

**INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BURNESSE
FORMER ASSISTANT TO PRESIDENT TOLL
VICE PRESIDENT FOR UNIVERSITY RELATIONS, CORNELL UNIVERSITY**

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Dr. Hartzell: An interview with John Burness, former Assistant to President John Toll, now Vice President for University Relations at Cornell University, Ithaca, held at Ithaca, New York, July 23rd, 1988.

John Burness: I'm John Burness and my initial position at Stony Brook was as an assistant in the President's Office on some grant money, and it gradually evolved into Assistant to the President and then Deputy to the President for University Affairs.

Dr. Hartzell: When did you come?

John Burness: I came in, the memory does strange tricks, I came, I believe, it was September 1, 1970.

Dr. Hartzell: Where had you been previously?

John Burness: I had been, I was fairly young when I went there, everything is introspective, I guess, at that point. I was all of twenty-five, just having turned twenty-five. I had graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania, had gone to law school, injured my back while I was in law school and took a medical leave of absence and was persuaded by family interests to be involved in the possibility of taking over my grandfather's insurance agency, he was quite elderly at the time, he's now only 103.

Dr. Hartzell: It's a good prospect for you.

John Burness: Yes, isn't it though, and made a lot of money in a very short period of time but decided I didn't like it and had thought a good deal about getting involved in higher education after my experiences at Franklin and Marshall; I had been president of student government and had been named by then Governor Scranton as a student on a state-wide education commission. So I wrote a number of people I knew from that institution, one of whom was David Woods, who was in public information office at

Stony Brook, this was in a pre-affirmative action era, and I wrote David and sent a letter and had four job offers in about three weeks, which is now not possible, of course, and understandably so. But David called me and said that President Toll was looking for a very junior person who would handle a lot of day to day correspondence and preparing him for meetings and whatever else. Then I went up and met Johnny, he was then on leave, I guess he was working on some state-wide, SUNY-wide commission on priorities and I went and met him there and he pretty much offered me the job the next day, and a few days later I was at Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: And what is your position here at Cornell?

John Burness: I'm Vice President for University Relations and that is federal, I'm in charge of the offices that handle federal relations, state relations, community relations, press, publicity, public relations and publications, all of the external functions other than alumni and fundraising directly.

Dr. Hartzell: You heard about Stony Brook from David Woods?

John Burness: Yeah, someone had told me that he was there, and I actually knew very little about the place.

Dr. Hartzell: How did you know David Woods?

John Burness: Because he had been at Franklin and Marshall when I was a student in their public relations office. I knew a little bit about it, I remember having read some things about its relationship with Brookhaven Lab, so I'd seen it in that sense.

Dr. Hartzell: How did the institution strike you once you were there and became acquainted with it?

John Burness: Well, I was extremely naive when I went there in the sense that my understanding about higher education was largely in the perspective of one who had gone through an institution, which doesn't necessarily give one the broadest perspective on these things. My first job with Johnny, at least what I initially was involved in, in what seemed to me at the time like a sea of assistants to the President, was largely to really get

him prepared for meetings and fill in gaps, handle low-level correspondence, routine stuff.

Dr. Hartzell: Who else was there in his office; you were on my line?

John Burness: I came on your line, but I came after you, you were still there, so there was you, there was Jeremy Blanchette, there was a gave named Dave, Dave Dickson was one, but then there a fellow who was there from the ACE, Dave, I'm just absolutely drawing a blank on his name, but he had written a book on campus demonstrations for the ACE and had come there; I'm drawing a blank right now on who he was. Now, this may have been the year you left, he came on board too. Steve Seifman, Sheldon Ackley, I'm drawing a blank, there was a Sue, the woman who handled the incoming correspondence, did all of the assignments and some of the writing; I can't remember her name right now. But there was a very large staff in the President's office.

Dr. Hartzell: Joanne Willets?

John Burness: No, Sue Newlin, her husband was Paul Newlin, and then Joanne Willets was the President's secretary, Susan Bayer was there. But largely because of my youthful exuberance and being so fascinated by the really rather fast pace of the place, I was working probably 80 hour weeks and enjoying it enormously. And anybody who does that, especially around Toll, got to spend more and more time with him because no matter how hard you worked you never could keep up with him. But it ended up over a period of time, the job very quickly evolved into whatever I saw on his desk that it made sense for me to take off because it needed doing, I would do. In terms of looking at the place, it was so raw. If I was struck by anything, it was most clearly high ambition, but in retrospect particularly no sense of tradition, governance was non-existent as we think of governance.

Dr. Hartzell: The infrastructure was not formed yet.

John Burness: Yes, the infrastructure was not formed.

Dr. Hartzell: It had yet to be formed.

John Burness: It had yet to be formed, yes. One of the things that struck me, this was a few years after I got there, but I think we were then about a \$35 million budget, as I remember. The hospital and health sciences wasn't developed yet. I think there was only one person who was other than a civil servant in the entire fiscal operation of the place and all the fiscal budget officers. The place had just grown like Topsy. It was only later, I think, that I, I took a leave in '77 for a year to work on a doctorate, and while I was away, I thought a great deal about the place, and one of the things that struck me was in a fairly conscious way I think Johnny had taken almost every line he could find and put into faculty position, probably and potentially illegally. I mean they would give him public safety officers, and he would turn two of them into an Assistant Professor line, on the theory, I once asked him about this, he smiled but he didn't fully respond. My own assumption was on the theory that the support from the political structure is always a tenuous issue with the demonstrations and the Vietnam business that had already begun to fade, the political support had, and you built great universities by building great faculties; but if they give you buildings, they eventually will have to give you police, maintenance and whatever else. In fact, my recollection is that there had been a study done in SUNY, a major audit of the entire system, with about 80% of it devoted to Stony Brook, and understandably so. This was before I came, I think it was just about the time I was arriving.

Dr. Hartzell: Whose study was it?

John Burness: I'm not sure. It came out of Albany, it was an Albany study, and it was a SUNY-wide study, and I think it was, I just don't remember, but it was understandable. What I don't think was widely understood was the point I have just made about how he knew what the tradeoffs were and made them willingly. And I don't think that was frankly understood in the faculty at the time or anywhere else. I certainly didn't understand it until years later when I had a chance to step back from it and at least reach the conclusion that this is what happened, and I think I'm probably right on that.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you think he understand quality in the teaching faculty?

John Burness: Uh, huh.

Dr. Hartzell: Better than the people in the Central Office?

John Burness: In what sense, you mean up in the system, you mean in Albany or

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, one thing that I would like your reaction to is the priorities of the Central Office with respect to the four university centers, Stony Brook in particular.

John Burness: Well, to the extent, I was working on my doctorate, the area I was looking at, in fact, was the relationship of the flagship university campus to the system in nine multi-campus major research university systems. The Chancellor-President relationship, for instance, at Madison, and the system office at Urbana, the system office in North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the system office, Stony Brook was one and the system office. I think that there was a little doubt in my mind that Stony Brook was, that New York State to this day does not understand a research university, a public research university. I see that all the time from my own involvement now at Cornell, nothing has changed in that regard. New York is the most over-regulated system of higher education in the country, even with this flexibility legislation they received a few years ago.

Dr. Hartzell: The Friday report.

John Burness: Right, they still remain the most regulated place, it is extraordinarily regulated. Then there were, of course, only two university centers in the original plan but, for the same reason that there is the over-regulation, politics intervened and they became four. I have a sneaking suspicion, and this is purely conjecture, that had Rockefeller stayed in, had we not had a Vietnam with the dislocation that caused, that by dint of his own power, and to some extent vision, it might have had a shot. But there has never been, and there is still not to this day, I would say, a very strong sense within SUNY Central of the real genuine importance of what a research institution can mean to a state, so on and so forth.

Dr. Hartzell: Partly a function of the background information of the people who do the hiring in the Central Office.

John Burness: Absolutely, but it's also a function of the politics of the system. The four centers are all part of the same four year college, and to some extent community college, it's confusion of all kinds, it is a very pork barrel oriented system. In other words, they have to spread the wealth out. That leads to mediocrity, it doesn't lead to quality. SUNY to this day, in my view, is not capable of making hard qualitative decisions. In fairness to them, the political process has never wanted it any other way. And where I probably disagree with Toll, is I think he felt that Ernie Boyer was non-supportive. My view is slightly different, which is Ernie Boyer, he was the system head when I came in, so my perspective comes out of that, that Boyer gave the presidents of individual campuses a good deal of freedom, in fact, to be aggressive and do their own thing and to try to build up its place. On the other hand, Boyer was somewhat detached from the system; he was a Chancellor he was not a political operative in that sense in the way some other ones are. But, I think, in retrospect, and I'm not sure I would

Dr. Hartzell: Somewhat like Gorbachev and the Russian

John Burness: I have a much higher regard for Gorbachev than I do for Ernie. But I think Ernie, there was a great deal that was accomplished at Stony Brook, despite the difficulty within the system, the lack of understanding in the system, the lack of autonomy. I mean the whole idea of the Construction Fund, where the institution had virtually no control over the hiring of the architects, the whole process of construction, the quality control of construction, the timing. I remember one incident where, I guess it was a residence hall we were going to be building or some infrastructure work, replacement in tunnels, we had coordinated and purposely postponed it almost for a year so that the work could be done during the summertime and not be disruptive of school. It got delayed and delayed, and they started it the first day of classes, and it was like it was an irrelevant consideration to them. It was a bureaucracy failure. SUNY evolved as another state agency; it was treated by the state as a state agency, and not as a different kind of state agency. There was no recognition of anything. And in large measure there still is very little recognition within the state government about what it

takes to have a really great university and how much the political structure has to give some flexibility to the institution to do that. I mean, slack is built into our kind of institution in a way that it isn't built into other institutions.

Dr. Hartzell: Slack is built into Cornell?

John Burness: Yes, we have duplicative programs all over the place. We have four economics departments; they're all different, they have a different focus. One could argue you only need one economics department. Anyway, that's part of the ball game. Frank Rhodes has a phrase about management of research, sort of like trying to manage a chamber orchestra or something like that. You know, you can scrimp on the notes, you can cut back one-third of the notes, but it doesn't necessarily give you a better symphony. And it's the same kind of thing in the some of the things that go on, which is not to say there isn't what I will say is an excess of slack in a system. But in SUNY it's over-regulation, the decisions in large measure are not made by SUNY, they are made by the Division of the Budget, pre-audit, post-audit, they are made by the legislative committees.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you have anything to do with anybody in the Bureau of the Budget.

John Burness: I had very little to do.

Dr. Hartzell: Veillette or Axelrod?

John Burness: I little bit with Veillette, but in my first few years there, I was most heavily involved, I guess, and I would say two different things, one of which was an evolution and I had little to do with external relations, which is where I ended up there. I was very much involved in a wide array of student oriented things, and in those days it meant a lot of demonstrations, and was, with a small crew of people around Toll, very much involved in the planning for how we were going to respond, and our most frequent response was to send me out to talk to the group. Even that, in itself, is an interesting kind of thing because

Dr. Hartzell: Probably doing a good job.

John Burness: Well, it was a good job but what I think was understood by Pond and some others was that Johnny's instincts, largely because of the Stony Brook Council and the pressures associated with the drug bust, were to on some occasions to respond and respond quickly. And I think there was a general feeling among those who were involved in it that in some cases that would be the worst thing you could do, not the best. I mean if you went out and talked, you could talk them out after five hours, and all it cost you was five hours. If you brought the cops in, you could make it into something much bigger. And there was a rather conscious effort, in fact, to build a process in which you removed Toll from the decisions around this thing, to the point where we had another office for him in another location, we'd sneak him out of that door and have somebody there with him. And did a whole series of things, which is not to say he wasn't ultimately in charge, but it was not useful to have the President of the University involved in the day to day management of this kind of activity. Anyway, I got very much involved in

Dr. Hartzell: Who was Dean of Students?

John Burness: I guess Scott Rickard was the Vice President, or Acting Vice President, whatever it was. Dave Tilley was still around. That was a much beleaguered group by the time I got there, rightly or wrongly I can't say. They were, nonetheless, a much beleaguered group. Again, because all the money had gone into the faculty, housing was lousy. The Financial Aid office was incompetent. I mean, but we didn't have any managers in there, they were all civil servants, everybody was a civil servant. And there were many people who I think were well intentioned, but we had no systems. We couldn't keep track of anything. I'll get to that in a second. Anyway, these people were very much on the front line, were in some sense abused by the institution.

Dr. Hartzell: Abused, in what sense?

John Burness: In the sense that they really didn't have support to do their job. I mean the money was not put there to do it. We had a security force which was at best former night watchmen; in some cases former night watchmen who got fired because they were doing things wrong, and we hired them. But it was not a group that you could

have any kind of confidence could handle a sophisticated problem or a complex problem and could make judgments. So a lot of those judgments ended up being up higher in the institution than they should have been, and that meant in some ways an awful lot of things ended up sort of on Alec's plate that if we'd had an infrastructure within administration, again I go back, we had more people on the staff of the President than we probably had on the staff of all the Vice Presidents. You know, to me, in an organizational context, the staff should be down at the operating level, not up there. But given the way the resources had been pushed into the faculty, I think I understand why Toll set it up that way. The second thing I worked on and it really relates to the issue I just described, the lack of a management structure in-house, was what I will call the Joe Diana problem.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I would like to know more about that.

John Burness: Joe, extremely bright guy. It was fairly clear to me within a year of my time there that Toll and Diana were not hitting it off at all. Diana was, well I'll try to describe my view at the time, pointing out a lot of shortcomings, but I think he made some assumptions that were probably incorrect, which is that, and this later was confirmed in conversations with him, that the findings of this audit, which I had mentioned earlier, which in fact had led to Diana coming down, had been a consequence of intentional mismanagement and malevolence perhaps as opposed to either incompetence in administrative context the kind of lack of organizational infrastructure I mentioned. There were conscious decisions on the line I described earlier which was the only way you were going to build a great university, and this kind of political climate was to get all the money in your faculty while you could and so forth. It was fairly clear to me over a course of time that Joe was there to clean house and was sent down by Central Administration to do so.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was his boss at that time in Albany, do you have any idea?

John Burness: I think it was Kettler. At the very end of Joe's time, he confessed that, and I don't want to use the word 'confess,' it's not that drastic, but he said in a

conversation with Pond, but he had also said it to me, that in fact he had been sent to get Toll, to get him out. And in an interesting way, to get him out because, as I said, they thought he was incompetent, and he was perhaps malevolent. Johnny had broad support with Beth Moore and some of the Trustees who saw him as this extraordinarily energetic, brilliant guy, all of which is true. But again, in the political process, the bureaucratic mode of SUNY, it was very hard for anybody to see that. That wasn't in their vision. They also didn't understand Johnny's vision of a Stony Brook. I think Johnny who was easily the most literal person I have ever met in my life

Dr. Hartzell: Literal?

John Burness: Literal in the sense when he read what the Heald Commission Report said, he said, that's right, let's do that. And that was his single-minded goal. What he perhaps didn't understand is that's what the report said, that didn't mean that's what SUNY meant or that's what they meant at the moment, but it never was going to go that way. In any event, Diana came down and was, I think, came down, and within a year or so in tough budget times had thirty-four, thirty-five new positions, all professional -- management, fiscal, budget, whatever -- established. It was clear SUNY was making a major commitment to put the fiscal house in order at Stony Brook, to the extent one could anyway. I think it also became clear to Joe that you could never get to Johnny, which is what I think Joe's ambition was, unless you got Alec out of the way, because Alec was the buffer. Alec was the bad guy. In my present responsibilities, I am occasionally asked to climb out on limbs while folks are sawing trees behind me, and I understand that, that comes with, I think that that in a large part was there, I'll talk a little bit about Alec later because I think he fits into this picture too. I should also say some things about Johnny actually too, but in any event Joe was there with a mission. It became fairly clear. And he spent an enormous amount of time, especially as I look at it now with some sense of perspective and experience of my own, but one could see it even then, trying to dig up old things as opposed to trying to put the house in order. I mean there are two roles there. There's no doubt the house needed to be put in order, the question was how do you go

about doing that, and how do you focus. Joe was spending more of his time, it appeared, on trying to dig up, trying to pin things, and that led to, and again in the context that there had not been any professional management in any of those offices. I mean checks would come in and people would put them in drawers, and get around to it three days later getting it into the accounting system. Is that malevolence, is it incompetence, is it the absence of a system? You can look at that any number of ways. The context I think he used is that this is all a conscious effort to do some nefarious deed. He went after any number of people. Lusardi was one, Cliff Decker was one, Warren Randall was the one that was the most visible. And I remember that one very well, in the sense that Johnny asked me; well, let me step back a minute. I would guess that there was a period of about three years in there, four years, where I spent 25% of my time responding to letters from Joe Diana, which were letters which were pointing out another grievous problem that needed to be addressed, and I almost had a rote response, the beginning was “Dear Joe, As you know, (these were letters to Johnny) I feel very strongly about the need to make sure that our management is going the right way.” If one went back to the file and read those letters, I mean it drove Joe crazy. He told me about that once; he said will you stop sending those goddam letters. He tried to hire me, he tried to hire me away.

Dr. Hartzell: Hire you away.

John Burness: Because had I gone to work for him, I too was above the maelstrom. There was the FSA where the management of FSA, like the management of everything there, management was an oxymoron, so you pick your spot.

Dr. Hartzell: Faculty Student Administration.

John Burness: Right, Faculty Student Association, or whatever it was, and it ran a series of non-profit service activities to provide services to students in this incredibly raw environment in which they were located, outside of class services. Anyway, a great deal of my time was spent on, in a sense, protecting Johnny from Diana. Even though I was reasonably young at that time, I was also reasonably politically astute. One could see what was happening, and I had access to almost any piece of paper on Johnny’s desk, so I

think I had a fairly good feel for the game. Part of the dilemma was, of course, Pond had sensed this issue much earlier than it, and certainly much earlier than Johnny. Johnny tends to

Dr. Hartzell: He was without guile.

John Burness: In fact, in some ways he was unbelievably naive, that was an element of his charm that he retains to this day, I think. And Alec was furious. You know, everybody has strengths and weaknesses, one of Alec's is that he holds integrity at a very high level and couldn't imagine that someone would have taken a job to get somebody; that's not in his parlance. And he was extremely angry at Diana and trying to get Johnny to pay attention to the fact that Diana was a man with a mission, which will in and of itself bring me to a story here which will be good for historians to know some day, in addition to the difficulties on the management side, we were trying to get the health sciences, the Vice President for the health sciences was Ed Pellegrino, who was a brilliant builder of great institutions in some way much like Toll was, a person of great ambition and energy and intellect; and he and Toll clashed frequently. And part of that clash, I think, related to the fact that SUNY never saw Stony Brook as a comprehensive research institution, they saw it as a selective research institution. In other words, it would have great strength in the sciences, it would have great health sciences, but the idea of great strength in the social sciences and whatever else was not; in other words, the breadth and the resources there for it to have the breadth were not something that was in SUNY's planning mode.

Dr. Hartzell: They didn't understand the Heald Report.

John Burness: No, not all. There may have been some people there who did, but you saw no evidence in the operation of SUNY to lend any credence to the fact that they understood that or were supportive of it. But it was Toll and Pellegrino, they were both very strong minded people, and they clashed and clashed hard, which Johnny never quite understood. He would scratch his head after some of those, but there was one particular session that we had with Joe Diana. You know there used to be a set of meetings that

were set up that was Toll, Pond and Diana and I was the scribe, which was really quite unfair to Diana because he who is the scribe reports history. But if one went back to the file you would find the summary notes of these meetings. But after one particularly long one, that actually was held at Johnny's house, it ran for hours, and I think this was as much theater as anything else, that Diana decided, look we weren't getting any further, the hell with this meeting, let's get out of here. And he sort of stormed out of the meeting. And it was after I think he had accused Steve Seifman or somebody. I mean it had gotten to the point of whoever he was accusing proved as honest as the day is long, another one of the nefarious host. He stormed out, Johnny said, looked at the floor for about thirty seconds, and looked up and said, I guess I'll just never understand Italians. It was a truly humorous line and in a funny way from the heart. But even the clashes with Pellegrino in those days, so many of them were related to 'was the health sciences center going to part of the campus or was it an independent entity.' The tensions between medical facilities and universities in general is always a tense one anywhere.

Dr. Hartzell: But the original purpose of the Muir Report and the people who came talked to me was that they were going to put the comprehensive health science center on the campus of a growing institution so that there could be good relations.

John Burness: Right, and the answer was that absent a clear sense of support for that and understanding of that within SUNY Central, it couldn't happen at the campus. And a smart enough person, such as Pellegrino, could do several things: one is, could play off the incompetence of the campus administration to say to the extent I have to work or rely on them, I'm in trouble, therefore I should get my own resources; from the campus administration side that meant that the health sciences would be, in effect, eating up whatever flexible dollars would be coming to the campus, you can understand this. But in the absence of an understanding of the issue you just mentioned within SUNY, you needed support of SUNY to reinforce it. You didn't have that support, Johnny didn't have that support, he pretended.

Dr. Hartzell: There wasn't a capability in SUNY of having broad comprehension of what they were supposed to be doing.

John Burness: Because it was a political structure, it's not an educational structure, it's a political structure. And all of this in many ways became absolutely crystal clear to me in a strange sort of way when I went to Illinois, when I left Stony Brook I went for my doctorate, I'll get to some of that, I came back to Stony Brook and then left when Schmidt came down as Acting President. But I think I'd be the foot in my fanny in the process of leaving because it was clear that Wharton wanted me out, I'll explain some of that. But I then went to the University of Illinois, and I remember that in the 19

Dr. Hartzell: When did you go to Illinois?

John Burness: 1981. I think it was the 1975 accreditation report, that report had an opening line about Stony Brook being created with a broad ambition to match in New York State that which the great public universities in this country, and it cited Berkeley, Ann Arbor and Urbana, had done. And it said that in this short time it has succeeded outstandingly well. And right I go then to Urbana, I said to myself this is wonderful, I will have a chance to see how the great places do it. And in fact the contrast was unbelievable. The ability of the institution to move dollars around to respond to needs, the sense of tradition, the vitality, the element of control that the institution had over its own destiny, the power, the genuine power of the faculty in the governance of the institution. There were just so many different factors which made Urbana a great university that were absent at Stony Brook. The process in Illinois understood the importance of a great public institution.

Dr. Hartzell: The Legislature.

John Burness: The Legislature did. They clearly saw the difference between the University of Illinois at Urbana and all of the other public university campuses in that state. And New York State is still not seeing it; it's a pork barrel situation. And if Buffalo gets it, then Stony Brook has to get it. You had asked me much earlier in the conversation my sense of where Stony Brook stood relative to the other four university

centers within the system. Well, if you assume that the system is really responding to the environment rather than pushing the environment, the system was responding to the then Senate Majority Leader, who was from Buffalo, Bridges, major commitments. Let me back at that. Long Island was only then emerging as a political area, as an area with its own identity. If you go back to the '60's

Dr. Hartzell: I don't think they had, at the time that you were there, anybody with the power like Joe Carlino.

John Burness: No, but they did with Duryea. I mean Duryea was there when I was there, but it was different, it was not like Joe Carlino, the answer is you're right. It also, the area was politically conservative, and the drug bust issue and Vietnam issue really killed Stony Brook, because it had not yet made its friends, it had not yet established itself, established the relationship. It all sounded good to put it there, but then the problems came in, and it didn't have the basic alumni support, the basic political support, the sort of infrastructure of relationships which protect institutions in tough times, in difficult times. When there is a difficult problem at Cornell, or there was a difficult problem at Illinois, I knew how to put together a strategy that would bring our friends to the fore to build that protective zone around us; whether it's the bringing of a controversial speaker to the campus or whatever it was, you did that people at Stony Brook and people wouldn't come in. You do that Cornell or you do that Illinois, and the structure works around it to protect it, the values of the institution. That didn't exist then. The Stony Brook Council, and in fact the Councils in general had no real authority under state law, although it was, it was one of my contributions to Stony Brook when Jeremy Blanchette left, which was about a year or so after you did, you left in 1971, is that right?

Dr. Hartzell: That's right.

John Burness: He probably left in '72 or so, and I became Secretary of the Council. I went and looked up what the law said, and on paper it sounded like it was a real entity. I mean it was responsible, I said let's pretend it is. And we began to use it with the Trustees as an operating, I mean, part of the developing of the relationship politically and

elsewhere, was to use the Council, and they had the Council for instance ask me to go to Albany to talk to legislators. Nobody ever went to Albany to talk to legislators because that was all controlled by SUNY Central. But in the political power structure with Buffalo, and Buffalo desperately needed a new campus. I mean here was the perfect example of the folly of a four center system, for research in the system. The old Buffalo campus was falling apart, they had some awfully good programs up there, a decent place. That part of the state needed a powerful focus in a variety of ways, and because of the political power structure, and I'm trying to remember his name right now, I can't but, the then Democratic party state chairman was also from Buffalo, so you had the Republican Majority Leader and the Democratic Party State Chairman when Rockefeller was Governor, but nonetheless the person who had real authority was Joe Crangle; he's still alive, he's still around, and several of his people then still are very influential in the state. But SUNY's commitment had largely been to Buffalo, Stony Brook was going to be quite secondary. And that meant if we go back to the comprehensive mission that I mentioned earlier, which SUNY had not seen for Stony Brook, they had seen as a limited, never in the Carnegie classification, not a Carnegie 1 but a Carnegie 2 institution, selective graduate programs, not comprehensive. In that context the only way that Stony Brook was going to be able to achieve the mission that Toll had identified out of the Heald and Muir Commission Reports was in fact to really go with a very strong Long Island identity and a very strong political one. And we started then doing, I mean I mentioned earlier I was involved in student affairs, I gradually evolved into this external set of roles and responsibilities. And then we started doing a great deal of working the Legislature, and I did a lot of that in ways that we had not done before. And some members of the Council were very helpful in there. One thing about the Council that struck me was so many of its people, its Chairman was George Tobler, who later was indicted I guess kickbacks on insurance for the County and whatever else. I was truly struck by the extent to which the Council, when it was a Republican appointed entity, really kept its hands off day to day activities, with the exception of then J. Kevin Murphy, who was a young and very

ambitious member of the Council, and was outraged over the drug problems and some other stuff. But in the main they really did look later to protect it. A specific story when Tobler's son had in fact flunked out of school and Tobler didn't know that, and he called me one day to ask how his son was doing, and I figured out that he had been the person who had put on the table in a rare move, because a Chairman of an organization never does these kind of things, never actually takes an action himself, other than convenes the group and coordinates it, a resolution that the role of the Council in admissions were merely as conduits of information, that they were not to be privy to all kinds of things and to be involved in the decisionmaking, that they would pass the information if they were interested or someone else was interested, but that was without pressure associated with it. And when he asked about his son, I was able to remind him of these rules and regulations, and that I was unable to talk to him about the subject. I did suggest he might want to go talk his son. But I mean they really were like that. Sullivan was like that, Tobler was Chairman by the time I came on, Sullivan had clearly been like that. But there was also this frustration on the Council, I think until the mid-'70's it wasn't a functioning group in the sense that it had something to do other than come to a meeting and learn the place, at least during the first four years I was there. It probably was in the early days, but in the first four years I was there, I didn't see that. I mean it was a dog and pony show. They had no real committees to do any business or whatever else. But they then became a fairly political group. We used them effectively politically. In other words, the Chairman of the Council would send a letter to the political establishment saying how concerned they were about these issues. It wasn't now coming from Stony Brook, it was coming from the citizens, and it changed the nature of the dynamic tremendously. We were, over a period of time, able to get a good deal of support from *Newsday*, a good deal of support with the Long Island political structure. And, in fact, was more news at *Newsday*. Bill had left and I literally would go to Albany almost every week, maybe once every other week, and would walk the corridors. And there was a particular, it's irony of ironies in some ways, there

was an assumption that Johnny, Johnny was beginning to emerge as this very powerful political figure all of a sudden. Then as he was leaving, if you recall, he was seen a major force on the Island in a whole variety of ways. Johnny, frankly, wasn't very good with the Legislature. It's a problem for him now. He's too literal; I mean he's back to the rational. Legislators are used to being irrational.

Dr. Hartzell: He was liked by the business community.

John Burness: Business community liked him, but the political structure, he didn't understand them; he didn't understand the pressures on the politicians. And always thought, geez, if you just rationally explained your case, people will look at the rational data and make a rational judgment. I wish that were the case. But in any event, there was this assumption that Johnny was very tight with Joe Margiotta, who was the Nassau County Republican Leader and maybe the most powerful political boss in the state. I think Johnny met him maybe once or twice in ten years. But everybody thought they were good buddies. We had this, one of those meetings with Margiotta, we had gotten to Margiotta because we were talking about a law school. And John Scaduto who was the Nassau County Treasurer, I think he may still be, arranged for this meeting. So we went in to see Margiotta's office, I somehow expected a, in my naive way, a Mafia-type to come out and it was this extremely handsome, articulate, warm fellow who invited us into his office. I at the time was a good liberal Democrat and here I was in the den of the arch conservative, as it were the enemy, and was absolutely charmed by him. But one could tell that after about a twenty minute period he was getting bored, and it was going to see the Pope; you have your time period you were supposed to get your business done. And it was clear he wasn't interested in talking about the law school. He wanted to talk about getting more kids into medical school, and that was his agenda. And he finally leaned across the desk and, this was right about the time the film "The Godfather" was out, was is it you want from me, what can I do for you. It was that blunt. The problem with Johnny, and this is why I say he was not necessarily good as a politician in that sense, was that politicians like a clean, neat slate; tell me what you want number 1, tell me what

you want number 2. You ask Johnny that question, you got a smorgasbord answer, I want it all. And I could that all of a sudden, I mean Johnny started listing off about twenty different things; and I brashly just interrupted him, and I said we're interested in the social and behavioral sciences building, we're taking a lot of kids from Nassau Community College and are not able to provide the education for them, we're having to turn them away and whatever else it was. He stopped the conversation, Margiotta says I'll see what I can do. That was his comment. We walked out of the room, and I said to Johnny, you realize we just got the social and behavioral sciences building. It was a major project we had been fighting SUNY on forever, and SUNY was saying they couldn't do it for a variety of reasons. But we'd never been able to generate the real political pressure. And Johnny said to me, do you really think that's how it works. Here he was in the eighth or ninth, tenth year of his presidency, and still hadn't seen that sort of thing. And we did get the building that year, and Margiotta did not fight us on the law school, and he was very closely tied to Hofstra and whatever else. But I use that as an example of how we started to play the political structure and a key element of it was using Johnny the right way. I mean he really in some ways he couldn't be involved day to day with legislators, it was not his forte. He and Leon Giuffreda would be daggers with each other; they were just totally different types. So I cut my teeth on all this, was sort of the intermediary with a lot of these folks. There was the very well placed person, who in the annals of Stony Brook will not well known, but was absolutely instrumental in a whole lot of things that went on there, and I would guess that no more than a handful of people know about him, and his name is Meyer Sandy Frucher. At age 28 he ran Moynihan's Senate campaign. He was a Joe Crangel protégé out of Buffalo. He happened to be good friends with Harry Weiner who succeeded Bob Nathans at the school which became the Harriman School. And I think he had been a student of Harry's at Harvard and JFK School, but Sandy was extremely well placed politically. Sandy was not a nice man, wasn't then, isn't now. Sandy's job, as I understood it only years later, in the Legislature, between campaigns he had some commission responsibility in Albany,

but he made sure that the legislators nocturnal activities were well supplied. He is today the head of the Battery Park Authority; he is known as a close former political advisor. You will see him occasionally. Battery Park is one of the largest construction projects in the history of the northeast. All of this begins to make some sense. But because of Harry Weiner, I went up to meet Frucher. Frucher was sufficiently well placed that, he ran some commission, I don't know the name of the commission, it issued three reports a year, whatever, he was a big time political operative.

Dr. Hartzell: Is he in the red book?

John Burness: Probably no. These aren't in civic texts He may be because he's head of the Battery Park Authority now. I have his phone number, I talk to him every once in a while. His daughter was interested in admission to Cornell this year, so he called me out of the blue and we had a conversation. But Frucher was someone who would get things done. And I, for instance, went up there and we were talking about the problem, and he said, well I'll get Steingut to do this; give me a letter. So I wrote a letter from Stanley Steingut to Beth Moore and Ernie Boyer that essentially said that my colleagues on Long Island are deeply disturbed by the priorities of the SUNY system with all of the resources apparently going up toward Buffalo, and they have great needs down there and we expect the Trustees and the Central Administration to take care of those needs because, one didn't need to read too far between the lines, this was fairly tough letter. Frucher would walk in and get Steingut to sign them, Steingut didn't know what the hell he was signing, he'd sign it, the letter would go out, then he would run next door to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who was Arthur Kremmer, who was from Long Island, and look what Steingut just signed, you sent a letter. Oh, yeah, sure, I did. The next thing you know, there was this phalanx, now the Democrats were saying Stony Brook is important to him. It was all a myth, when the political structure was never behind it, but what was happening was, that's how politics works sometimes is you create these impressions of. And SUNY was then having to respond. This was during the time that Ernie was leaving, and if you think about it, Ernie came down to Stony Brook, his

last act as Chancellor before going down to Washington, cause he flew to Washington for the press conference announcing his appointment as Commissioner of Education, was to come down to the campus and assure Stony Brook at a public press conference that SUNY was committed to completion of the Master Plan for the campus. That outraged to the SUNY, who again were responding to the other political Here was Ernie, didn't cost him anything. There had been a lot of pressure in *Newsday*, Bob Greene, the *Newsday* multiple Pulitzer Prize winner, had seen, had identified Stony Brook as a potential rallying force and place around which Long Island could establish it's own sense of identity. So *Newsday* had taken a very active role in promoting Stony Brook. And Greene, who then a very powerful figure on the paper, their Long Island Editor, had been the one there, he liked Johnny a lot. Ernie leaves, Johnny denied it but I think he would have liked to have been Chancellor. He never said it to me at all. But I think once he didn't, it was clear to him he was going to go elsewhere. And his elsewhere, the Maryland opportunity came. That was really an absolutely pivotal point for the institution because, I mean, the campus still was in chaos. One could go on for hours about the nature of governance there or the absence of it. Johnny's leaving was the point at which either the institution was going to continue toward that goal of a comprehensive program and part of the problem was that I don't think it was widely understood at all on the campus where SUNY really was coming from and why, I mean, the political thing. So there was in a sense the campus was protected from that information. Given that a governance system that worked was a town meeting form of governance, so that that kind of information really wasn't shared nor widely understood and that the pivotal issue, and I think I understand this much more clearly in retrospect than I did at the time, although I saw it with a degree of clarity that was the decision to replace Johnny. Because if there wasn't somebody who was going to fight on that issue, it was down the tubes, I mean, the game would be over. That gets into the Alec business. I'm enormously fond of Alec, I have a series of biases as a consequence of a personal relationship, but trying to step back from those; he was in many ways more pivotal than Johnny in my sense in getting the

campus where it was going. And, in fact, the pivotal character. He was the one who had to deal with SUNY. He was the only one who understood really how they worked. He was the one SUNY wanted out desperately because his planning models, because there was so little understanding of a research university in Albany, he was much better at developing planning models and what I would call political arguments for academic issues and academic growth and development than anybody in SUNY was. So we would make our cases to SUNY and it was very hard for them to shoot it down on a rational basis because they didn't have anybody competent enough to do that. I mean it was going back to the point you made earlier, they didn't, there was nobody who understood what a research institution was. So that SUNY always felt caught between Stony Brook's ability to develop all these arguments which they had such difficulty shooting down, and that frequently defined the issues, and this political process that they were having to respond to for other sections of the state. You know, Warren Anderson succeeds Bridges and Warren Anderson is from Binghamton. The old adage, you also had that Alec was the campus sob.

Dr. Hartzell: In what sense, these are the faculty or students or what?

John Burness: He was always the guy who delivered the bad news, not Johnny. When people who were arrested, it was Alec who was out front; when you had the real fights with the faculty on different issues, it was Alec who was out front. He always headed the commission which studied the issue. I mean it was Johnny's solution to a large number of problems. And I will say, I think Johnny was aware of a lot of Alec's weaknesses.

Dr. Hartzell: What were some of them?

John Burness: Alec's weaknesses,

Dr. Hartzell: Johnny asked me early on whether I thought Alec would make a good vice president, and I said I thought so.

John Burness: I think that was right. I think Alec's weaknesses were he took things too seriously some times. I mean he got so intense, he was driven. He, unlike Johnny,

Stony Brook was in Alec's blood. It never got in Johnny's blood, it was in Alec's blood. You can be in a position too long, and I think the number two position is the prime one you can be in too long, where you end up making decisions ten years ago, because a lot of those decision were made by him, but you then end up defending ten years later but the times have changed and whatever else. I think Alec was in that position. I think he also had lost his sense of perspective, which is his, only he in some sense knew, and I want to be fair here but it's hard to be, how venomous the SUNY situation was. I think part of why Johnny and Alec never told the campus, hey we have no support up there, we have no friends of there, was what that would have done to the campus morale. You're trying to tell people we have this great ambition and goal and let's go and so on and so forth, but you can't do that if you are also saying nobody supports us. Alec said at the eulogy for Ron Siegel, he said that Stony Brook was founded something along the line, I forget the exact line, but a general went out and placed out a white flag and you turn around and there's no one behind you. That's what Stony Brook was. Only Alec understood in the detail of how on a day to day basis we had nobody up there who understood or cared, nobody. And as a consequence of that he just got angrier and angrier and angrier. His tolerance for the faculty was going further and further down. In fact one of the reasons didn't know and were naive and in some sense supercilious, because here were these absolutely critical issues for the future of the place and they were nibbling around the edges of SUNY issues. One of the reasons was Johnny and Alec never told them, so of course they didn't know; it was a catch-22. But the end result was he was bitter, I think he was really quite angry, he knew what was at stake when Johnny left, understood it clearly. Alec's weaknesses are he's not someone who has a warm, cuddly personality. As private as Johnny is, he's a very private person, I don't know that he had a friend in that sense, I mean a real friend.

Dr. Hartzell: You mean Alec didn't have a friend.

John Burness: No, actually Alec did, Johnny didn't have a friend. I don't know a friend. I knew Johnny, I probably spent more time with Johnny over a ten year period

than anybody just because my office was right out his back door, my hours were such, I mean he wouldn't have a friend in the sense of somebody he would confide in, talk to about what I see Johnny every once in a while, I stop and see him when I'm in Washington but he was a lonesome character in his own way. He was a very private individual. Alec took these things so seriously because this Stony Brook issue was in his blood that his sense of perspective, he had trouble stepping back sometimes, he would just get so angry at what was going on. And when the issue was up as to who was going to replace Johnny, there were a lot of reasons for it not to be Alec, a lot of very good reasons. One is he's not a public person, the job requires a public presence. He's an ideal number 2 in some ways, but not necessarily a number 1. I think he had the intellectual capability, I think he had the sense of vision, but he made too many enemies over too long a period of time because he was the guy who conveyed the messages. Even if you looked at the structure and your comment about why Sidney didn't made sense, Johnny was superb on picking, on faculty issues. I mean I watched him early on on the tenure cases, and he read every page, and he would pick up the phone and call all over the country to who the best people were and said, tell me about this person, would you hire this person, you know that kind of thing. Sheldon spent 50% of his time on mail doing tenure case reviews for Johnny, that's how rigorous Johnny was, because he believed that in the long run there's no better way, the only way to do it is you build up quality, and absent a tradition in the institution, that was fine, it was a great way to build it and it succeeded, in large measure it succeeded. The dilemma though, it seemed to me, it meant that through the process of tenure decisions, because everybody knew Toll would be so tough no one else had to be.

Dr. Hartzell: Let me ask you one question, Dave Price, was that name

John Burness: I remember the name, but I think he had died right before or right about the time I was there.

Dr. Hartzell: He was one of our supporters.

John Burness: Yes, that was a name that I knew as a supporter, but he was not there; and I'm trying to think but I don't know. I think Johnny recognized Alec's weaknesses; he saw that he was angry and no longer in fact in some ways could no longer be effective in working with him with faculty leadership.

Dr. Hartzell: I was surprised to hear that about the local campus.

John Burness: Let me put it this way, Johnny knew the weaknesses of having Alec do that at this stage; because Alec had been the bad guy in so many different issues, no matter what the issues, whether they were budget cuts, even if one goes back to the raging internal debate that was there the whole time I was there about the social sciences and the humanities on campus. Part of what was not understood it seemed to me in that dynamic was the lack of SUNY support, which again Johnny could not talk about in some sense, so that they were always seen as the bad guys on that issue. They couldn't get, when I use the social and behavioral sciences building, we would try to get that building through five or six years. We knew how crucial it was. The strategy, for instance, of going for the Fine Arts Center which should have been a much larger building, the strategy was that you can build your excellence in the hard sciences over here and build in what I would call on a continuum of disciplines over here on the fine and performing arts, but you build in and you gradually develop that excellence across the other way. You start over in the middle, you've missed this group already, so there was a really conscious decision, I think, as part of an academic strategy. Someone you should talk to is Carl Carlucci, do you remember him at all?

Dr. Hartzell: Carl Carlucci?

John Burness: I'll tell you about Carl Carlucci, and remind me to go back to the performing arts. Carl Carlucci was a very young, he's Frank Carlucci's cousin, he was a student at Stony Brook, he was hired as an intern in Woody Trautman's office -- Trautman was institutional planning -- nice, sweet man, enough said. But Carlucci is a brilliant young fellow, Carl's now in his late 30's. Carl was the number cruncher for Alec; he was the one who devised the number strategies for Alec. My involvement in a

series of Albany related activities started to get me with good relations with higher ed committees and whatever else, and then they were looking for a person to join that staff and asked me who would be good; I told them Carl Carlucci. Carl Carlucci left Stony Brook. I left in '77 to go on sabbatical. Carl took over my responsibilities; he handled legislative stuff, political stuff for that year. I then came back. Carl left shortly thereafter to go work in the Assembly for the Legislature. Ultimately became the key staff person on the higher education committee, ultimately became the person who redistricted the state for the Democrats in 1980, and is now the Secretary of Ways and Means Committee in the Assembly. Carl Carlucci was the staff member on a commission around '80 that took a whole new look at higher ed in the state. It was right around the time that Johnny was leaving. But Carlucci has a wonderful perspective on the Stony Brook stuff and understands the SUNY dynamic, the political dynamic, the whole routine. He is enormously fond of Alec, knows his weaknesses completely, but enormously fond of him and Johnny too. Both of them tried to hire him repeatedly. Carl to this day holds what happened at Stony Brook against the SUNY system and they pay a price for that every single day to date. As recently as last week they paid a heavy price on it. But he really understood that issue, in some ways in far more detail than I do.

Dr. Hartzell: Was he a Stony Brook student?

John Burness: He was a Stony Brook student, who then went to work for Stony Brook. But in his early 20's literally ran the institution for planning office. He is someone literally whatever he wants to do he could do; he's a remarkable guy. The speaker, Mel Moore, the first appointment he made was Carlucci as Secretary of Ways and Means. Chairman of Ways and Means didn't pick him, the new Speaker did. He was president of Brooklyn College at the time. Anyway back to this with Alec and Johnny. The tenure issue where Johnny was so vigorous; the best example of that was the economist who was a Marxist; he's now there and he's no, I mean he's like Abbey Hoffman, he's moved, he's now middle of the road, Mike Zweig. In his heart Johnny wanted to turn that tenure decision down, but he couldn't get away from what was in the

file, and his head governed his heart. Politically had he turned it down it would have stood him in good stead with the Long Island political establishment where Zweig was well known as this extreme radical, the Stony Brook Council, I mean the whole routine. He looked at the stuff, and as much as he wanted to, he couldn't. And Johnny, I never once saw an academic issue, an academic tenure kind of decision, the only issue was the quality issue to Johnny, just time and time again. The problem was that because he was so tough others in the system didn't have to be. There was great tension, not great tension, there was a degree of tension between a Diana, and a Pellegrino and a Toll that applied but it was qualitatively different from that that was between a Bentley and a Johnny. Johnny went for the star system -- he got Frank, he got Bentley, and wonderful appointments -- but my sense of it again, and this is partly in retrospect and I didn't have that much to do with it, but I did see all the mail, was that Bentley never understood the political dynamic in Albany at all. He was the great protector of the liberal arts, but couldn't protect them because he didn't understand the so that they naturally got into their tensions. Alec's temperament was such that he'd get very frustrated with Bentley. Johnny never got frustrated, it was all part of the water off a duck's back. But again Alec became the bad guy because he was the one, you know, who was the senior academic officer; it turned out Alec was the senior academic officer, Bentley didn't understand the issues. I don't know that Bentley understood that, but it was fairly clear. To some extent why did we have a Vice President for Liberal Studies? The reason we had a Vice President for Liberal Studies was cause we had a Vice President for the Health Sciences and Johnny was trying to establish that the Vice President for the Health Sciences is the equivalent of the Vice President for Liberal Studies. And then there's an academic officer above them, and then there's an executive vice president above them. It had to do with the political context of this entity being placed in, none of this was understood; Ed understood it, Ed Pellegrino understood it; I'm sure Sidney understood it. I'm not sure Bentley understood it. But the situation was such that Sidney knew he could always pass the buck up, Bentley knew he could always pass the buck up, so the

buck always got passed up toward Johnny, I mean in some sense in these decisions. It was partly of Johnny's own making. I mean you know it's a catch 22, it keeps on going around in a circle; but the inner workings were such that the pivotal person time and time again was Alec in the middle of it. Because when you needed to make the arguments, Johnny turned to Alec, and Johnny knew where he wanted to go, starting with the arguments, go do it. Alec would come up in the arguments. Bentley had no capability to counter the arguments; who is the bad guy. Alec became the bad guy. In that search for the president the issue was going to be the future of the institution. I was then at Maryland, I had left Maryland before Johnny became president, I mean I had left Stony Brook to take a leave to work on a doctorate; and I had a year at half pay and I was going to have a second year, which was leave without pay to do it. Johnny in the interim comes down to Maryland as president. Everybody down there, all of a sudden I was a very hot graduate student invited to all these parties, I couldn't quite understand it. It dawned on me when somebody told me they thought I was an advance man. But Alec asked me if I would come back and take my second year leave later because during this interim period it was going to be very important to have as many folks around who understood the ball game. So I said yes and I moved back for that time period. I had a commuter marriage for most of it, but I was back in Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: What years?

John Burness: '77, '78 I went down to Maryland. I came back '78-'79.

Dr. Hartzell: You went down to Maryland as a graduate student.

John Burness: As a graduate student, and had gotten a job, and got a Master's under Laurie McHuan Marine Sciences Center, and she got a job with the Middle Atlantic Regional Fishery Management Council, which was in Dover, Delaware, so my doctorate was going to be, the location of my work was going to be dependent upon where she was, so I went there. So I came back for that year. I wrote a letter to Sam Easterbrook, who was a very key member of the Council. I don't know if you remember him, but

Dr. Hartzell: I remember his name but I never had anything to do with him.

John Burness: He was, first of all he understood education in the way that most members of the Council didn't; most of them were much more political.

Dr. Hartzell: Sand and gravel people.

John Burness: Yes, that's right, exactly. Sam understood education. Sam was an economist who was the key person at New York Telephone in setting their rates. He understood demographics, he understood politics; I mean he wasn't just an economist who understood the numbers, he understood the whole fabric of things. I think in his younger days, he was a Republican from Huntington, in his younger days he confided in me once, he was the person who carried money from place to place or picked it up. Very interesting guy, I learned a ton from him. But he was the single member of the Council who most understood the broader context of so many of these issues. And I'm going to digress for one second to say that just as we had organized the Council as a sort of political issue force with SUNY, the Council then appointed the Stony Brook Council Advisory Committee, which brought in other people. Part of the problem you had was the Council itself in some ways, well intentioned basically, but most of them were political hacks, how were we going to begin to build a political base; so we set up this advisory council, and we had people from all over the Island, from business and industry and labor. It was our way to establish tentacles out there, much like the Foundation started to become the same thing. And I was doing that too when I started to get the Foundation dinner off the ground and began to establish a presence in them. But Sam understood this whole picture better than anybody else on the Council. And he was near the end of his term at that point. And I wrote him a long letter talking about the search, he had asked me about it. I was then down at Maryland. It was a handwritten letter, where I said that there would be enormous pressure to knock Alec out and knock him out early; there would be pressure from the campus, there would certainly be pressure from SUNY. And that I thought it very important that at least one member of the Council understood the role that I had seen that Alec had played which is not to say that I thought

he should be the president, but somebody at least ought to understand this set of issues that were out there. I found that letter about a year and a half ago; it's somewhere.

Dr. Hartzell: Have you got a copy of that?

John Burness: I can send a copy. There were a limited number of other people at the campus who I think understood the importance of the issue. Jerry Schubel was one; because of his Marine Sciences Program and its Sea Grant status with Cornell, he had spent more time at Albany and with the political structure than others normally did at the campus. And he is extremely bright and understood. I liked your comment earlier about how's he doing. Well, within the context of the situation, as well as he could. I mean that's the problem. Jerry understood the issues. Well, that search went on. In some ways I was as responsible for the debacle as I was anything else, in that I had argued that when Tobler was retiring that we should try to get Carey to appoint someone who really understood the higher education issues. Andy Anderson had been appointed, I think he had already been appointed as a member, I'm pretty sure that's right, and he was a new kind of member. He was the first person who came, Johnny had tried to get him on, I don't know that he knew Andy that well. I don't think that was the issue. But it was somebody from Brookhaven at a high enough level who would understand these issues; that was very important to us.

Dr. Hartzell: They had had George Collins.

John Burness: Right, that's right. But then after George left, there was nobody. I conceived of the idea of getting Andy to be Chairman. (a) He'd understand the issues; (b) He'd give us credibility, he was a non-political kind of character. I was absolutely right; the problem was my own naiveté, and to some extent, I think, his naiveté. If you haven't interviewed him, I would urge you to do so on these things. He ultimately was appointed Chairman, and the political process was not happy about this. We pushed this issue very hard through the Governor's office to get it done. I think Andy was enormously bothered by what he saw as the constant political infighting at the University, whether it were these battles with SUNY where we just couldn't agree on anything, it

was just knives and daggers all the time, as well as the internal tensions, which were as unhealthy for a campus. You know I really glossed over those and not doing that intentionally, it's just the areas in which I was really focused externally, but I was very much aware of the fact that the singular importance of a campus governance system that really works is when you need it, it's there. We needed it several times and it wasn't there, that kind of problem. But he was very troubled by it. He understood the academic issues that were at stake; he understood the frustrations of the humanities And he was bothered by Alec's style.

Dr. Hartzell: Style?

John Burness: The angry, bitter. You know, when the faculty would ask the legitimate questions but for the tenth time. Alec's view was "screw 'em, I don't have time to talk about this any more." He just lost his patience with all of it, and that angered the faculty and that was all known to Andy. Stony Brook was also an inhospitable place to students. I mean, we had lousy housing. All those things I talked about the infrastructure before, the consumers of the product might get a damn good education from the faculty, but they couldn't get their grades, they couldn't get anything. The bills were always screwed up; the financial aid program was always screwed up; the housing was terrible. We didn't have a college town area where the normal kinds of amenities and services that the local environment provides at Cornell. There are all the little shops off campus

Dr. Hartzell: The fine arts program now is much better.

John Burness: Yeah, but then, the fine arts had just come on board. So he was very frustrated by that; he saw spending all of our time on what were political fights and facilities fights. And facilities, I mean, it's a funny game. Facilities define program. Program really should define facilities, but in the SUNY structure the only way you could become a comprehensive place was to be able to get a building because then they couldn't take the building away and had to fill it. I mean it was the exact reverse of the way it ought to have been. But again that was not widely understood either. That's the

context of the system. That search started, Andy was the chair, and it was a disaster from start to finish. It was a disaster for any number of reasons. One of which was Cliff Wharton was new. Cliff Wharton walked into a situation where Stony Brook had been making life miserable for SUNY Central. Even when I was on leave, I would periodically get a call from somebody at Stony Brook, Alec or Johnny, saying could I place a call to one of my contacts in Albany and move something through. And I could do that easier from Maryland than anybody who was there, and I would do that. So I was very much aware of what was going on. But we were just so involved in that political fight, which was literally going to define the future of the University, that we weren't paying attention to all these other kinds of things that needed great attention. We weren't, we just didn't get to it. It was evident they weren't being paid attention to, people I think made the wrong assumptions about why that was happening. In any event, Wharton comes on new, would like nothing better than to stop this rogue campus which is what we had become. We had gone and used the political structure system in a way that was making their lives miserable and totally constraining the flexibility in Central Administration. Any time there was a flexible ballot, we had already gotten our way in on it before SUNY had, and in their system, you know the politics of that system so much you can understand, so it was clear that Wharton would not want Alec, and SUNY Central would not want Alec, I mean the bureaucrats up there wouldn't under any circumstances. Wharton had a conversation with Anderson early on. This was not known until the very end, where he told him that there was no way he would approve Alec Pond coming forward as a candidate.

Dr. Hartzell: I didn't know that.

John Burness: Well, that was the biggest piece of the puzzle. That's where it all in many ways really fell through. Nobody knew that. The search went on, and I think Andy was sure that in the course of the search, and Alec didn't have strong, I mean, Alec didn't have strong support on the Council. He was a diffident personality, whatever else. He'd never go out and have a drink with these guys, you know, that kind of stuff. Not that

Johnny was, but at least he's a character. And I think Andy thought, well, we won't need to worry about that because it will never happen. Well, as the process went along,

Dr. Hartzell: Alec had support in the business community.

John Burness: Well, Alec had very strong support from what I call the political community. You can go back and look at the letters of support that came through for Alec, they were very broad gauged externally, some powerful political people, the business community, which in Stony Brook is a key element of the development, even *Newsday*. Which is not to say they were trying to go for him, I don't think that was the case until the very end when it started falling apart. But then the Council brought in the various candidates, I was, Anne and I in that interim year lived in the President's house, we caretook it, so we met each of the candidates. Of course, I was Secretary of the Council and was involved in all those meetings as those meetings were going on that they were making those judgments. It was not a very sophisticated search. The Council was doing it.

Dr. Hartzell: They didn't know how to do it.

John Burness: At some level they didn't; they didn't know the right questions to ask anyway.

Dr. Hartzell: Or the places to go look.

John Burness: I thought they had wonderful candidates they named five finalists, then there's Mike Hayman, who is now Chancellor at Berkeley, who was a finalist at every place in the country and he was waiting for Berkeley and went around and was offered every, he withdrew before the Council voted, I'll get back to that eventually. But there was a Vice Chancellor number two guy at Irvine, who in fact was very impressive. I think the Council was very impressed by him; he was the one I was least impressed by. He was a psychologist of considerable distinction, but his undergraduate major had been theater and I was struck by what a great, how on stage he was, how effective he was, on the substantive issues he didn't seem to be there, and what I at least found out from my folks I could check with in California was not that positive.

Mort Weir, who is now Chancellor at Urbana would have been a good choice, but Mort was a very quiet, much more quiet in the search when he came to campus than he really is, he came off quite different than I think he really is. I forget who, the fourth was a guy that Cliff had put in, who was a black, who was the Chancellor at U Mass Amherst, who was a real lightweight, he was a geologist, worked for the geological survey. Schubel and others knew him as an academic joke. So it really came down to, and Alec

Dr. Hartzell: That says something about Wharton.

John Burness: Well, I'll tell you something about Wharton, that if you look at almost every one of Cliff's major appointments at the campuses, they were deans. There was nobody who came from a presidency to a presidency. I say that because, I mean I did my doctorate on organizational behavior and theory. Deans are folks in the middle. They are not the ones who make the decisions frequently, they are caught between the pressures from above and below, and they are conciliators, they have to be. Well, that's what Cliff wanted in his presidents because he wanted to be able to run the show. He wanted people down as conciliators. So, this is purely my own theory; I don't have any basis but So here are your five candidates, Heyman who didn't want it

[end of tape 1]

Dr. Hartzell: How do you spell Weir?

John Burness: W-E-I-R, Morton Weir, he's now the Chancellor at Urbana, should have been the Chancellor, politics of that system, much like the Pond politics, didn't let him become Chancellor; this guy from Irvine, whatever. The Council votes and the vote was, I think, either 7-1 with an abstention or 8-1 for Pond. With Anderson being the only one who voted against Pond, and Anderson voted for Mike Heyman, who already had withdrawn. But nobody on the Council knew that but Anderson. The Faculty Senate or whatever they called it there, I'm not even sure of the governance structure, had not even interviewed Alec and basically said they would not find him an acceptable candidate. In fact the search process didn't There was the normal opposition from the student government, you could predict who would be opposed. There were good reasons

to be opposed. I mean I want to be fair here, but the process was stacked in a way that no one quite understood. The Council sent this nomination forward. Anderson had been trapped. He thought it would have been headed off. He had this conversation. The Trustees turned it down. And either the Council asked for or the Trustees invited them to a meeting in Albany to meet with them. So about 6 or 7 Council members went up. Now Sam Easterbrook's term expired just about that time so he was now off the Council, the one who could have made the most effective case as a member of the search committee. They went up there and I'm trying to think of the guy's name, something Warren, he was Vice Chair of the Trustees, bald.

Dr. Hartzell: James Warren, I've interviewed him.

John Burness: Okay, and I have to digress again here, but before Johnny had left, as this debate had been going on about where was the future of SUNY, Johnny happened to be in Albany the day that a guy named Jim Kelly, who was then Acting Chancellor, had come from Georgetown, this was after Ernie had left, as Executive Vice Chancellor, very bright, tough political guy, probably a good guy, I don't know, certainly not from the perspective I had from Stony Brook, but probably a competent guy, he was testifying before the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and flat out said to them that the future development is going to be two-thirds of Buffalo and the rest That was the first time that we had ever actually had numbers put on the table by SUNY. Later we said, oh, we'll take care of you, we'll take care of you, you're in, you're in, you're in. We had always doubted it but people in the lower levels who were giving us accurate information were saying you're getting screwed. Kelly went and testified. Johnny was outraged. He happened to be there and heard it. He had been absolutely lied to. Threatened to quit on the spot. Ended up with a meeting with then Erwin Landis, who was chairman of the Higher Education Committee of the Assembly on Long Island, Johnny, whatever you do, don't quit, let's talk about this, get this resolved. But all of this was in the background of what Alec understood, what Johnny understood what the ball game was because they were dividing up several hundred million dollars, and it was clear

three-fourths was going to go to Buffalo and the rest was going elsewhere. If that's the case, you did not have a Stony Brook according to the way That was the issue, that was plain and simple the issue. Bricks and mortar were driving programs, bricks and mortar decisions were going to drive programs. You couldn't have a comprehensive tower in the fine arts and the humanities and the social sciences without the facilities for them; that was what was in the Stony Brook program that was not now going to be funded. We had the meeting with the Trustees and at that meeting Warren, the chairman wasn't there, Blinken wasn't there and Anderson wasn't there, he had absented himself from the meeting, refused to us. Warren said, but we told you at the beginning we would never accept Alec Pond as a candidate, you knew that from the start. But we didn't know that from the start. Peter Pappadacos practically came across the table over that; he was outraged. He said, what do you mean, we never knew this. You mean we have gone through the search for whatever number of months, and these guys spent a lot of time on it. I don't think they did a good search because they didn't know how to do it in some sense, but they had gone through the search process, meeting after meeting, all these interviews and whatever else. And it was now at the ninety-ninth hour they discover that the Council had been told that they could never accept Pond. Pond never knew that. I think Alec never would have let himself get in the box had he known that; but he was then trapped. They left that meeting absolutely, they re-submitted his name. There was pressure on the new Democratic members, who were new and didn't know what the hell was going on, that this is a Republican issue. So the new Democratic members of the Council they didn't really quite know what to do. But the votes essentially were still very much the same. The Trustees then turned it down again. Now this was the only time the Trustees had ever turned down a recommendation from the Council, only time since, only time. It was at a meeting at Cooperstown, Sidney and Alec and I went to the meeting, press was there.

Dr. Hartzell: Meeting of the Trustees of the University.

John Burness: Trustees of the University was at Cooperstown, yes. They turned Alec down. Van Arsdale voted for him; it was one of the rare times in SUNY's history of the Trustees that they didn't have a unanimous vote on issues. And they were, you know decisions get made..... There were at least two other people who were going to vote against the Trustee position. This was a really big, Van Arsdale had gotten word from the Long Island labor committee, this is a screw job basically. Actually I think one other person, Nan Johnson of Rochester, may have too, I'm not sure of that. But anyway Alec was then turned down. Alec, he's a very private person, this was enormously difficult for him anyway. The fact that it was set up from the beginning never to happen was another issue. And I don't think he ever would have let himself get put up in that form, in that way, had this been known, but it wasn't known. To this day he despises Andy Anderson. I mean his level of venom for Anderson is higher than it is for Wharton. Wharton I understand. I mean in the sense that he's coming in, he's the head of the system, he's got to get some element of control. He did have this rogue political thing, if he could get rid of the Toll-Pond access, to some extent control the political game behind the scenes, he then would have, he would be able to spend time on other kinds of things. He could end his problems. So from the perspective I understand what he was doing. The end result was the decision that was then made. A critical issue in it was *Newsday* editorialized ultimately against Pond, which was, you could go back and find it in the file, but all things considered at this point, it's in the best interest that he step aside so that we can get past this. Judith Moyers, who was the Long Island Trustee and who is not a supporter of restrictions on SUNY, she comes out of a populist Texas mode. I have enormous respect for Bill Moyers; I think he's the best at what he does. But Judith was a really interesting character because originally she, I think too, was one of the first Trustees appointed from Long Island; they didn't have Long Island Trustees. There was a great fight to get a Long Island Trustee, so they got Moyers appointed. She came by and she appeared to be very, very supportive, but the problem was, they felt this was a populist focus on access, not a search of quality. She was

looking at the undergraduate missions, not at the graduate level. And she was very much involved with Cliff Wharton's selection, got him in the office. She liked Johnny, didn't like Alec, the stiffness of Alec. And the end result was she got to *Newsday* from her old contacts, got that editorialized and it was over, I mean at that point. So then when Schmidt, you know Alec in effect was fired, Schmidt's, I am told authoritatively I think, that the first thing Wharton said to Schmidt is now get rid of Burness. I understand that completely. I was due to go back for the second part of my leave, so I went off on the second part of my leave and just never came back. And then it kind of progressed from there. And they went with Jack Marburger.

Dr. Hartzell: Schmidt did a good job.

John Burness: I think he did a very good job. I mean everything I knew about him, I also thought he was a class act. I mean in my dealings with him while I was there, I found him very honest, very straightforward, very up front. He never did ask for my resignation, and I took care of that for him. And if I were Wharton, I probably would have said the same thing to Schmidt, get rid of this last guy and we can get to work on this. But it was just a terrible period for the institution, and what was at stake literally was the future. Was it going to be a place that was going to have that comprehensive mission or, and even if that had been achieved, even if we had secured agreement on the comprehensive mission, that was only the first part. Because the rest of the part was making it happen within that crazy system. And having two perspectives, one is having been in Illinois to see how other great public universities work and the differences, it's 180° on a continuum; and now being at Cornell, where I spend a lot of time in Albany because of our land grant status and understand how, and we have an affiliation with SUNY, although we're separate obviously from SUNY, and seeing how it works in New York State, the way Cornell can play it and the way SUNY plays it, and it's night and day, it's just night and day. There is no, I mean I was shocked when I came back to New York to Cornell by two things: one was I picked up this little local newspaper, *The Ithaca Times*, on my first week here, and I opened it up, and there was a letter from Mitch

Cohen of the Collective, and I said, my god, he's following me around; the other was that with one exception every single actor in SUNY was exactly the same, and to this day they are all the same. All the senior people in SUNY are still there from when I left, when I came. You look at your various, I mean with limited exception, there are obviously some people who have moved and the Chancellors have changed, but the guy who has now replaced Oscar Lanford is the head of facilities. Even that was another one, Oscar Lanford had wanted to be president of Stony Brook desperately. Oscar Lanford was head of the Construction Fund. Oscar Lanford hated Johnny Toll with a passion. Oscar Lanford worked the Trustees liked crazy against Toll; I mean it was ongoing. So Lanford gets replaced, he's replaced by Irv Friedman, who had been another Vice Chancellor. He had been their legislative guy, he's a good guy and all that, but that's one character. You go through their present Vice Chancellors, they all were there, they all were Vice Chancellors in other jobs. I mean they just move them all around, but the point is you got the same people for fifteen years, and the issues are the same, the mentalities are the same. This is a bureaucracy, a state bureaucracy. And Stony Brook is paying a price for that now. Even as I said, even if the battle had been won, the crucial battle had been won, then came the real hard work, which is working through the system and developing the kind of infrastructure for governance of the campus that made sense.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you know anything about Marburger?

John Burness: I hear lots of things, the difficulty I have with it is I think people are inclined to believe that I don't want to believe good things about him so they phrase their things to me in such a way as to imply 'bah.' In other words, I mean, Marburger was the one who replaced Pond, I was associated with Alec, so people are very careful what they say to me about Jack Marburger and will stress the negative not the positive, let me put it that way. So I know about him. The limited times I've seen him I will say I'm not that impressed with all his work; but he may have been what was needed for an interim period. I'm not sure.

Dr. Hartzell: I think there's something to that.

John Burness: I think for an interim period, it's too long now. Those whose judgments I would give some credence to don't have a high regard for him. But again I am always a little worried because I think sometimes people tell me what they think I want to hear rather than maybe. I'd be curious as to your opinion. You can turn that off on that issue. It was an interesting thing about Johnny, we've talked a little bit either on tape or off about the issue of the sciences and the non sciences. If you look at all the people directly around Johnny, on his staff, not one was a scientist. You had Sheldon Ackley, philosopher ACLU orientation, ten years head of ACLU; Steve Seifman, Norman Thomas' personal secretary for whatever number of years; I was a government major, liberal arts orientation not a scientist; David Dickson in English. I mean you go through with Jeremy, I mean everybody around Johnny was not a scientist. I think it was intentional on his part.

Dr. Hartzell: You think it was.

John Burness: Yes, I say that only because when you saw all of them that way, it couldn't be passive, I may be wrong here but because he did want contrary views. I think people, I don't know that Johnny was a good listener, and I have to say that. He's a person of very strong opinion, he's very rational, he would get to the point, he saw that goal and wanted to look at it, I'm not sure he was a good listener. But I think he consciously picked people to be around him who were not of the same views as he was to make sure he was getting different kind of views. Part of the problem was that after enough times where the decision ends up being contrary to the advice you get from that group, they give up on giving you advice to some extent. That was one thing. I think to Johnny's favor, he made that kind of a judgment. The second thing was that he was my mentor and and I learned an extraordinary amount from him and learned it in a way that, by the time I left that place, in my 30's I knew a whole lot more about managing large complex universities and developing different kinds of things, because he gave me enormous running room. I mean he was the kind of mentor who would let you make mistakes, which is what seems to me is very important. He knew I would never do

anything intentionally to screw him, but he really gave me just a huge range, I mean the whole political area, I mean a lot of these other kinds of things. And I think he made a judgment early on that he would, he liked people who took initiative, he liked all of that. To me one of the shockers when I got there, there were so many vacuums that needed to be filled. I mean, the absence of the infrastructure, whatever. But I just saw a problem and thought it was interesting and go work on it. Others could have done that and didn't. And I've thought about that often, and I think there are two reasons: I was never a threat to him in any way.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, let me stop right there. One of the things that I think was a piece to it, he succeeded me. I had gone down to interview him and one of his first questions was, why don't you want the job or don't you want the job. And I told him that I did not for various reasons. And after he was appointed, or even before, we had talked and our understanding was that I would stay on for a year, we would see how we got along. Ordinarily, a man coming in new doesn't want his predecessor around him or anywhere in the vicinity. Apparently Johnny didn't feel threatened by me at least, and there was never any question at the end of the year that I would stay on, and he raised my salary then, I took a cut to stay. I could have gone back to Albany. Sam Gould asked me if I was interested in doing that. But Ann and I had been on Long Island previously, had friends there, it was fairly close to her home and

John Burness: It made sense to stay. Well, when I say not a threat, I think the point I mean by that is, just as an anecdote, when I was being interviewed in Illinois, their Chancellor had been the Dean of their Law School for thirteen or fourteen years, a venerable person at the campus, the president was new, he was from outside the university, was fifteen years younger than he, and I asked him because of my own interest in this relationship question the kind of power the campus head of the system had of this multi-campus, how do you guys deal with the fact that the president of your system is right across the street from you, in fact the president of the system's office at Urbana is on the quad, the Chancellor of the campus' office is two blocks off the quad, which is a

very interesting issue. And he said, well we agree I'd say 90-95% of the time on most things, when we don't, we go behind a closed door and can really battle it out. On the other hand, I'm much older than he is and I'm not much of a threat. That was a very telling anecdote, because one the things that came through in my research was that, to the extent that the system had links with the campus is someone interested in his or her job, it may very well color the nature of that relationship in a perfectly understandable way. When I say that Johnny didn't see me as a threat in any way

[end of side 1-tape 2 and end of interview]