

Oral History 2014-16-08 PT. 2

Don and Jan O'Dowd

Santa Barbara, California

Jeannie Phillips, interviewer

Leslie McCartney, interviewer and videographer

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Jeannie Phillips asked Don O'Dowd why he decided to leave in 1990. O'Dowd said he had the feeling he had done as much as he could do. He didn't see much more that needed doing. He said he retired when his health was good. The Board of Regents was changing and not as much fun to work with. That began to lose its charm. He didn't disagree but they weren't as impressive as the people before them. Steve Cowper selected the regents at that point. He thought it was a good time to leave. Mrs. O'Dowd said they were also realizing that they were separating themselves from their families and they wanted to be closer to family and friends. They moved from Fairbanks to Santa Barbara.

Phillips asked if he has done any consulting work. O'Dowd said for the following five years after leaving the university he was active. He chaired the Arctic Research Commission for four or five years and did some consulting. He was doing presidential selection. Leslie McCartney asked about the financial situation at the university at the time he left. O'Dowd said they hadn't recovered. The state was never quite as generous as it had been, but state funding was better than it had been. The university recovered slowly. Phillips said it was under the tenure of Mark Hamilton when it finally recovered.

Phillips asked about advice and guidance for Jim Johnsen. She said the interim chancellor was Mike Powers and now Dana Thomas serves now as interim chancellor. O'Dowd said hope that he can hold the university together under difficult financial circumstances. He said to do a lot of consulting with your colleagues, the public, your legislators, and try to find areas of agreement where people can help you reduce your costs. It is never easy. He went through probably five recessions in his years as an administrator. He said you take advantage of the turndown to solve problems that you couldn't solve any other way. Phillips asked if O'Dowd thought we were in tougher times in Alaska than in the mid-80s. O'Dowd thought it sounded comparable to his time and with the oil prices where they are it won't get better for a while. He said the predictions for the price of oil may stay about the same for a while and during his time they were pumping two million barrels a day through the pipeline. It is way down today and who is going to invest money to find new sources at a time when prices for oil are low. Phillips talked about the current financial state of Alaska and need for diversification. O'Dowd said he doesn't see the university making extensive commitments that are an embarrassment or a challenge like other

institutions. He said the tuition has remained quite low. Phillips said that will change a bit, but out-of-state tuition is still lower than in-state tuition at the University of California.

McCartney asked if a lot of faculty left during his time there and were they concerned about the quality of the education at that time. O'Dowd said he didn't remember any loss of faculty. He didn't think they were harmed to begin with, but eventually their salaries began to erode. When he first got to the university the faculty salaries were very generous by national standards, but by the time he left they weren't so generous at all and it didn't get better for some years after that. Phillips said you can't use adjunct faculty alone. He disagrees with using many adjunct faculty. O'Dowd said he has taught some courses on higher education. He commented about big-time athletics at the college level. He talked about sexual assault on campus and how it is handled and Trump's behavior. He commented on research at universities and funding for faculty. Phillips said the University of Alaska has a specific niche in research. O'Dowd said the Arctic is finally becoming of interest and there is more focus on it.

O'Dowd said it was a good experience being in Alaska and he had the opportunity to get around it. Mrs. O'Dowd talked about her interest in theater. O'Dowd said he still reads the Fairbanks newspaper. Mrs. O'Dowd said they travel up to Oregon for the Shakespeare Festival every year. Phillips asked how long they have been married. Mrs. O'Dowd said they have been married for 63 years. O'Dowd said they have gotten to know each other.