

Interview of Rich Studley

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SPEAKERS

Rich Studley, Dr. Jim Goenner

D Dr. Jim Goenner 00:06
It is our great honor to have Rich Studley, President, CEO of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce with us here today. Rich, thank you.

R Rich Studley 00:14
Thank you, Jim. Glad to be helpful.

D Dr. Jim Goenner 00:16
I want you to go back to 1993. Michigan eliminated the school funding system and was working on a big project that we now know as Proposal A. Can you tell us about what was going on at that time and how that led to the birth of charter public schools?

R Rich Studley 00:32
Gladly. I started at the Michigan Chamber in May of 81', as manager of taxation and labor relations, and so I was an entry level lobbyist. I reported to then chamber president, Jim Barrett, who was an early and strong supporter of parental choice of schools and charter schools. And because of my responsibility in the area of tax policy, there were a series of debates about property tax relief and school finance reform. And so we went through a

period where the Michigan Chamber played a leadership role. And I was often involved in negotiations with the governor and legislative leaders and public debates over petition drives and ballot proposals. Some of the proposals were well intended, but not especially well drafted. And I think what we learned in that series of ballot proposals is that unless you give people a real choice, there's always an imaginary hypothetical, perfect plan, somewhere down the road. So we're at the end of that series and I think most Michiganders were tired of being asked to vote on complicated ballot proposals. And so there was an effort in the legislature and on the part of Governor Engler to simplify the debate. Democrats wanted property tax relief and a tax hike or a tax shift. Republicans wanted property tax relief and school finance reform. And eventually, the governor and legislative leaders did find a middle ground there, I found myself along with Jim Barrett, called to the capitol building one afternoon, the Senate was at an impasse. And so we spent the day in the governor's office with legislative leaders, then state senator Dan DeGrow, the governor and lieutenant governor, trying to find a compromise that could receive enough bipartisan support to receive a supermajority to be placed on the ballot. And so even in those days, I was very fortunate to have sort of a front row seat and to be working to support our chamber president in negotiations and compromise. One of the breakthroughs was the desperate need for property tax relief in Detroit. Their taxes were very, very high, the schools were struggling, somethings changed a little somethings changed a lot. But as we work through that process, we're able to come up with a plan that increased funding for schools, drove down property taxes permanently for homeowners and job providers, and as I look back on that proposal, one of the things you have to admire about Governor Engler was that he was a smart, tough negotiator. And if you really set out to do two or three things, you'd often have a package with four or five elements in it; one or two that were negotiable, one or two that he really wanted, and one or two where sometimes it was unclear. And I've often told people since then, that one of the proposals that received the least attention, but has been most fundamental to the support for parental choice of schools, and then charter schools, was a one line addition to our state constitution, requiring the legislature to base school funding on per pupil funding. And that was a giant shift away from an old formula that was about protecting traditional school districts, funding districts, funding institutions, not funding students and their parents. And after that proposal passed, I have the privilege to live in Grand Ledge on the west side of Lansing, nice community, good school district but there was a question that came up that was of concern to a lot of parents. And so to the surprise of the school superintendent and school board who are used to meeting alone, without much of anyone in attendance, we not only showed up but asked to speak. And it was pretty clear that that was an unusual situation in our school district. And the superintendent was dismissive. The school board chair was frustrated. But we insisted on speaking. And I'll always remember, a school board member leaning over to the superintendent, and the school board chair and it was right after Proposal A had passed and he said, "We should listen to

these people." He didn't say, "We should listen to these parents and students, we should listen to these people." Because now they can vote with their feet. And so that was the first indication I had, how sometimes a subtle, but a fundamental change in public policy can drive the debate, and that actions have consequences. And that was really a breakthrough for a lot of individuals and groups, but especially students and parents.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 05:55

So we like to say now the money should follow the student, that really was the line in there that made that possible.

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Rich Studley 06:01

It is, and it received very little attention. The debate was over the property tax relief, would it be more than a nickel? Would it be permanent? The sales tax increase? And really the question about school funding, and parental choice was, was secondary. Received very little consideration. It wasn't a surprise for those of us who work at the Michigan Chamber because when you think about it, business people believe in competition. Successful business people listen to their customers. And thriving businesses learn how to succeed in competitive environments. So I was a little surprised at the level of interest as a young chamber staff member in education. In those days, education really was an economic issue. But it wasn't a traditional business climate issue. It wasn't tax law, or labor law or environmental regulation. But what became apparent to me, and the thing I've learned at my tenure and experience with the chamber, I've been there almost 40 years now, and I'm going into my 10th year as CEO, is small businesses, medium sized companies, major corporations all understand that the students that graduate from high school are the workforce of tomorrow. And I think for quite some time, responsible business leaders have been concerned that too many young people graduate from high school and whether you decide to go on to college or enter the world of work, too many young people graduate from college, not ready to enter the world of work. College is a wonderful choice for many people, but not for everyone. But if you have a diploma that is a certificate of attendance. And I still sometimes talk to employers who know, area school districts and some diplomas mean a lot. It means that you have those strong basic skills in math and reading and science. Other districts, not so much. In my family, my mom and dad moved to Kalamazoo when I was a little boy, my mom was a nurse, my dad was a butcher. We moved to Kalamazoo for the job opportunities. I attended public schools, I wouldn't be the person I am today, if it wasn't for teachers, and coaches and counselors who really cared about me. And so I have great admiration and respect for teachers and school administrators. But I think for too long, especially in those days, we had good people trapped in a bad system of school funding that didn't really bring out the best in

public schools.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 08:54

There's a quote by Edward Deming that says something to the effect of a bad system defeats good people every time. And what we find is that so many people that are for educational change and transformation, get accused of being against public education, when the truth couldn't be any more further away. Right? You're for education, you want everybody have a great education, question is how do we deliver that? How did charters become a delivery system for public education?

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Rich Studley 09:23

I think we realized in the business community and in working with Democrats and Republicans in the statehouse, in the Michigan senate and governors, that there are extraordinary people who teach in traditional public schools, good teachers, good school boards, good administrators. But one size fits all is a challenge. That's why today you see traditional school districts with magnet schools. Personally, I think magnet schools are charter schools in disguise. The choice then was quite different. The education establishment had a very powerful grip on school funding, and so much of the debate, and it still happens today sometimes, is less about students and their parents, but about maintaining jobs, about preserving the status quo, about protecting the institution. When the debate needs to be focused on the students, the debate needs to be focused on the parents. When I was a little boy growing up in, in Kalamazoo, we lived in, in what I thought was a wonderful neighborhood in downtown Kalamazoo. But you realize later as you grow older, there are differences between cities and suburbs, or even within cities. There are elementary schools that everyone wants to attend and there are elementary schools that no one wants to attend. When I first came to Lansing, in '81, that was the situation here. Legislative staffers would routinely live and work downtown. And then when you got married, and wanted to start a family not uncommon to move out to the suburbs. I think one of the things that drove the debate over parental choice and charter schools was a recognition we have today, that in many ways, it's a civil rights question that you shouldn't have to move, you shouldn't have to sell your home, to give your children the education they need. And not all children are alike. Not all schools are alike. And not everyone can afford to escape a failing school district by paying the heavy price to sell your home and move. People make home location decisions for a variety of reasons. I know one of the things that drove my interest as a lobbyist for the chamber and a parent with a child in public schools, is that we came to understand that students and parents were being treated like prisoners or property rather than, than customers. And so that was part of the need for those dramatic changes; per pupil funding, parental choice, and then

charter schools.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 12:29

So you know, Minnesota was the first state to pass a charter school law. And one of the original thinkers of that was a gentleman named Ted Kolderie, who's been a great supporter and has contributed his materials to the National Charter School Founders Library. But Ted wrote a real poignant piece that said, fundamentally, districts can take students for granted. They're the only provider of public education in their community. If you look back 25 years ago in Michigan, there was only one provider of public education in the community, and that was the district. Today, you look around and you see the choices in a city like Detroit or Grand Rapids, Lansing, others. Does that give you pleasure to see that there's now this competitive marketplace of educational choices?

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Rich Studley 13:17

It's an honor and a privilege to be involved in the legislative and the political process. I've always thought that the day I will walk up to the Capitol building, and I'm not excited, I don't feel honored to work in our state capitol. That'd be a signal, I need to do something else. And so it really was a joy to work on legislation that made a big difference in the everyday lives of real Michiganders. I think sometimes our support for parental choice and charter schools has been misinterpreted or misunderstood by the education establishment as an attack on teachers, an attack on schools. That was never the case, at least from the Michigan Chambers perspec, perspective. The idea, first and foremost, was to make traditional schools better. And then if they couldn't, or wouldn't change, if they couldn't, or wouldn't listen to their customers, then to give parents and students trapped in failing school districts, the opportunity for a better life by giving them a better alternative that didn't require them to vote with their feet.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 14:34

But if I could say in many ways, if it wasn't for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, charter schools wouldn't be here in Michigan. And many don't know that history. But before there was a charter school law, the chamber took on a lead role as the advocate for educational change and reform. And you're a counterweight to the Michigan Education Association and other groups and without the chamber support and muscle, the charter law probably would have never come to be. And then many have forgotten that the first law was found unconstitutional in circuit court, and then again in the court of appeals. And everybody is ready to give up. And up, stood the Chamber of Commerce and said, "We'll fund taking this to the Michigan Supreme Court", which then found it

constitutional, and the rest is history. But can you take us back what was happening within the chamber when you were making those decisions and showed such fortitude?

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Rich Studley 15:31

At the Michigan chamber, we've always been very member driven and policy focused. Then, and now we have a large and diverse membership. We represent companies of every size and type in all 83 counties, small businesses, medium sized companies, major corporations, really manufacturing service sector construction. I think one of the wonderful things about chambers of commerce, is that we are about diversity and inclusion. When we bring business people and community leaders together from different walks of life, and identify a problem and then come together on a solution. Chambers of Commerce can be very powerful forces for good, to solve problems at the community level and the state level. I think one thing that happened early in the debate over parental choice and charter schools was there is growing recognition that more school districts were struggling to be successful than people in the education establishment wanted to admit. And so even today, we have over 500 school districts when we have only 83 counties. But it wasn't a question of one or two schools failing here or there. It wasn't a question of, well, our schools are good and those other schools are not so good. There was a growing recognition in the business community, especially in the 80s when we were losing jobs, even to nearby states. Today, we look at Illinois, where I was born and they're very uncompetitive. Those roles were almost reversed. Indiana and Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, always good states, good neighbors, but tough competitors for jobs. I think one of the things that even then drove the debate is we were losing the competition for job creation and economic development. And there was a growing recognition that education policy, parental choice, school finance, charter schools are part of our economic development infrastructure. John Engler said, "You can't win the race for jobs if you don't have good schools." And again, I think that was a breakthrough in thinking for the business community. I've always been blessed to work for an organization with strong leaders, Jim Barrett was a champion, extraordinarily polite, but very tough, fearless, he was not afraid to take up big challenges. We're not afraid to be a strong advocate for our members. And the given take of the legislative debate, if you have a good idea that you believe in, can only make you stronger as you go through that process. There was a lot of opposition and it didn't happen overnight. We had wonderful volunteer leaders, people like JC Huizenga, Doug Bouma in West Michigan and others. Many business leaders in Detroit, who knew that the graduates from a lot of schools in urban areas, did their very best to be ready to go to work and then just did not have the basic math and science and reading skills that we need today in manufacturing. We're going to continue to be a manufacturing state but our future is in advanced manufacturing. I met with a machine tooling company of ours a few years ago and going through the plant I was looking at

multi million dollar computer operated drills and leis and I asked the owner, what kind of people he hired. And he said, "Well, we hire people with a strong work ethic. I haven't hired anyone who dropped out of high school in a long time." And I said "Why?" I thought that sounded a little harsh. And he said, "You have to be able to read. You have to understand math and science. I can't afford to put someone in responsible position for this equipment and risk that we could lose 10s of 1000s of dollars hundreds of 1000s of dollars in waste. Or that someone might be injured because they didn't understand the safety rules and regulations." And so it was kind of a real revelation for me that employer involvement in the debate over public education in charters in schools has economic implications as well. But I think sometimes people have this odd notion that business people don't have families, that they don't have children. We're hearing the same thing from our members as parents. A lot of business people that we work with go on from high school to earn associate's degrees or bachelor's degrees or other degrees. And so I think sometimes there's more a sense of appreciation for the tremendous value the life changing impact of a good education than people who are not in the business community understand. It was really pretty a natural process once we recognized the problem. Successful business people solve problems.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 20:58

Well, you know, the power of a great education is it's transformational. Right, it can transform lives. And when you see the human potential and you love people, you want everybody to get a education that's transformative, so they can be the best that they can be. And you know, I remember as you bring this history back, Governor Engler used to be a fan of saying the smart state, the smart state, the smart state. Has Michigan become the smart state?

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Rich Studley 21:26

We're doing better. The challenge is, I think, especially in the the early 80s, the mid 80s, the late 80s not enough public policy leaders thought about economic competitiveness. People thought about the business climate and defined it too narrowly, to the traditional business climate issues, not quality of life issues, not where do the employees of the future come from? Are they prepared? And so I think our thinking changed, our focus evolved to more holistic approach. It wasn't that long ago, that Michigan was the only state in the country to lose population. And we lost almost a million Michigan residents because there were not enough jobs. Bringing those jobs back has been a decades long struggle. And we're almost back to where we started at about 10 million people. But I think the challenge is sometimes people think about being competitive as a destination, like you can get in the car and drive there, you can make a reservation, you can check in and stay

for a while. What we learned is that every time Michigan passes groundbreaking public policy, parental choice, charter schools, per pupil funding, other states copy that legislation and make it better. So we have to remind ourselves that we're in a war with other states, cities in other states, and now foreign countries for jobs. And that we have to constantly be striving to listen, to learn, to be better. As our society grows older, I think it's critically important that we really can't afford to graduate anyone from high school these days, who doesn't have the basic skills they need to earn a good living here in Michigan.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 23:28

Well what's wonderful about that is that's the rising tide lifts all ships. And it is a competitive environment, competitive world. And so the importance of education becomes even greater. There's nowhere to hide. Governor Engler used to talk about schools without boundaries. And prior to charter schools, there was only the district with the boundary and based on where you lived, you were assigned there. We've moved to this era of choice. We've really moved away from assignment, you can be assigned, but you don't have to be you can vote with your feet. And well, not everybody has or will. Part of the key is that they have the ability, whether they choose it or not. Can you talk about that from the Chamber's perspective, the business perspective? How did those kind of fundamental principles shape public policy over time?

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Rich Studley 24:24

Business people tend to understand economics, not always at a theoretical level. But they understand that when you develop a groundbreaking product or service, you can attract customers and keep customers if you listen to them, if you're responsive, one size doesn't fit all. And part of the innovation and creativity in school reform came with the introduction of parental choice, and charter schools and even within the framework of traditional public schools to not only challenge traditional schools to be better with charters. But another breakthrough, and again it didn't seem like a big deal at the time, was to allow parental choice between public schools. It started to change the thinking within the Intermediate School Districts. And so now today, even within the more traditional education establishment, you have people understanding at the regional level that or within an ISD, some schools are better than others. We're a large and diverse state, it doesn't make any sense. If you have a large, geographically large rural district, with a small number of students and parents who need foreign language instruction, a lot of school districts that can't afford to hire a full time French teacher, Spanish teacher, German teacher, or Japanese or Chinese today. That's something that can be done by a magnet school, it can be done with science and technology. I think we're breaking down those old boundaries. When we visit, and work with charter schools today, we see schools

that are very focused on meeting the individual needs. And know that if they're not good listeners, if they don't deliver on their promises, they'll be out of business. We still have that dilemma today. If you're a traditional public school district, and you're failing, you get more money, you get more time. If you're a charter school, and you continue to fail, and you constantly lose students, you're held accountable, and you go out of business. And so I think there are some of those basic differences, public sector, private sector, most of us know almost intuitively, that monopolies are not very customer oriented, and bureaucracies particularly permanent, unionized civil service, bureaucracy, bureaucracies are often not very good listeners.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 27:04

One of the things Ted Kolderie used to talk about is in his advocacy to lawmakers and governors, is education is too important to put all your eggs in one basket. Right? So that notion we learned in kindergarten, don't put all your eggs in one basket. His argument was we put all our eggs in one basket, the district, and that we needed to create these options. As you talk about the economists, right? There's this notion of creative destruction, where somebody can come in with a better idea, do it better, faster and cheaper, and you can end up out of business. You think that would be okay, for schools where somebody doing it more effectively, more efficiently, could actually put a school out of business.

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Rich Studley 27:48

I wouldn't lead with that argument. I think one of the challenges I've come to appreciate after almost 40 years at the chamber as an employer myself, is that most folks are in favor of change for someone else. Real change, dramatic change can be very threatening, very unsettling. There's some times when that is necessary. We were very determined. We knew that this was a big challenge that we would have to chip away at it. Parental choice, per pupil funding, charter schools. People like John Engler, people like Richard McLellan, people like JC Huizenga. My friend and predecessor, Jim Barrett, who continues to be a wonderful mentor to me. Another element to that debate that people have almost forgotten about. And we were a catalyst for permanent fundamental change is why you were stuck before charter schools and parental choice in your district. If you move to a new district, whether it had good schools or bad school, schools, what were you told, "Oh, the schools are wonderful here. You're like, Mr. Johnson or Mrs. Smith." There aren't very many communities that advertise they have crummy schools. And so another breakthrough is when that same circle of bold and innovative leaders went to Dr. Jerry Faverman at Public Sector Consultants. It was the Michigan Chamber Foundation that created and published the first statewide scorecard on educational performance of traditional public school districts. And it triggered a firestorm of controversy. Because all

of those superintendents who said, "We're a great school and doing a fine job." Many of them were right. Some of them had not been candid about student achievement, graduation rates. One of the things that blew the lid off this debate was the realization that across Michigan in the 80s and 90s, we had very high spending districts that produced poor results and we had low spending districts that produced above average results. And so another lesson we learned along the way is money is important. But it isn't everything and pulling back the curtain so that students and parents and employers could see not only how their school district was doing, but how did it compare with surrounding school districts. How did it compare, not just in the labor market, but similar school districts in other parts of the state. We're a state where a lot of people will live in one community and work in another and have a family in a third. And there are many of us who have lived in different parts of the state. So that was also an accelerator, shining light on school performance. And again, I when we released that report, Dr. Faverman was very brave person. But as a PhD, he was not welcome in many academic circles for a while because he kicked open the door and turned over a few tables to get that information.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 31:09

That report was a game changer. You made data visible and understandable. And when people saw that they asked questions, and it was a game changer. So that's a great memory of the Chamber's leadership in this. Rich, you've been involved in the capital scene in Michigan before there was charter schools. But since 1993, when Governor Engler brought that law into existence with the legislature, you've seen different governors, different legislators, different dynamics come and go. Is there a theme or pattern that you've seen over the last 20-25 years when it comes to education and charters?

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Rich Studley 31:56

I've had the privilege to work with six governors, Democrats and Republicans. I think sooner or later, every governor realizes the importance of education. Some people come to office, at a time when the focus is on jobs, or the economy, or the environment. The first governor I worked with was Bill Milliken and he cared deeply about education but there were other challenges facing the state. So I think part of the dilemma we have, and there are a lot of great things about our 1963 state constitution. But one of them that I think has hindered the advancement of student oriented, parent oriented educational reforms, is the disjointedness of education policy. You have 148 lawmakers who think they make education policy, and they can and they should, and that is their role. Governors see themselves as the chief executive officer, they think they make education policy. But then we have this odd creature in the middle, an elected State Board of Education, a partisan elected State Board of Education, which in my personal opinion, is a horrible mistake. And

then the partisan State Board of Education that doesn't report to the legislature or the governor hires a state superintendent of public instruction, and they think they make education policy. So I think perhaps if we had it to do over again, it might be simple and it might be better accountability, in the same way that governors are allowed to appoint department heads, whether it's state police or Treasury. Everyday folks think the governor is responsible for education, whether the governor is a democrat or republican, allowing each new governor with their mandate to appoint a state superintendent. Well, I think local school boards are critically important, whether it's a traditional school or a charter school, to stay focused on students and parents. I spent a week, one afternoon at a state board of education meeting. And I promised myself I would never go back. And so it's hard to see how they add value. And I think sometimes they're not even helpful to traditional public schools. And so between the local school boards and the ISDs, it seems to me that the Michigan Department of Education has suffered, frankly, whether the governor is a Democrat or Republican. We've come to think, I have come to think of the MDE as the Michigan Department of Excuses. They defend the status quo. And every single governor that I've had the privilege to work with, becomes frustrated, especially with that part of the education establishment. The State Superintendent from who knows where always has the same agenda. Give us more time, give us more money and leave us alone. The state board of education that bickers and fusses and fights, and nobody can tell you who they are.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 35:09

You in the chamber have been the impetus of so many fundamental education reforms, as you look forward to the next 20 years, what are a few of the keys that you think would help us go to the next level as a state?

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Rich Studley 35:25

Well, unfortunately, it'd probably take a constitutional amendment to eliminate the State Board of Education, or to have a different method of selection. On the other hand, it's a good thing that when voters said, "We want per pupil funding," that's written into the state constitution, and now's the time for students and parents, and all of us who believe in charter schools, and good public schools to remind lawmakers of that. There's a lot of discussion recently, about moving away from per pupil funding, going back to a complicated, some districts get more others get less, some students are worth more other students are worth less. There are a lot of nice sounding arguments about that. But I think it takes us back to the old days of the appropriations driven school funding decisions made behind closed doors, by people on the appropriations committees trading them for bridges or armories or draft picks to be named at a later date, we need to stick with per

pupil funding. When you look at all school districts, sometimes the districts that are struggling, when defenders of the establishment make the case that they're not doing well, they can't change, they shouldn't change. They say that they don't spend as much as nearby suburban districts. Well that's because they don't include the federal funding that only goes to some of those districts. I think that's a challenge for those of us who believe in parental choice and charter schools. In many ways even the current school funding process, which is much improved, is still not delivering complete fairness when it comes to per pupil funding. Charter schools students do not get the same level of funding as traditional school districts in their community. We've got to work to prevent that gap from getting any wider, to try to close it. But I would sound a word of caution to all of us who care about students and parental choice and charter schools. This idea that some students are worth more than others. We really need to think that through very carefully whether that is the right approach. At the Michigan Chamber, we believe personally, I think we stay focused on closing the per pupil gap in funding, that tends to level the playing field in a way that is fair and balanced. I think we need to be very careful about proposals we'll hear in the next few months, for the next few years. It's time to repeal Proposal A, it didn't work. It's time to change school funding so that the student gets more than that student. That's going to be very political, very partisan. And as the leader of a large and diverse statewide organization, I'm reminded every day of the joy of our state being so large and diverse, but living and working in Detroit isn't different than living and working or going to school in Dowagiac. Living and working in Niles is different than living and working or going to school in Negaunee. And so some of those regional and local differences are okay.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 38:44

It's big state. As you look back over the last 25 years of charters, what are some of your proudest moments?

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Rich Studley 38:56

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit a charter school in Mount Pleasant. After spending all day on campus as a trustee, and it was a great field trip for me. It had been a while since I had visited a charter and to see the teamwork, the collaboration between the administrator who was seen as a leader of the school not a bureaucrat, the teamwork, the cooperation, the different methods of teaching, the parental involvement, the excitement of the students. I think it's really important that we ask that we challenge lawmakers to visit their local schools, not just the traditional schools, but the charter schools. Because there's such a great story to tell. I think it's also important for students and parents and those of us who believe in charter schools to be prepared to defend them. And in the

Capitol Building Information is knowledge and knowledge is power. We can't take for granted that what we've accomplished over the past few decades, in terms of building this foundation of parental choice, and charter schools, and per pupil funding, and disclosure of performance data, is going to remain the same. There are individuals and groups, very powerful individuals and groups that would like to turn back the clock and eliminate charter schools or parental choice entirely.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 40:27

Rich with your vast experience working with the business community, are there certain principles that work in business and work in education, and that you'd like to say, here's some real keys that if you want to build a great school, a school of excellence, here's things you should be focused on?

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Rich Studley 40:49

I've been reminded at different times in the debate, when educators, school bureaucrats would say, why are you involved? You're a chamber executive, the business community shouldn't be involved in education. Well, we're your customer. Where do you think the high school graduates go? They either go to school, they go to some other state, or they stay in our state and work. So I think we've made some breakthroughs there. But I think it's really important that the charter schools that exist today, don't take for granted that it will always be this easy to be in operation. That you have a Department of Education that at best is ambivalent, if not hostile to charter schools. It's critically important for students and parents, employees and charter schools to be involved in the legislative and the political process, to attend and participate in committee meetings and public hearings. I think if there's one thing we've demonstrated together over the years, is that a few good people with a powerful idea, who are determined to participate and won't give up can have a tremendous positive impact on public policy. But today in Lansing, I think it's appropriate to be concerned that some individuals and groups are so hostile to charter schools, they may know that the law can't be repealed, that they wouldn't have the votes to get that through the House and Senate. But Governor Whitmer has a number of policy initiatives that we agree on, some even with education focused more on getting workers the skills they need to stay competitive. On the other hand, would the current governor sign a bill to curtail or severely limit charter schools to rollback the funding, would she do that at the urging of the teachers unions? Well, they were very supportive. So I think we have to be prepared. I think we also have to be concerned if you support parental choice and charter schools, that the governor has the authority to appoint trustees to state universities and those state universities that charter schools are a likely target in the next year or two. And so who is appointed to a state board is very important. And I think again,

there are good people on both sides of this debate. But we have to have balance, we have to be listening. We have to be learning, we have to stay involved. And we can't take for granted that the status quo will remain unchanged.

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Dr. Jim Goenner 43:35

Rich, can charter schools join the Michigan Chamber of Commerce?

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Rich Studley 43:38

Yes. I think that's one of the fun things about our involvement in this is that charter schools are very entrepreneurial. They see themselves as meeting a need for students and parents and employers. There was a time when traditional school districts were very welcoming to employers. Sometimes they are now sometimes they aren't. There was a time in the past and a good friend who is the executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards, and before he retired, he told me how much that had changed, that in the past if he would visit school boards around the state, every single school board had at least one or two business people on the school board. And I think that's a challenge we have to accept in the business community. Business people who serve on school boards deserve combat pay. They're long and difficult meetings. God love them for doing that. But before he retired, he said, "I visited a lot of school districts now and there's not a single business person on the school board." Everyone on the school board is a teacher, a spouse of a teacher, someone who's retired. We need that mix. We need people from all walks of life in the legislature. We need people from different walks of life on school boards. I think part of what's been welcoming, and why we have such a good relationship with many charter schools is employers who don't want to serve on a public school board, because of what that involves, have started to step up to serve on charter schools. And that's something we work at with our friends at MAPSA. We've talked about with Dan Quisenberry, how we're all in this together. That's something I see myself as a university trustee. And so we have to continue to work together to encourage good people from all walks of life, but also some business leaders and other community leaders to serve on the charter boards to make sure that they're connected to their community that they're listening. But again, because of the differences in funding, and the contracts and accountability that goes with that, good charter school authorizers hold their school districts accountable.

D

Dr. Jim Goenner 45:58

Universities being authorizers is in some ways unique to Michigan, we're not the sole state that has university authorizers but we certainly lead the way on that. How do you see the university's connection to charters being mutually beneficial; training teachers,

professional development connections to business technology. What all possible as a university authorizer?

R

Rich Studley 46:24

At CMU, one of the things I enjoy about the board is President Davies relentless focus on our students. Everything we do is about helping our students be successful, whether they go on to further degrees, whether they return to the workforce. And so I do think about it. And I think sometimes schools of education forget that there are a lot of amazing job opportunities in charter schools. And so we're quite clear about that, that we train good teachers to teach in traditional public schools or charter schools or other schools. So jobs for CMU graduates is important. I think another element is part of our focus on business. From day one, we've been about teaching teachers to teach and business. That partnership between business and charter schools, focused on caring about customers and accountability. And being driven by success is also part of the beauty there. And I think that we also appreciate as more than just a regional university, that there are school districts that have failed in urban areas and other areas, where if there wasn't this lifeboat, people would have been in real distress. And so some of it is manning the lifeboats. And I think the innovations we do, whether it's in business or education, we've had to learn as a university. In the early rounds of COVID-19, we moved very quickly from a lot of our instructors, not teaching online, to in a very short time with the library sciences people helping to help tenured professors who are used to teaching in person to be able to teach online or teach hybrid classes or flex classes. And so I think modeling innovation, and changes in technology and improving education, helping people persevere through difficulties like COVID-19. That's part of the reason we're so determined at CMU to reopen safely. And we're making good progress there to be a good example for other educators.

D

Dr. Jim Goenner 48:56

Rich last question. You've got such a vast experience in service on the board. If I were a newly appointed trustee, and I'm trying to figure out where my bearings are, what advice would you have for me?

R

Rich Studley 49:15

During my tenure at CMU, I've got the remainder of this year and two years left. I've been blessed to work with extraordinary board chairs. And ideally, I think you ought to start with the idea that you can trust and have confidence in both your president and your board chair. I'm not here today to speak on behalf of Bob Davies our president or Tricia Keith. They are both extraordinary leaders. If you have a president that is talking about

rigor and relevance and excellence, and not just talking about it, but living it, and you have a school of education, if you're not already in the business of chartering schools, I would ask the question, why not? The other thing I've learned, which has made me a better board member, is to not be shy about asking questions. I don't think I've ever felt so inexperienced or foolish or just plain dumb when I found myself as part of my orientation, sitting in a room with 18, or 19 people, and I realized 15 of them were PhDs. And so it can be a little intimidating at first. I think it helped I had a master's degree from CMU. So but you're there for a purpose, to ask questions, to challenge the status quo, and be relentless in your quest for rigor and relevance and excellence. And try to say and do things that lift up others. It's been a wonderful learning experience for me. Being on the CMU board has made me a better CEO and I think I have a whole new understanding and appreciation for how important universities are as regional drivers of education and how our role in higher education and in our state is critical. And for CMU, that partnership with charter schools, teaching teachers to teach in charter schools or traditional schools, being in education ourselves, there's more connectivity there than than you would think. I do think sometimes we have to challenge universities. The university decision making process isn't slow. It isn't incremental, it can be glacial. And so I think part of the value you can contribute, as a board member is to question and challenge and to try to help good people do great things. And sometimes we do get sort of bogged down in the process of university life. But I am so proud of our faculty, I think they understand, although we're collegial and respectful of other universities, higher education is changing. K through 12 education is changing. Whether we like it or not, we will all live and work in a very competitive environment. And so I think being the very best we can be, asking those questions. The other thing is to devote the time, being a good trustee is not about just enjoying a football game on a Saturday. You got to be willing to do your homework. And in that regard, it can be a very humbling process because you get to work with so many amazingly smart people. But they have the same everyday challenges we do. So it's been a big joy, but question, challenge, and ask how my university, whatever university board you're on, how can we be better? How can we do things quicker, smarter? How can we better serve our students in our community? How can we get there faster? I've been surprised. We had a speaker the other day, talk to us. Faculty member said how difficult it was to establish a new course. And there was this bible, and it made it difficult and time consuming. And finally several of us on the administration, the board said, "This, this Bible that doesn't let you do that? Wouldn't that be our Bible? How come none of us have seen it or read it? Can you help us find that?" And it turned out as our Provost looked into it, to be more habit and tradition. And no, we cover process to do things more quickly. People get into routines, and I think universities sometimes can be wonderful places to work, but maybe a little too comfortable from the pressures that face the rest of our state. But it's been a great joy. And I think chartering schools, makes our education department better, School of Education. It makes CMU better. It brings that spirit of entrepreneurship. That's

the other thing. If you look for opportunities to allow your faculty to compete and innovate, our experiences, CMU is that they will welcome those opportunities.



Dr. Jim Goenner 54:51

You just summarized the five practices of exemplary leaders: model away, challenge the process, encourage the heart, and Rich Studley, we thank you for your time and we thank you for your service.



Rich Studley 55:03

Thank you Jim.