concern of yours.

JT: A great concern. I participated in a symposium for the class of 1939 where I documented all of this and I recently was invited, in December 1993, to give the commencement address for CLA [College of Liberal Arts] and I laid it out at that point. The liberal arts is the core of the university. I think that Minnesota has not stood up well in comparison with other colleges and universities in the Big Ten on this particular score. We have suffered from a lack of funding. Some of this, I think, goes back to the time in the Moos Era when—you'll have to check this because I may have it not quite right—my recollection is that the Medical School had a lot of people on soft money and they wanted to harden up those positions; so, they took a lot of money that should have gone to liberal arts at that point and hardened up the medical position. It hasn't been very good since either. I think under Vice-President [Henry] Koffler, we channeled some money into the Institute of Technology because it was faced with very severe teaching responsibilities and had a lack of personnel. I think I was on the FCC at that point and I sort of favored what they were doing because they had such a case; but, in the meantime, nobody is doing this for the liberal arts. As a result, we, in the liberal arts, are an underfunded and understaffed unit in the university.

CAC: Relative to comparable universities, not only within the Big Ten, right.

JT: Let me give you an illustration, Clarke. Four or five years ago, the Economics Department was evaluated as the most excellent economics department in all the public universities in the United States. It had, at that time, thirty-six members. It was a stellar unit, one of which the university could have been enormously proud.

CAC: And were proud, sure.

JT: Now, things have happened. That unit, at the present time, has only seventeen faculty members full-time. It's teaching load is either 25 percent or 50 percent higher than the average teaching load of any other economics department in the Big Ten institutions. I can't remember . . . I could go back to my notes.

CAC: Substantially higher, in any case.

JT: Yes. I think it's 50 percent. We used to have a core in that department known as the Rational Expectations group or something. Four people had great promise. The last person, a member of that group, left the university one week ago. It's kind of too bad. I think we've been reluctant to reorganize. We've expanded beyond our resources creating new departments and so on; but, whenever we do any retrenching and curtailing, pretty soon they're back again. We've just had back luck in the Arts College and I think the university has suffered. In terms of reorganization, if I could wave a magic wand, I'd bring those hard sciences back into the college and start reorganizing it again with the Arts College as the hub. That would put us then, I think, in the league with other Arts Colleges in the Big Ten and other areas with which we have to compete.

CAC: It's not easy to go home again.

JT: No.

CAC: I'm going to state something which really has a question mark at the end of it. I would suggest it's not a matter of decisions that are made, although many decisions are made along these lines, there must be something systemic in the structure of the university, the resources of the state of Minnesota, for example, that contributes to this, if it doesn't make it inevitable?

JT: The university has been starved of state funds; there's no question about that. In my humble view, the only thing that will really help us is an infusion of funds.

CAC: But with competition for funds that's unlikely to happen from the state legislature.

JT: I want to continue my argument a little bit farther here.

CAC: Okay.

JT: I know the competition is very intense. In my commencement speech last December, I pointed out what is really happening at this university in terms of being starved for funds. I spoke for twenty minutes. Some of my friends were there and they said that you could have heard a pin drop. The audience was startled by what I said. I told them, "I know what I'm supposed to do as a commencement speaker. I'm supposed to tell you that the world is rosy out there just waiting with open arms for you to enter it; but, I can't do that. I want to borrow an ungrammatical expression from the Vietnam Era and tell it like is." And I told it like it was. As I marched back in procession toward the back of the auditorium, I'll bet twenty people came up to me and said, "What should we do?" I was interested in this. Two weeks later, there was a study made and reported in the *Star/Trib* [*Minneapolis Star/Tribune*]. A *Star/Trib* poll was part of it and 51 percent of the respondents said that they would be willing to increase their taxes in order to improve the university. We don't latch onto that. Recently, gubernatorial candidates have been featured in one daily issue of the *Star/Tribune*. Under the general rubric of education,

nobody said anything about the university. Do you know what that means? Their constituents aren't talking to them about the university.

CAC: Right. Yet, they want their children to come here and be well-educated?

JT: That's right. If our university goes down, the worth of our diplomas will decline as well. I think that something could be done about it. As a matter of fact, I had a session with a high level administrator the other day; but, I don't think anything is going to come of it . . . for a lot of reasons.

CAC: Some well-informed persons have noted the pressures on the university itself accelerating the last fifteen years, just to use that as an arbitrary era, an increasing pressure for applied and professional training on the part of effective community groups outside the university, that is, the business community, the agri-business community, the high-tech industries, for example. Do you have any sense of that in regard to the strength of the central liberal arts?

JT: Those pressures are there; but, we, as a state, have not really integrated our higher educational programs effectively. In an ideal world, you've got your technical colleges down at the bottom here performing a very important role for certain types of people, and your community colleges, and then your liberal arts colleges which would do liberal arts but not graduate programs, and then the university that does graduate programs, professional programs, and that sort of thing. Now, you've got many of your liberal arts colleges moving into the master's field and doing it with adjunct faculty. There's one institution in this state which is very heavily into the M.A. programs and a person who participates in the programs tell me that 90 percent of the faculty running that program are adjunct faculty, which means that they don't really have regular office hours, they don't supervise research, and so on; so, what you get is, in effect, a bastardized degree.

CAC: St. Thomas University has gone that way.

JT: Yes, I think that's probably true. I saw—I cut it out—an ad in the paper the other day . . . Metropolitan State University, which doesn't even have a regular faculty, offering master's degree and Ph.D. work. I couldn't believe my eyes.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape 1, Side 2]

JT: . . . regard, from the state point of view. This Higher Education Board should have been riding herd on this. On the other hand, I think the university is partly to blame for this because the big demand is at the master's level for professional degrees and we haven't felt equipped to meet that demand; so, somebody else has come in and taken it.

CAC: Others would point out that a lot of the foundation, philanthropic, the endowment monies have gone into the applied and technical as opposed to the, particularly, the graduate level . . . computer science, for example, that whole development there, or the institute generally, or, again, agri-business, and the new growth of the Carlson School of Management, all of which, some people see, detracts or takes resources away, potentially, from the core of liberal arts.

JT: We have more educational institutions per 1 million people than a lot of other states. I did some work on this when I was preparing for that symposium. I don't remember the figures now; but, we're over committed when it comes to educational expenditures throughout the state in higher education. What it means is that you put, say, a junior college in a certain area. Then, that legislator and other legislators nearby, become tremendously interested in that and not so much the university. Then, you get into a real political problem. We've got to do a selling job, I think, to the people of the state of Minnesota and also to the legislature as to the importance of the university because if it continues in its decline, the state is going to suffer.

There's one other thing—I think we're coming toward the end here—I'd like to talk about. It's very controversial and I hope anybody listening to this in the future will not misunderstand me. I am a great believer in diversity. If anybody looks at my record as a staff member, as an executive director of the International Studies Association, they will see that I have always supported the cause of women and minority groups. As a matter of fact, when I was a candidate for the Council of the American Political Science Association, I was endorsed by the women's caucus.

CAC: Good.

JT: I was endorsed by the women's caucus even though I'd filled out a questionnaire and placed a great deal of emphasis on merit and some people said, "He's a merit person. We don't want to endorse him." Then, some of the women from the International Studies Association got up and supported me and said, "Don't say that about that man!" Then, I ended up getting an endorsement. That's my overall position. I have always understood it to be this and I worked that way when I was on search committees—I served, for example, as chairman of the dean's search committee at one point—what did I do? I wrote letters to every women's college in the country, every women's professional organization in the country soliciting names . . . the same thing with blacks and Hispanics. The purpose of that was to draw as many into the pool as possible. I understood Affirmative Action to be that after you've done that and you've got them all into the pool, then, you apply criteria and they are the criteria of competence. I haven't talked with anybody about this. I don't know whether people in the office that is responsible for these affairs think that Affirmative Action doesn't work that way anymore . . . I don't know. It looks to me as though the pressure for us is to somehow or other fill a quota. We've got to get more women into positions and I agree with that.

CAC: In an implicit and covert way, you're suggesting?

JT: Yes, yes. I agree with that that we have to do that; but, they have to meet this merit. They have to meet the achievement and qualifications in order to do it. I have heard criticism of some of the women at the university who currently or recently have held high posts. Some of them, in the eyes of a lot of people, fall short of this qualification standard. When we hear so much about diversity . . . it is very important that our institution become diverse. [sigh] But, when you're listing all these requirements and goals that you'd like to achieve, there's one word I think that's often absent—I'm going to change that—one word that's always absent and that is excellence. Excellence. If we forget that, we've forgotten a lot. I'm not even sure, as a matter of fact, that we help the cause of minorities and women by reducing our standards and giving them positions for which they're not really qualified in competition with others. Besides, we have enough qualified people in those categories now that we don't have to go out or our way to just give it to somebody. I think we've come a long way, and the pool is getting bigger now, and there are some women and minorities in this university who have come up by their own bootstraps, and they have made it because they are good.

CAC: You bet.

JT: That's the kind of excellence that we should be encouraging and the kind of diversity toward which we should be striving. I am willing to entertain the proposition at this point that we have lost some of the core elements of Affirmative Action in terms of the way it was supposed to work. I remember one search committee I was on. [sigh] We did everything at my insistence in terms of soliciting these colleges and professional organizations . . . we did all of that; but, there was still pressure in the final six . . . we have to have a woman. We ended up with a woman as a final six; but, she shouldn't have been there. She should have been eliminated about two or three rounds later. I've got to say something good about the two really good professional women that were on that committee. When the time came for us to discuss this woman candidate, I said to myself, "I'm going to see now who has really got excellence. I'm not going to say a word until somebody else does." The first two people that spoke were the two women who said, "This woman does not live up . . . "

CAC: Not yet.

JT: That's it. Maybe some other time when she's got more experience but at this juncture, no. We have to have qualifications. That's about all I have to say here.

CAC: You have shared for posterity as you have shared for the forty years you were here on the faculty honestly, and candidly, and well-informed. I thank you, again, John.

JT: Thank you.

CAC: I would urge whoever is listening to this that the longer account of teaching, and research, and other related matters is in an earlier set of tapes which are equally engaging.

JT: I should point out, too, that I was one of ten or twelve people selected by the American Political Science Association to have an oral interview about the association and the field that I was in.

CAC: Good.

JT: That has been transcribed.

CAC: That's on file where?

JT: It's on file right now at the University of Kentucky; but, eventually, I'm going to get a copy and if I get a copy, I'll put it in my archives. The point is that it's about six hours long and it has a lot of stuff in it. It's probably better than that original interview you had.

CAC: More focused on the professional part of your career?

JT: Yes.

CAC: Bravo!

JT: It's kind of funny . . . they'd ask me questions and I'm a little bit reluctant sometimes to come out with full answers when it involves me. There are a lot of times in this interview that the person who was doing the interviewing would fill in stuff that I hadn't given; so, it's a little artificial in that sense.

CAC: I could share with you the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet at St. Catherine's tried to initiate the oral history project for the sisters, the nuns, twenty, twenty-five years ago. I was a consultant for awhile. They discovered that the nuns were so disciplined to say nothing good of themselves and nothing bad of anyone else that there wasn't anything left to say. [laughter]

JT: Yes.

CAC: It was not a very good oral project. In my experience on this one is that it's going better. Thank you again, very much, John.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[End of the Interview]

Transcribed by:

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