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Interviewee: Sheila Stearns

Interviewer: David Brooks

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David Brooks: Okay, it's October 27, 2006, and I'm David Brooks, the interviewer for The University of Montana's Oral History Project. I'm doing the second part of a two-part interview with Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns. Ms. Stearns, I was hoping you could start out by talking a little bit about what your relationship as the Commissioner of Higher Education is with The University of Montana in particular. Projects you work on that are UM-particular or the people you tend to work with.

Sheila Stearns: Okay. Thanks David. As commissioner, of course, I work with all the 11 institutions that the Board of Regents directly governs, but the two largest are The University of Montana and Montana State University. I do work, probably the most, with the two presidents. In the case of The University of Montana, the person I visit with the most, or consult with, or who consults with me, is President Dennison by far, far and away. There are times, certainly plenty of times, that other people in my office will—for example the chief fiscal officer in my office will connect very frequently with Vice President Bob Duringer. Or the chief of Human Resources person in my office will connect frequently with Rob Gannon, in UM's Human Resources Office.

All of the chief officers at UM are people that we consult with. They ask us for advice, we ask them for advice, as we try to—they have immediate responsibility, primary responsibility, for The University of Montana and its set of campuses, whereas we have that responsibility not for day-to-day operations, but for general policy and facilitating governance for the Board for all of the institutions. So I meet often with President Dennison, as we just discussed, I came from his office. I do come to Missoula quite frequently because of family here, so I would say I talk on the phone more frequently with President [Geoff] Gamble of MSU, but I actually see President Dennison in person more often, and often on a Friday afternoon, because I'll come early enough to see family.

We cover a range of issues [during the meetings], and there maybe—usually I would say two-thirds of the time it's President Dennison raising an issue to me, and one-third of the time it might be me raising an issue with him, a question, about one of the UM campuses. It could be about budgets, it could be about personnel, it could be about a policy change that the University needs. It could be, and frequently is, about some initiative that The University of Montana, and obviously in particular, President Dennison is considering. He and I will visit about [whether something] is feasible, under which policies, how do you bring it forward to the Board's attention, what would be the best way to do that. Does it make any sense? Is it an innovative idea but maybe could never have legs?

So we visit quite a bit because I see part of my role as to help campus executives, particularly the two that report directly to me, and that's George Dennison and Geoff Gamble of the two flagships, to encourage them to be innovative and to have, frankly, all the—I hope a lot of rein to run their institutions. But, nobody in the public sector, and that includes any private corporation that's traded on the New York Stock Exchange, nobody in the public sector has total [free] rein. They have to check in with their board of directors, and in this case that's the Board of Regents, and I'm their chief staff person and chief executive. So it's through President Dennison, by and large, that I interact in terms of how to help, how to advise, how to get out of the way, whatever is needed.

DB: So you mentioned a few times the words “innovative” and “give them as much rein as possible.” Have those been your, if you can say guiding philosophies or your goals in relating with the university system? Or do you have anything that you would call guiding goals?

SS: I would like to say that's been my guiding philosophy for the—this is going into my fourth year. I would say initially, you know, it depends on the board of directors, the Board of Regents, the particular group you're working with. It has changed, they change every year and then there were a couple of resignations so it has particularly changed. I believe that when I first arrived back in the state that first year, that the Board of Regents was in *some* ways interested in innovation and in other ways still feeling its way about “do they want more control, or less control?” Frankly, I need to reflect that to a degree.

My personal philosophy, that I think is ascendant now with the Board of Regents, is that they share it and perhaps in some ways have discerned it from me and in some ways have encouraged me to develop, is for flexibility in the ways that matter. Management flexibility for campuses to be innovative, creative, but at the same time not to be innovative in ways that don't matter and only interfere with accountability. And I'll give you an example.

A number of years ago, the State Legislature and the Board of Regents, in effect decreed that all the units in the university system would be on the Banner Software Administrative System, the informational technology software. That was somewhat troubling to Montana State University [in] Bozeman, which had already begun to invest and had thought it wanted PeopleSoft. But it was determined that which software package you use, really that's not a way you needed to be unique. And if you had too many kinds of uniqueness, then it would be impossible for the Board of Regents to be accountable to the executive branch or to the legislature or to the public. Because you'd never be able to pull the data to compare, to track trends across the whole system in a consistent way.

So that's an example. There are some areas in which the Board has said, no, we don't expect creativity in some basic areas. Find the ways that are unique to your mission but that will not stymie accountability, tracking of basic information in an organized coordinated way. So yes, I would say it would always have been my preference, but it's only in the last year or so that it is probably a prevailing philosophy.

DB: Is that—I mean you mentioned your personality has sort of ascended in your role, to guide the Board of Regents—is that a philosophy that is just something that's part of your personality, do you get that from other university systems, any other universities in particular, other comparable Boards of Regents? You know, I guess what are your influences in doing that?

SS: Right. A little of each of the aspects that you mentioned. My preference, whether it's within my own family, with people I work with, with colleagues, has always been to have individuals be just as smart and independent as they can be. And that includes, now in the position I'm in, the chief executive officers that I work with. It was also true when I was a college president with the vice president. Frankly, it's almost lazy, in the sense of, if I have to look over every single decision a vice president was making when I was on campus then I would be way—I'd have to work 80-hour weeks instead of 60-hour weeks...and that [60 hours] was plenty. So part of it's my own preference, and part of it is the changing whims or the preference of the Board. Some like more control, some are very content to be at 50,000 feet instead of 15,000 feet.

Part of it is learning on the job. I've learned a lot in three and a half years, too. That it's really best to at least try not to control very much. I just have to be accountable to the Board and make sure they're well informed. So I think—and then I've observed good examples in other institutions, my colleagues across the country. I pay close attention and stay in touch with those that seem to me are doing a particularly good job. I hear that from their presidents. They say they have great respect for their state higher education officer and I say, why, and try to learn from that. So it's a blend of all those influences that you listed.

DB: What are some of the initiatives or innovations that you've seen in your three and a half or four years as commissioner, on this campus in particular, that are noteworthy?

SS: Well, some of them may have been mentioned by President Dennison in his interview because there have been several recently. We actually, practically in honor of The University of Montana and President Dennison's sort of wide-ranging experience—things such as planning for expansion into the South Campus, planning for a couple of years now of possibly extending The University of Montana to China. So those are two. A third one, perhaps the indexing of fees for auxiliaries, so that you would not have to go back to the students every single year for kind of a vote from the Student Senate, if the Student Senate agreed that consistent with keeping them informed and with the inflationary pressures. You know just various, whether it's relatively small but an innovative idea to be more efficient administratively, or whether it's a big issue, such as should we have a campus in China, or an outpost or whatever you'd call it.

So those are some examples, but this campus more than I would say almost any other one in the system [is very innovative] and I attribute that to President Dennison's long experience in higher education and at The University of Montana in particular, to have the confidence, you know to—. And he's well-read, widely read, so he comes up with lots of ideas and I'm sure he censures a lot of them himself, but some come forward to me. We talk or he'll say, we have this

idea, we've looked at it. He doesn't bring half-baked ideas forward, not to my level. But he'll say, what do you think? What should we flush out? Do you think...? You know. So those are just some examples.

DB: You know, not that he doesn't do plenty of other things, but I think most people recognize President Dennison's legacy so far at The University of Montana is in the number of new buildings and physical structures that the campus has gained. How involved are you in that sort of building of the campus, because it certainly—I mean it's going on right out the window here with the new Journalism School, there's talk of buying a golf course up in the—I think Highlands Golf Course now, or building on what is now the University golf course. How much of that are you involved with?

SS: President Dennison consults with me very quickly and in any depth that he wants or that I feel I need in order for us to keep the Board well-informed. So, I'm not involved in starting it or stopping it. What I am involved with is facilitating. Our office, by statute, or at least by Board policy, is expected to prioritize what is called the long-range building plan for all the universities. So every major building project ends up on a list, every two years, that the Legislature's Long-Range Building Committee, looks at. And that's—everything goes on that list with an estimated cost, [but] only if the Board of Regents approves that it goes on the list, even if it is going to be privately funded.

So in that respect, I am very involved and so is—especially is a member of my staff, the associate commissioner for Financial and Administrative Affairs. So there's not one major building project, and even the minor ones have to be signed off on us, but the big ones all come to our office, and from us to the Board, and from the Board to the Legislative Long-Range Building Project Committee. We talk them over. The University might lobby for something that might be state-funded to be higher in the pecking order than perhaps a new Education building on some other Campus Y, when we would like a Science Building on the UM campus.

But most of that angling and making the case for the need goes on to my staff members. I'm kept informed about it. If I agree, usually if the architects have agreed and my staff have looked at it. You know I'm not going to be out there looking to see the possible blueprints. I'm very—with all the building, either I or, in most cases, my predecessors, said well, A, great idea, or B, not so sure, probably won't be ranked very high, or C, the only way you'll ever get that is to raise the money for it yourself. In which case the President sometimes will say, I want to try that anyway and the Board will, generally, say yes to that and just puts down their—it's at the end of a list that says "authority only," meaning you have the authority to go out and raise the money and try and build it, but go find the money. And that was the Don Anderson Journalism Building, was an authority only, maybe close to a hundred percent privately fundraised. I'm very much involved with that. Or expected to have some responsibility for the oversight of the building plans.

DB: So I mean by definition, your office is in this really interesting position of being between the State Legislature and executive branch and the University's executive branches and, you know, you've got the funders and the spenders that you're working between.

SS: Exactly. You've described that very well, and it's by Constitution, the State Constitution, that we are in that spot. And I think the 1972 Constitution put us in that spot because of how difficult it was for previous governors and legislatures to sort through that without a body, such as the Board of Regents, with considerable constitutional clout, to be there. The Legislature can always look at a long-range building list, let's say, that the Board of Regents has prioritized and say, well, we're the ones who appropriate. We're going to move building #5 up to first priority, if we have blank dollars to spend. But they don't usually, because now as then (pre-Constitution), they know they don't, in general, have that expertise. And they're pretty wary about flexing political muscle. They try, instead, if you're from the Butte legislative delegation, to work with the Billings legislative delegation, or the Missoula legislative delegation, to say, you know, maybe we could flex some muscle, but maybe it's best if we convince the rest of the legislators who would really like that new building in Butte, at the Tech campus right now, that you wait your turn. And that the process that the Board of Regents uses, under the authority of the Constitution, was established for that exact reason.

DB: And, of course, tech schools did get a bunch of money out of the last Legislature. But you know, aside from buildings, when I follow the Legislature, when it comes to university issues, things stick out for me that probably, and you'd know better than I, that your job is not always probably particularly easy or it's not always celebratory issues, things getting approved. There are plenty of things that don't get approved, no doubt. And I'm think in particular of this University has had to defend its Environmental Studies program, Forestry. It seems like things that deal with the environment here at this school, they've had to justify curriculum many times to the Legislature because of—and this may be simplistic, —but because of the strong lobby for traditional extractive industries in the state. That seems to be the two sides of it. Whether that's a simplistic analysis of it or not, what I'm getting at is, what are some of the difficult situations you've been put in, being between these two bodies?

SS: Okay.

DB: UM in particular.

SS: Right. I will say that, as you've expressed, it's a very interesting issue and as you said, admittedly simplistic because that's what shows up in the press. Our office would certainly intervene...I think you said something interesting. You said our office or whomever getting between the Legislature, and perhaps inappropriate meddling in curriculum at a campus. What has generally happened, and I've observed this long before I became Commissioner, is the attempt. There's a real key difference here between a few *legislators* rather than the *Legislature* as a whole.

Generally, my office, working with representatives of a campus such as UM, if its Environmental Studies program or some of its students or a few of its faculty have done something to ruffle the feathers of a couple of legislators, we'll intervene in the sense of generally trying to defuse it, to explain [that] they do have the right of free speech. They can write essays, they can—just because a student chains herself to the federal courthouse on some issue does not, frankly, reflect on or have anything to do with the curriculum and really legislators cannot—so it's just an education communication.

Frankly, [since] the early '90s, the budgets come to the Board of Regents in what they call the lump. [This] removed the—it had pluses and minuses, but a real plus was that it removed the ability of a legislator on an appropriations committee to go in and take away, let's say, \$400,000 for the Environmental Studies program. They could never, even pre-1991-92 have targeted Environmental Studies, but they could have said, we're so frustrated and we think we can get enough people to vote with us, we'll try to remove that dollar amount, in effect to punish UM and maybe that will motivate their president or whomever to make those people be more civilized or politically correct from their perspective. But that has happened very seldom, because they cannot affect the line items of individual campus budgets.

So the complaints are as they should be, at a higher level. They are with a legislator going to see President Dennison or Bill Johnston, the lobbyist, who then will say, you know what senator, some of our faculty in that particular discipline would love to visit with you and they set up some interim conversations and they end up visiting that fellow's ranch and it all—you turn it to your advantage using communication rather than any other way. So that's more how it works. I am in a position plenty of times to go with campuses when they're celebrating, but you're right, more often my office is called in or called by a complainant, whether they're in an elected position or a citizen or a parent or a student, when there's a concern. And we generally diffuse them and manage them quickly and get them back to the campus where the people can really deal with it as soon as possible.

DB: So earlier you mentioned in your conversation about the software and MSU wanting some unique software and perhaps that not being where they should be unique. In saying that you said that you use that software, or having everybody on the same page, to compare and to track trends in the universities. What have been the trends that you've seen in this University or in the system that you've been interested in as a commissioner of Higher Education?

SS: My job on behalf of the Board of Regents is to track global issues [such as] as enrollment, or percentages of resident students to non-resident students, budgetary trends, cost of education trends. Are they going up at the research universities and staying stable at the two-year units? So they're kind of macro-trends in terms of managing the overall university system and therefore defending to policy makers, the governor, citizens, and legislators that the money is being well spent. Even though it's millions and millions and millions [of dollars]. Because they always think if there's that much money, there just has to be change just falling through the cracks, and waste.

I mean, I think that about the military, you know. Yet, if I were administering a little office someplace, as I knew someone who did, with the military, and I could see how spartan was that little office and how they struggled to get their [needs met]... You know maybe the waste is someplace else, but our job is to track trends so that even if you see—let me use the military analogy again—a \$600 toilet seat, that you know overall—

To change back to the university system, if you're spending \$9,500 per student, and that's been the trend, it's been going up slowly, no faster than the rate of inflation, or maybe a little faster. Then you look at the trends compared to the higher education price index, not just the consumer price index, to find out if that trend is defensible. But if you're spending \$9,500 per student and the other 14 states in the West to which you're most comparable, that their universities which are most like yours, are spending \$11,500 per student, the macro 50,000-foot trend shows you that while someone may see a custodian leaning on a broom for an hour, when they think she should have been working and, ah hah! This is the reason our tuition is so high! The trends enable us to get away from the anecdote and look at the overall metrics.

Because then you know, quite frankly, most of your expense has to do with good people in a knowledge economy. And you can show that if that's what you're spending, then you have to be at a disadvantage in competing for faculty or specialized employees at any level, whether in the computer center or for a provost for the university. They are high demand, they're mobile, they can go anywhere in the country. If you're only spending \$9,500 and 80 percent of your budget relates to personnel, you may have a big problem. And you probably do. Especially as the baby boom employees, primarily faculty and staff, begin to retire.

So that's why you have to have the software system, not only so that the Board can track it but, here's another important factor—so that the executive branch and the Legislature trusts you. If they cannot monitor this as well and see that you're comparing apples to apples, across your campuses, then they begin to think you're making it up. Or you could be. Or a campus could be fudging. So having the data be as clear as possible, as transparent as possible is one of the areas where, frankly, it's just best you're not too unique.

DB: You know one example that I think people were asking those very questions [about] in your time as Commissioner and in my time here has been the audit of the University's Athletic Department. That was, I believe, just two years ago.

SS: Yes.

DB: Can you briefly describe that? You know, what has become of that, and what was that issue?

SS: Yes. That was an issue that the Board, three to five years earlier, had said, let's not run any more negative fund balances. Now in the general fund areas you always had to balance your

budget, but in the auxiliaries you could, in some, let's say residence halls, have a bit of a surplus one year and the other area could have a bit of a negative and your job as the executive was to balance it out. Frankly, anyone who runs a big business kind of knows that. There are some areas that—and you watch. If you've got the Ford dealership and you're losing in marketing but you're gaining in, whatever. You watch it. You try to get the balance.

The Board said, we never want any negative fund balances. That may or may not have been a wise decision, but they made it. That said, then, they gave the universities a couple years to get their athletics—a couple of them, UM and MSU, had some negative fund balances going—they were balanced with positives in other areas of their non-general fund. The University [of Montana's] President Dennison asserted, after two or three years, that they had it whipped; that they were balanced. He was very pleased and proud and he should have been.

Then they discovered that they really, I mean he really felt, and I think he's right, that he was misinformed by people who didn't mean any harm but were not as on top of the finances as they should have been. That they had solved it for one year, but they still had not solved the structural expenditures to stay balanced. So that was what was discovered early in 2004. Then as they dug a little deeper they realized that an accounting transaction that should have been recorded in '02-'03 was pushed over July 1. Was it a mistake? Was it intentional? I'll never know. Was it really malevolent? I don't think so. But it created enormous distrust for a while of President Dennison himself [and] certainly the athletic director and the whole enterprise, the fiscal side of the house at UM.

I really think it was—it certainly wasn't a molehill, but it need not have been a mountain. But some of the initial reactions and information caused it to catch fire and then my office needed to step in to regain trust with the legislative audit committee and with the Board of Regents and others and empower an independent panel with some UM folk but mostly non-UM folk to look at what happened and to verify was there any—was it inept? Was it deceitful? Or somewhere in between, in that continuum? I think that the panel did, and there's a book an inch thick that explains their findings. It was primarily well-intentioned people, not making particularly good decisions. So, they got that sorted out. Made their plan to correct it. They had five years to correct it, they corrected it ahead of schedule. It was resolved.

DB: You know this is something I should have asked President Dennison as well because athletics is one of those things that plenty of people, when they look at a university or educational system, think maybe that's extraneous. Or how is that important to a university or educational institution, you know, which this primarily is. Knowing that you're a Griz football fan, answer that question for me anyway. How, from a Commissioner of Education's standpoint, is a big athletic program at a large university important?

SS: I definitely want to distinguish that from my being a Griz fan.

DB: Sure. Of course. [laughs]

SS: Okay. If I were to design universities and university systems, in this day and age, maybe even 50 years ago, I would not probably do it with athletic programs. I think they've grown up organically with the colleges and universities in this country. And anything that grows up and is part of the culture, part of the organism, to cut it off—it can be done. When I was chancellor of UM-Western I closed down wrestling. Oh. You'd have thought that I—and there are people to this day in Dillon who will not speak to me. So it is part of the cultural connection to both the local community and the community broadly defined. One or two of the people who won't speak to me are wrestling coaches far out in Eastern Montana. So community broadly defined, in the whole state.

I think there are plenty of positives [in] well-run programs that have all the controls in place to really emphasize academic integrity for those athletes. Sometimes we overuse student athletes when we know why many of those students came to The University of Montana. They came to play basketball or football. Let's be honest. But our job is, being that that is the way the culture has evolved, to make sure that they use that opportunity given to them to earn educations and become terrifically good, educated citizens just like the rest of our students who have other extracurricular activities. So I think that it does create a sense of community, of many colleges and universities, that is very positive. It does enable lots of students to bond to the campus. The graduation rate of student athletes, at least at a place like The University of Montana, is higher than the student body as a whole. They finish in fewer years than the student body as a whole. They have a higher grade point average than the student body as a whole.

What I wish is that we had more things that that same broader community would put money into, give scholarships to, pay to attend, to help us to help a lot of other student groups bond that closely with their institution that enables them to get maybe a little bit more academic advising, maybe a little bit more TLC from a group of friends. So, athletics have grown up organically in this country. I think if we were to go back a hundred years and reinvent everything, knowing what we know now, we might not connect ourselves so closely to athletics, but here we are and there are plenty of positives, including for the students themselves. So there it is.

DB: Earlier I asked you about your relationship with UM in particular and your work on things with UM. What, as of right now, after four years, or better yet, what down the line do you hope people will look at the University and see your handprint on? What we'll really be able to identify and say that, yeah, our commissioner of Higher Education at the time, Sheila Stearns, that's her.

SS: Really, if I'm doing my job well, most people in connection with any one of the particular universities won't say that. If I'm doing my job well they will say, President so-and-so did a great job and one of the reasons he or she was able to do a great job was because there was a supportive, relatively wise commissioner who helped get initiatives through or helped blunt criticism or helped redirect it or whatever. So I should be a background person. The credit

should go to the chief executive officer. I really believe this. I hope that the presidents and chancellors I work with believe this. I should be a background figure that very few people would know, that this good thing might not have happened if my experience or my wisdom or my common sense did not help that chief executive officer make it happen.

DB: Well, we have the longest-serving president at the University right now, which you've been in on at least the last couple of years so—

SS: Yes.

DB: We can certainly see your hand there, if that's what you're trying to do is help presidents be successful.

SS: Oh, yes. That is my goal. And interesting for President Dennison, it was my goal from the day he came, even though—I don't know if we talked about this last time, that I was a candidate when he became president.

DB: I don't recall us having that discussion, no.

SS: [I was a candidate] for that presidency. I was a finalist. I was a little young and a little green. I think they picked the right person. You know, I was disappointed not to get it, but I certainly thought, when I saw his credentials, that yeah, that makes sense. He was secure enough to keep me on as [a] vice president. I think there are people who might have been hired who would have said, I don't want someone that close to me as a VP who wanted my job. But if you know him, and I think you do know him a little bit by now, he's a very confident, wise, experienced chief executive. Right from the get-go, although he'd not been a president at that point, I think he knew that I—or he would at least know within a few months or a year, if he could really depend on me to do the same thing that I'm doing now, as vice president. That is, be kind of behind-the-scenes to help him be the best president he could be. Because if you have a really good president, or chief executive or chancellor or whatever, then you pretty much have a successful university.

So from 1990-93, when I was the vice president working for President Dennison, to these last few years when I've been a commissioner working with President Dennison, my goals have been the same—at least for those in the interim I was in a different role, but—and that is, help him be as successful as he can.

DB: The other thing you mentioned when we were talking about tracking trends was making comparisons. What in the university system in Montana—how is The University of Montana unique in the university system of the state, if not universities at large?

SS: The University of Montana is unique in the system because of its storied history and respect in the state. For so many years, Montana State University, which has grown immensely and

which is a fabulous institution, but for the first half of the century it was a little bit in a shadow of *The University* over in Missoula. Well MSU has certainly come into its own, but that history of the University [of Montana]'s sort of—educating a lot of professionals, the pharmacists and the journalists and the lawyers and, you know, the foresters, has given Montanans a sense of pride in it and awareness of the ascendant role it plays in Montana being a place that is attractive to the educated, creative class in this country.

There's a new book by [Richard] Florida called *The Rise of the Creative Class*. And The University of Montana, and now increasingly Montana State University because it gets a lot more of the science research dollars and as the century went on, —and certainly now into this century— science, technology, math, engineering certainly has helped MSU. But The University of Montana, and now its role with the pharmacy and allied health sciences, its growth there, the forestry [school], I just think—my sense of it across the state is, and partly this relates to having a president with 16 years of experience— is well-respected across the country. Occasionally someone's disappointed in the press or something with one of his initiatives, but has just given a sense that we have a first-class university in this state. Then they think about it and they think we really are very lucky we've got two first-class research, teaching, creative universities in this state. But The University of Montana, and maybe it's my bias with it being my alma mater, has a special aura there and I think it's across the state.

DB: So from your sort of bird's-eye view of the university system, where are we headed?

SS: The university system is more than most people realize. [It is] the engine for the state's future: economically, culturally, and therefore increasingly politically. The knowledge age, the information age, has—we've always played a strong role there but I see that future governors, the current governor, immediate-past governors, believe that the university system is about as important an organism, an entity, as the state has to achieve goals to make the state and its citizens more prosperous, more healthy, more engaged and involved, have fewer problems, you know prison problems, you name it. College-going [attendance] rates and the presence of strong higher education across the state are the best indicators and predictors of a strong state in almost every way that you could measure strong. I think the university system in this century will play an even stronger role in Montana's destiny than it did in the last century.

DB: And how long are you going to be where you are, helping guide it?

SS: I have no idea. It could be...I just had my 60th birthday.

DB: Congratulations.

SS: Thank you. About six weeks ago. And I love my job, and this will be my last formal job. So what I need to decide is if there's a book I want to write, or if there are causes I want to push, or if there are women and children's issues that I want to pursue. Then I couldn't [continue to be Commissioner]. It would only be because other—you don't live forever and you should

decide when you still have time to do some of those other things that tug at you. I don't know if that would be two years from now or five years from now. All due credit to President Dennison, he is I believe, 70 years old. I think he's at least 10 years older than I am, or about 10 years older. I'll tell you this, I will not still be drawing a paycheck from The University of Montana when I'm 70 years old. I may still be working for it as a cause that I love, but as a volunteer. I will not be formally working, probably beyond the next five years or so.

DB: To hear him tell it he may still be working when you're done then! [laughs]

SS: He may. Exactly, yeah. It wouldn't surprise me.

DB: He didn't give any indication of slowing up or stopping.

SS: Oh, he's not at all. Well, I hope I didn't indicate that I'm slowing up or stopping. [chuckles]

DB: Not at all.

SS: No I am—

DB: Changing perhaps.

SS: Yeah, I may make a change in a few years. I will not work for the university system right up into my 70s. Much as I love it. I may, as I said, as a volunteer. But in that way I would say that President Dennison and I are different.

DB: Great. Well I really appreciate your time in doing this. If there's anything else you'd like to share, other memories or thoughts that we haven't covered, I'd invite you to now. That's all I have in terms of questions for you.

SS: Oh. Well, you know, I used the word destiny a few moments ago and I do think that the destiny of the state of Montana is very linked to the destiny of its colleges and universities. I just think that point can hardly be stressed enough. They, we, are life-changing. Particularly for individuals where that matters, but also for whole communities and ultimately its being realized for the state as a whole. States such as Massachusetts or California or North Carolina, when they've really invested in their university system, it has changed their destiny. So that is my vision, that I help our presidents and regents continue to do—to help knowledge and wisdom change, through a place like The University of Montana—change lives as it changed mine. To give opportunities as it gave opportunity to me. And, therefore, to just change the face of the state for the next century.

DB: Great. Thank you.

[End of Interview]