

# Interview of Gov. John Engler

Mon, Oct 24, 2022 2:41PM 1:21:54

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, school, education, people, state, governor, charter, thought, charter school, child, district, kids, talked, charter schools, opportunity, parents, university, important, teachers, years

## SPEAKERS

Jim Goenner, Ph.D., Gov. John Engler

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**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 00:00

Well, Governor Engler, it is great pleasure to be able to host you as the National Charter School Founders Library. It's October 12, 2022, and almost 29 years ago to the day, you were talking about education and that our kids deserve better. We're just grateful to have you here today in the studios and to get your history of what happened and how you made that happen.

**G** Gov. John Engler 00:23

Well, it took a lot of effort on the part of a lot of people. I suppose the roots of this go back quite a ways. Even before being elected governor, we talked a lot about education and we certainly, in the campaign to be elected governor, talked a lot about property taxes and the burden that property taxes represented on Michigan taxpayers. If we go back to the late 80s, early 90s, literally senior citizens almost being taxed out of their homes, but the incessant demand for money to fund public education, that was primarily based on the property tax, so it was a big political issue, but there was also the issue of education performance. We had an opportunity that arose after failing twice with ballot proposals - we came pretty close twice - but they were only measures that would restructure how we paid for education. They did not deal with, fundamentally, the reform that many of us felt was important for improving public education in Michigan. We saw public education, I did as a candidate for governor then as governor, one of the most important competitive things that a state can do. I used to say that the state with the best schools wins. And we weren't just talking about universities, we really talked about the K-12 system as well.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 01:45

Well, you talked a lot about the smart state and the knowledge economy and what it was gonna take. But a lot of times governors don't get into education the way you do. Is there something about your upbringing, your own education that made you take education so seriously?

G

Gov. John Engler 02:00

I had a father that spent 20 years on a school board, so I guess I had a perspective. Now I went to a small rural school, only 42 students in my class. I had early in my education, there was a mixture of public school for kindergarten, parochial school for some of the elementary and then public school for high school. So certainly, I'd seen in rural Beal City, Michigan, the ability of public and nonpublic schools to work together and it was very collegial, but I certainly understand also it wasn't that way around the state. And also, we went through a period where the state was trying to force consolidation of school districts. I remember that the people in the Beal City school district were pretty proud. And they said, No, we're not consolidating, we're not merging. And to this day, they remain an independent district. What's interesting is one of the things that happened in the debate that we had in the early '90s, relative to public school choice, resulted in Beal City becoming very attractive to a lot of students who were, in the day, neighboring districts, but now could exercise choice to come to the closer school, which was Beal City and we saw that happen all over the state. So there's a lot to talk about in education, but I felt going through Michigan State and then coming into the legislature, that we just had and you looked at the test scores nationally, we were pretty average, we weren't exceptional. We weren't at the bottom, by any means. We wouldn't want to trade with a lot of states, we wouldn't want their systems and their performance. But it seemed to me there was a lot of room on the upside. And even in those days, all of the talk about the knowledge economy - when I took office, we didn't have the internet, which is kind of weird to think about a pre-internet world. I mean, the cell phone in those days was a bag phone that we had in the car that was expensive and cumbersome and sometimes worked, but that was how we communicated. It's so different now and yet, all of those changes that were being rolled out by the tech companies and the telcos and all of that were foreshadowing where we were going to be headed, and it was very clear that we're going to have a revolution, that digitization, that computers and everything were going to change the whole world and how are we going to respond from an educational sense, and I think we were, maybe still are, a bit behind the curve where we need to be, but the idea was that they were rolling out all these technologies and they were improving and things were changing but what was driving it? Competition! And where did we have a monopoly? I think in the speech the phrase I used was a "monopoly of mediocrity", gosh, public education, impervious. And it really was monopoly - if you lived there and you weren't of means, you were stuck there, and you took what they offered, and what other - even public services have more choice than that - but this aspect, so important, K-12 education was a monopoly.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 05:27

So I want to take you back to the summer of 1993...you had inherited a mess, you were in your first term as governor, and you eliminated the state property tax for funding schools. Can you take us back to what was going on?

G

Gov. John Engler 05:42

Well, that was wild. I have to put the first term as governor, maybe in the context of, you know, people thought in 1990 when we won the governor's race by about 17,000 votes, well, this is a big shock. What's this guy - we never thought this guy would get elected - what's he doing?

And there was a, at least some say, well, that margin is so narrow, that's so slim, you know, there's no mandate there. And we said, look, the change was the mandate, it's not the margin. And if people think you're gonna be there just one term, because everyone said that, oh, he's one term, he'll be gone. I said, well, we're gonna use the one term to our maximum, and we'll enjoy it, and we'll do everything we can. If we're right, we'll win easily. If we're wrong, nothing we can say will save us. So let's go full speed ahead and no half measures because you've got the opportunity to lead the state to bring people together. Back in those days also, I think it's important to remember, I hear people talk about bipartisanship, it's a lot more difficult when, in fact, there's different parties in charge. And we had a Republican Senate and Democrat House the first two years, we had a tie in the House the second two years of that first term, so we never had both chambers of the legislature. We had a court at the time, which was, I would say, it wasn't certainly a rule of law court, you know, I think, obviously, one of things I was proud of is over time, we're able to improve the Michigan Supreme Court, and it became a distinguished court. But back in the day again, that was a roll of the dice I think in terms of the court. '93, as you asked, what happened? We had tried and failed, as I mentioned, on property tax proposal into the ballot twice, came close, but failed. And so we're gonna try it again. And we had a legislative package that was, you know, it was going to do something, it wasn't a solution. But the loyal opposition in the Senate, where we did have the majority, thought they would be cute and play some games about, 'well, if a little property tax cut is good, why not cut all property taxes?' thinking that would be an embarrassment to the Republicans, they'd all vote no. But when the Democrat Leader, a pretty good friend, the late Art Miller, who I think was wonderful lawmaker who left us way too soon, but Art came and said, well, look this is the game that Senator Stabenow, who at the time was a state senator, wanted to play and we said that's interesting and we thought about it. And we kind of thought, well, they're never really going to do it, they won't have the gumption to actually do that. Well, they talked themselves into doing it and we said, well, if they do, let's bait the trap then, let's go ahead. And so, as it happened, Dick Posthumus was - eventually becomes Lieutenant Governor - but Dick plays an instrumental role in all this. He kind of got up and said 'oh this is...' questioning whether this is a wise thing, and I think, Dan DeGrow maybe called it irresponsible, you know, what are we doing? But then Jack Welborn got up and said 'oh, this is a good idea', he joined in and so it was an interesting debate in the Senate. But meanwhile, we had lined up pretty much all the Republicans to support it and here's the MEA lobbyist sitting up there - the MEA is the Michigan Education Association - sitting in the gallery, the late Al Short, I think probably wanted to jump over the railing when he saw all these green lights go up and all of a sudden by magic a bill has passed the Michigan Senate that eliminates the use of property taxes to fund public education. One of the barriers to reforming funding of schools. Before we get to the policy, and the competition and some of these other factors that are important. One of the barriers was always this divide between the haves and the have nots that we're a rich School District. We're not a rich school district and that that tension in that fight, and so, if you thought you were in a pretty good position, you were always defending the status quo and you would always attack virtually every proposal with the idea that well, there must be a better one, they've really got a better solution, it's in the drawer, it's hidden, you know, they don't want to show it to us. And so the idea that this was clearly the perfect was the enemy of the better because they claim there was something perfect being withheld and - (Jim Goenner: just hiding it.) Yeah, we're hiding that. And the other factor, that's really important here is, I mentioned that House was tied, because now this is 1993, so we've had an election in '92 and the House of Representatives is split, 55-55, and a very creative solution that was arrived at by Paul Hillemonds and Curtis Hertel. Basically, what emerged was, okay, one month, your party chairs the committees, and the other party is the Speaker and runs the floor, the next month, it's reversed. And so that happened to coincide with Paul Hillemonds, presiding over the House as the Speaker, and this was an amendment put on a bill and the procedure is important here, because it was actually

put on a bill, it was a House bill that was in the Senate, so it was going back to the House and the House could reject it, in which case then the House and Senate would have to meet to iron out differences, or the House could accept it. Well, because all of the senators voted for it, here sits the House of Representatives saying 'do I want to vote against the bill that my senator voted for that gets rid of property taxes?' and Paul had been fully informed and was working with us and they put it up and they concurred and meanwhile the teachers union, the MEA, Mr. Short, they're over there lobbying like crazy against it, the superintendents are lobbying like crazy against it, all the editorials and the Free Press and everybody 'Oh, is dangerous. This is uncharted territory. So risky.' A lot of criticism, but within 24 hours, the amendment had been offered in the Senate, adopted by the Senate, the next morning, it comes back to the House, it's concurred in by the House, and it's on my desk.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 12:26

Well, there's a great headline in one of the magazines. At the time, there was the movie that was popular "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" and it was "Honey, I Blew Up the Kids" because you eliminated property taxes. Connect that to the policy. So you were trying to fix school financing, but then you also brought in ed reform. What was going on in your strategy?

G

Gov. John Engler 12:50

Well now we had an opportunity, because suddenly there weren't rich districts and poor districts. They were all going to be poor - nobody had any property tax. So, if you were the highest spending school district in the state, if you were a little school district with a big nuclear power plant in your district, because in those days those power plants could enrich - there was one down in southwest Michigan, the Bridgman school district, and they had I think it was the Cook Nuclear Plant was in their district, a small district - big, big valuation on this nuclear plant, so they had all kinds of money. They really weren't interested in changing this system. They could keep property taxes very low for a homeowner there, let the utility, the nuclear plant, pay for the school. So we had everybody's attention on finance, and everybody suddenly had to come to the table on that.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 12:50

And prior to that, you couldn't get them all to the table. Right?

G

Gov. John Engler 13:02

No, you could not because people -

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 13:38

If I had it, I wasn't going to negotiate...

G

Gov. John Engler 13:45

Yeah, why should I negotiate? I love what I've got or make me an offer, and it was they just sat it out. And then there were enough legislators that were representing those kinds of districts, you just couldn't ever seemingly make the math work and put together majorities for reform. So now everybody's got to be at the table. Everybody's in this and they're freely, they're worked up, obviously. But that opens the door to say, Okay, we're going to fix the finance, but we've got a lot of other challenges in education. We think the system can be better. And I think in the speech, and you've mentioned this in some of the research you did, and we put into the speech as well. There were kids that were in school districts where they were literally kind of making up addresses with a member of the family or in Detroit in those days, there were residency requirements for Detroit Police and Fire. Well, they didn't want their children in the Detroit Public Schools, so many of them had a fake address in Detroit and another address, it may be in Macomb County or in Oakland County, because they want their kids and what they determined was a better school. So we thought choice among traditional public schools is important. We certainly allow choice among your community colleges and your university, you get to choose, you get to choose your public hospital or your community hospital, you don't have to go the one closest to you, you can go across town, if that's where your doctor is, or that's where you think the better treatment might be, for the purpose of your need to be in the hospital. So choice about services is pretty accepted and certainly it is the essence of the private sector, you don't have to, you know, you can go to Burger King or McDonald's, you don't have to be assigned to one, or you can even go to Wendy's. So I mean, you can have all kinds of choices in all kinds of ways. And not that we for a moment suggested schools were like a fast food or even a community hospital, but they certainly aren't very different than a university and because you're from Washtenaw County, you didn't have to go to Eastern Michigan, you come up north and go to Central, or you go all the way to the UP and go to Michigan Tech, if you wanted. And so we thought that was important, create more choices. And then we also said, well, you know, the other thing that's happening over in Minnesota, they've been talking about these charter public schools, which are - the way to think about that, they're still public schools in every way - I mean, you can't have selective admission, you can't say I'm gonna build the best football program, and I'm gonna go recruit all the football players come to my school. You have to have a nondiscriminatory process, you could allow and we did under our law, once the second son wins the lottery and is in the school, other family members can come there, but beyond that, it really was a random selection. But we thought that it encouraged people to do all kinds of different things. And what would that mean? Well, you could have a school, and now we have them, right? In West Michigan, the aviation school, or culinary school, you could have all kinds of creative ways. You have schools focused on the arts, focused on language instruction, it really didn't matter because what we're trying to say is that parents are pretty good judges of what they need for their child, let them have these choices and let parents come together let teachers put schools and I mean, for years, teachers unions had complained and teachers themselves, but it's not just a union complaint. Here the principal's miserable, that superintendent doesn't get it. You know, they've always talked about how much waste there is in the administration of schools. And I think that's a complaint has a lot of validity to it. Well, the way to deal with that is, why don't you run the school, hire whatever management services you need, and then you do the curriculum, you show everybody how it can be done. So anyway, the idea was, let's let 1,000 flowers bloom. And so that became part of the okay, if we're going to fix this, we're also going to fix some of these other problems, or at least put in place, ways that they can be addressed more creatively, then, again, a monopolistic system would allow. And because the funding was so important, we were able to put up an argument in place that look, we've got to do the reforms first, before we can do the funding, we're not going to, we're not going to fix the funding and say, well, we'll get to the

reforms later. No. Yeah, we've been down that path. And that doesn't work. So we, and I guess, procedurally what happened if we at the rate of talking too long here, but it was in August that I signed the legislation. So because I was getting all kinds of 'Oh, don't sign this, governor, be responsible, reckless? Don't do that.' No, no, we're signing it. So we had a big ceremony. We went down to Henry Ford, you know, the Greenfield Village, the old one room school. That's where we signed it. And then I said, I would work over the summer and when the legislature come back in the fall, we'd be prepared, I'd prefer to, you know, I felt by signing the measure, I've got an obligation come back with a proposal or a set of proposals. And, you know, we had a lot of talent and Doug Roberts and Mark Murray, I mean people that were in government, very able school finance experts, and we drew upon the different I would say assets, people that really, Dan DeGrow was an instrumental part of all of this. At the end of the day, Bob Emerson from Flint was a key part of this. And so we took and incorporated an awful lot of ideas and approaches and what emerged then, was the proposal that I came forward with as governor, put at the legislature of creating a foundation grant, and reducing dramatically property taxes, and that we can talk more about how that all worked, because that's kind of an interesting part and pretty central to, ultimately a solution. But that all led to what ultimately becomes Proposal A, which then passes in early 1994, in the first quarter of that year, and the crisis is averted. And yet, we've opened the door for a lot of new opportunities and I would say experimentation, but it's really not experimenting in the sense of something brand new, it's really taking something that we've been doing and doing it a different way. So it's more innovation is what we had hoped and, and I think we got a lot of that sometimes we didn't get as much as we'd wished. But on the other hand, we trusted parents, and I think that's a big difference, as opposed to defaulting to the government to be in charge your child, we gave the parents, I think, a bit more control over their children and their children's education.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 20:50

Yeah, looking back now, we've come to believe that the money should follow the kid. But back in 1993, that wasn't true. And you came up with the portable foundation grant. Right? That was groundbreaking at the time. And you also talked about schools without boundaries. And you talked in your speech about the student that had to drive two hours on the bus when he wanted to go to this other school, 10 minutes away, but it was in the wrong district. You quoted the school board, talking about we can't release this kid, because what would cause, you know, 10 more not to come and asked to be released next week? So they really believed they owned the child where your position was 'no, they're the parents kids.'

G

Gov. John Engler 22:04

That's right. And that's really a very fundamental concept that I think maybe in some ways, Michigan with our establishment foundation grant, began to to create the vision that then other states have picked up upon and said, Well, wait a minute. If, because there's no question that the state undertakes a responsibility of education that has historically been a state, actually better way to say as a local and state responsibility. It was only under Jimmy Carter, that we even had a Federal Department of Education, which, you know, I suspect we still don't need but but there it is, be one of the problems with the Federal Department of Education for, you know, they put in less than 10% of the funding of K-12 education in America, and yet, they'd like to write 90% of the rules and we don't need that kind of bargain. I mean, 10% of the money, maybe 10% of the rules, not 90. So we we said and your question gets right to the heart of it, if

you look at the state's investment, as how many dollars per child. And one of the things that happened with Proposal A being adopted as suddenly, overnight, in I think about 300 of then 550 school districts or something, whatever the number was, at the time, about 300 of those had the same dollars per student. And there used to be wild variations, those variations were more than three to one. I mean, you could have somebody at 3,000, somebody at 9,000, just based on the disparity of the property tax values. And so we took all of that out. And we did things. I mean, I'm fascinated by what's happened in Detroit, because they've gone in some cases, years without a single family permit ever being asked for it. Nobody was building a home in Detroit. Well, what was going on? Well, there were a lot of issues. I mean, they had economic issues, they had crime issues, but they also had 66 mills of property tax, and a mill is a dollar per 1,000. Well imagine that, that was the highest rate, they were at a constitutional cap, they literally couldn't go any higher. And when Proposal A was done, they were at six mills. So think about the difference there and all of a sudden housing, now it was possible if you wanted to build multifamily housing, if you wanted to you had a whole different tax structure, and that that happened around the state. The other thing happened, we created for the homestead a huge advantage and suddenly the senior citizens who were being taxed out of homes, the great examples anybody you could live on an inland lake you live on Coldwater Lake up in Central Michigan, small inland lake but if the guy next door, sold his house for twice what it was appraised at the appraiser went around the lake and everybody else got their taxes doubled. They didn't want to sell. They didn't have any interest in leaving, but now all of a sudden, because there was one sale, everybody got hiked. And we took care of that, we locked in the rate on the homestead and also limited the annual increases. So all of a sudden, a senior could stay in their home and people said, well, actually that's, you know, their taxes are lower than mine. Well, yes, they've been in the home, there was an incentive to stay, it added this stability. That turned out to be a good thing, not a bad thing. In my mind, if you were the senior citizen, those are your grandparents there, they didn't get driven out. So there were there were so many facets to this. But the foundation grant to go back and just pick up on what's that mean, in terms of future reform, not just in Michigan, but in the country? Now you suddenly start to think, well, wait a minute, if this is, and we talk about putting the money in the backpack, and it goes with the kid, well, that's what happens at a college. I mean, you don't get tuition for the student that doesn't come to your school. But in K-12, you got paid for the students, the way you'd have the most money in schools is if nobody came, because then you have all the property tax revenue, and no kids. So you didn't care. You didn't care if they weren't there. And I'm not gonna say that schools don't care. But there's clearly and there was a, we got a second count day, too, which was and what is it count day? Well, we used to count kids on the fourth Friday of September, we know how many kids were there at the school, that was what you get paid on. If they all disappeared the second Friday of October, you got the money for the entire year. And we kind of said wait a minute, what happens if they're not there the whole year? Now, I actually think most people get paid on daily attendance, you know, but we at least got a February count day and then we had schools all over the state saying I don't know what happened to kids. I don't know where they are, they must have gone next door, but next door doesn't have them either, you know, so their kids clearly dropping out the system, yet the system still got paid for these children-

 Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 27:27

And they had no incentive to go find them until you put that in place...

 C ... .. 27:30

**G** Gov. John Engler 27:30

No, or work to keep them. So I think there is a lot that needs to be done in education yet, but I think we put in place, a way, a pathway to get there in the future and to make it better. And I think you're seeing other states, Governor Ducey in Arizona, most recently, wide ranging and COVID has driven a lot of this, we didn't know what COVID was in the 1990's but America sure knows today what that's done in terms of learning deficit. And we also saw looking at different states, very different approaches by governors and local school boards, about keeping schools open and educating children. Some tried to do it only remotely. Others, you know, concluded that wasn't gonna work, they brought them back much quicker. Well, let the money follow the child, let the parent have the decision, the parent's going to do what's right for the child. And when they do, I think you're going to have a happier parent and a better educated child.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 28:35

So I want to tie all of that around to kind of the birth of the charter idea. (Engler: Sure.) So Ted Kolderie out of Minnesota is often credited as kind of the godfather of the idea and he wrote a really seminal piece in '91 and it said the state must withdraw the exclusive. What he meant by that is that the state actually gave districts this exclusive franchise and he lamented like everybody else, we've tried encouragement, we've tried more money, we've tried threats, we've tried all these things, but the system's inert, it just won't change and that we need to create an alternative to be able to do that. And the only group that could do it was the legislatures and the governors. So fast forward, you take Michigan on that front and today we've now got 45 states with charter school laws. As you look back, was that the right approach to go with choice and has choice made any difference on the monopoly?

**G** Gov. John Engler 29:31

It's helping there's no question, and I don't think we had an alternative. I mean, it at this point, I still don't have a better idea. I do think, you know, I've sort of changed my mind a little bit in terms of the ability. I certainly don't think as much ability of federal department education. I think there's minimal ability of the State Department of Education impact education performance and education improvement. I do think that we have to focus at the same time on maximum transparency in terms of our results. You're seeing now, a push to have transparency, what is my child being taught? I mean, suddenly, and again, in this post COVID era, during COVID, people started to pay attention.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 30:22

They looked under the hood-

**G** Gov. John Engler 30:23

What? This is going on in the school? This is what we're paying for? So they've gotten more active. And it's been interesting to see, in some cases, the pushback against parents. I mean, well, who are you running the school for if not the parents and their children? I mean, and in fact, what we've discovered is there's a whole lot of people, a whole lot of theories and a lot of

experimentation going on out there on your children, and people are 'wait a minute, let's get back.' No indoctrination. Let's go back to education, let's read and write and arithmetic kind of a thing. So I think Kolderie was right. I mean, I had read his material and paid attention to what was happening in Minnesota and Governor Roy Romer was another early adopter out in Colorado, he was one that I thought was interesting. Bill Clinton in Arkansas was interested in this, and I'm sure we'll get to it at some point a very, I think, enjoyable story about Bill Clinton as President coming to the Michigan Legislature, but to Kolderie's idea, the monopoly had to go and the monopoly had all of the bad characteristics of monopoly, it didn't want competition. And it became overtime, pretty self serving, a pretty closed loop because you had literally in especially the unionized states, I think you had teachers unions figuring out, well, wait a minute, I can have my teacher member in this district run for the school board, not a conflict over there but they think just like the teachers in my district, and so you know, over time, whether it was wages or benefits, and there's all kinds of things that got put into contracts, and because as that happened more and more rigid was the system, and I think not in the interest of the kids. I've also had, and we worked hard, there was a lot of efforts that were, you know, '89, before I became governor, there was a national education summit that was that was called by President George H.W. Bush and then that then was followed by Bill Clinton. And that was part of this one when he was president having another one and we had these education goals. There were six. If we go all back to Reagan, we had the Nation at Risk Report, which there was much Michigan input on that because of that Kirk from Mecosta was a part of that, but that was under Terrel Bell who ran the education department at the time, and it was interesting that report was just a clarion call for action and reform. And if I recall, the language was something along the lines of if a foreign nation tried to do to us what's happened in our education system, we'd think it's an act of war.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 33:18

There's a lot of research that points to that as like a seminal moment in the acceleration of education reform.

**G** Gov. John Engler 33:25

Well, it really was, but it was the alarm bell going off across the nation and I am a believer in federalism where the states ought to be experimenting and trying to figure these things out. And I think there was a period of significant state experimentation. But it was hard, too. I mean, I think it took maybe a little bit longer from '83. In the 90s, we had, I thought there was an unusual and I thought pretty capable group of governors out there who were pretty creative, and all were trying different things. And I think that period was an interesting time and it probably opened the door to lots of different approaches. I wish that same group could go back today, knowing what we know now and redo some of what we've done. But I do think that we did take a shot at setting the conditions for reform, making the money portable, creating more competition. Competition has made our higher education system clearly the finest higher education system in the world. I think that was true for a long time. I worry that today that you know the canceled culture that we have and the drift we've had with sort of a progressive orthodoxy that's, you know, sort of locking up many of these schools that some of that may be lost. But then I look at Mitch Daniels at Purdue, and I see a very different approach being taken there. I'm intrigued with the Florida decision to hire Senator Ben Sasse to come down run that system. Certainly what Michael Crow is doing out in Arizona State, very- so there still a lot of-

and to go to private side, what Larry Arnn and Hillsdale have done is truly remarkable. So there's a lot, even in that higher education realm, there's still a lot that I like, I mean, there's things that I think we have to be on guard against, but clearly, you cannot argue, I think, successfully that the K-12 system has improved as rapidly and has been as effective as our university system. And what's the major difference? It's that competition, and we need that competition. And I trust parents to be able to make judgments, and you've had people almost paternalistic commentators or the, you know, parents, you know, how can the parent, believe me, I trust the parent, I mean, you know, there's no parent, no matter what their situation in life that doesn't want their child to do better, I don't think. I mean, I don't think they get up and say, well, it's just my child, who cares, I don't care if they read, I don't care if they can't compute. No, I don't think so. I think they want that. And we ought to be talking about how well we're doing. There's been a bit of an arms race in K-12, who's got the biggest school building, who's got the biggest pool, or the fanciest facilities. In Texas, maybe, who's got the biggest football stadium, that really isn't, to my mind, what's going to win the day. I think when we look at, you know, this country today and what our needs are, it ought to be who's doing the best job for all kids and recognizing that kids are different. And recognize that today, we have skills deficits in so many areas. So those skills deficits aren't met by necessarily going to Middle State U somewhere and getting a general studies degree, they're probably met with specific training. And I think the opportunity ahead for us is to be much more creative in what those offerings are, and who we partner with. And I think that that will argue for even more flexibility and creativity, and portability of the funding. So that if somebody in their last two years or junior senior year, wants to be full time in a local business, learning a trade or a skill, they can still come back to the school to be on the football team, or to be in the school play or march in the band, if that's what they like, they could still be a class officer. They don't need to lose connection, but they do need the opportunity to have education is going to benefit them and even if that doesn't provide revenue for that home school district.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 38:05

Yeah, it's fascinating, because so many things we take for granted now, you laid the groundwork for so in that '90 era, you even talked about, tear down the walls. (Engler: Right.) You know, Reagan said to Gorbachev, tear down the walls, you said tear down the school walls, let's have schools without borders, let's let that choice and you mentioned that the districts basically would refuse to release kids. And you said, that's okay. But others can, and that that dynamic alone would change the system. So I want to take that back to Kolderie. One of the points he always tries to make is that for education to truly change, it's got to be self improving and there's got to be a continuous incentive for it to make the hard decisions that it won't make for itself. Can you just talk about your thinking on how do you take the levers of government and create incentives that cause change? And in what the speed of technology, the change has to be so much more rapid than we've been seeing in education?

G

Gov. John Engler 39:11

That's right. I think the greatest weakness in at least the public education system, probably the leadership, but it's not the teachers. I mean, I think people go into teaching, wanting to teach and wanting those who they teach to succeed. I think they're trapped in systems that are inflexible, I think they're, they became much too bureaucratic. We got assistant superintendents for everything. I mean, you know, I think you clean out a lot of that. I mean, I

think there's massive overhead that could go away. In the case where the overhead is the result of state policy or state oversight, we ought to be tearing that down, getting rid of that, too. I mean, I think we need to simplify. Just tell me what the results are. You know, I'll let you, to me it's like reading, I don't want to mandate how somebody teaches reading, we understand that probably to have everyone reading proficiently after four years in school is probably a combination of phonics, some kind of a whole English kind of approach, there's, you know, you've got to identify if somebody's dealing with the dyslexia or some reading barrier. You shouldn't be figuring that out when they're in high school, you should have figured that out much, much earlier. So, you tell them at the local level, look, here are the resources that you can draw upon, but figure this out and succeed with the child. And oh, by the way, report to us how well you're doing. And that reporting is important. That's that transparency that I talked about earlier, and also how much you're spending. I think these budgets need to be demystified for people. I mean, it's always bothered me that taxpayers build public school buildings, a school district shrinks, the building's available, you've got school districts and school boards would rather bulldoze the building and let a charter school have it because heaven forbid that they've got a competitor in their backyard. But I mean, you know, if in the commercial world, if a building becomes obsolete, they don't bulldoze it, they sell it for whatever they could sell it for. And yeah, it might be bought by a competitor. That's the way the world works. We have a system that to be very specific, I mean, we never had a school district saying, Mom and Dad, send your child to my school, because we're doing a foreign language instruction in grade school here, this will give your child a better chance. Today, we've got districts that compete for kids on that basis. They're reluctant in some cases to do it, but it has happened and the economics have forced them to do it because it's better to have a full school building. If I've got the elementary school, and I've got five slots available each my classes, I've got the teacher there already, I'm just increasing my revenue if I can bring these kids in. And so we want schools to say I'm doing a better job than my neighbor's doing. Colleges do that all the time. (Jim Goenner: Sure.) And schools, and so we've seen that breakout, that competition breaks out. What we don't have yet probably is the ability for a traditional public school to fail. And there probably is a point at which that that would be understood that that yes, they can fail. They can. They too, can go out of business, a charter school, a charter public school can go out of business. I mean, if the operators of that school do a poor job, or if they abuse the trust that was given to them. You've seen charters revoked by the chartering authority. You've seen parents literally abandon the school, walk away from it, thus collapsing it, but that doesn't happen with the traditional district. You see a Detroit where they've lost I think they've gone from 150,000 students maybe and, you know, the demographics are down so there aren't as many kids but they're, they're under 50,000 today or so- (Jim Goenner: They are.) And probably fully, I think they've kind of got the perfect storm or half the kids of used schools of choice, just go to another public school, traditional school, another third have gone off to the charter public school, so and those of those that have stayed behind, I don't know if they're stuck, or you know, whatever but there's, and they've got, you know, there's an arts and music school down there, there's, you know, Cass Tech, which still has a legacy reputation, or a Renaissance or a Martin Luther King, but some of the others have simply faded away, they don't exist anymore. And the school has, the district has a hard time downsizing to meet that smaller footprint. I mean, because they've got administrators who don't want to, they don't want to go away just because kids are gone, but they have to, and that's you've got to have these consequences have to be real. I don't know that we've ever looked at saying well, I mean, I think schools ought to report how much of the school budget is actually spent on the classroom versus how much on overhead. I mean we kind of have a sense, but, but when a school is spending half the money on the classroom and half on something else, we ought to be looking at that other half, and if school district 80% in the classroom, and 20 on something. People should be able to understand these, not every parent's going to delve into this but this is where the Citizens

Research Council or some of these public interest groups ought to be paying more attention and doing more detailed analysis and helping educate the public. This is where, you know some of the groups like the Chambers of Congress who talk about the need to have quality educated children, you know, coming up, I've always said that the ideal program in K-12 would be this, that every child who graduates from high school or finishes high school age, can go to college without needing any remediation when they get there. In other words, they're prepared to do college work wherever they decide to go, whether that's the University of Michigan or it's Eastern Michigan, doesn't matter if a child's not going to go to college, and they don't need to - half to 40% or so don't even go today, then they ought to leave with a skill that's been a certified or assessed a credential that they've received that could allow them go to work and the dropout rate ought to be zero. So that's it. No remediation, if you're going to college, a skill if you're going into the workforce and dropout rate zero. That's your education agenda right there. Who can do that? Which school district, a traditional school district or which charter school can say to the parents, any child who comes here will fit that-

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 46:02

Here's your opportunity. (Engler: Yeah.) Well, Governor, I want to go back to the Michigan Supreme Court case. And if you recall, you pass this charter law to great fanfare and then the Circuit Court judge said it's unconstitutional. What did you make of that case?

G

Gov. John Engler 46:19

Well, it was Judge Collette, not one of the distinguished jurists of Ingham County and we had trouble all the time, interestingly enough with the Ingham circuit, because if you look at that electorate and who was being elected to that court, there was a judge named Giddings there, it was just a bad circuit and bad judges. And we almost always expected we'd lose there. And then you go to the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court. In the case of the charter school law, we had to go all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court to win and we won a resounding victory there. One of the casualties along the way was that when we passed the charter school initially, there was no cap, it was pretty wide open competition, at least the potential for that. And we should talk about chartering, who could do the chartering because I think there we had some innovations as well. But when we went to the Supreme Court, we were vindicated completely. We had very good lawyers, and we felt very confident all the way along. But we also knew that we had very political judges to start with, and you weren't going to get to better lawyers, and better judging until you got higher up in the court. Unfortunately, it took about three years to get that all done. And along the way, we ended up having to put a cap in to make sure that we can get started because we had people go right into business sort of day one. And then there being they had to help, they had to fight for their existence to stay open. But the Supreme Court case really vindicated something that we thought was pretty obvious. Charter schools or charter public schools, they're public schools in every sense of the word. I mean, they have to admit anyone, they can't discriminate. They have to through a lottery, but then they're following the same rules, but they're allowed to be innovative. And we thought that innovation would lead to some better results. And there's clear evidence that it has, not every charter public school, but certainly I would say that the success that some of these new schools have had, in contrast to the traditional public school option that was there for the child, the child is much better off. One of the things that we heard from parents is that a lot of these traditional schools weren't as safe as the charter public school. So safety became a factor

which maybe we underestimated just how unsafe some parents and some kids felt. We had kids that felt they'd been bullied and they looked for an option and they really didn't have much of an option before. And the point that we made, I think, it's so important to understanding this whole debate and the concept. We've always had schools of choice, but it's always been economically limited. For people who are affluent, you've always been able to buy the house in the district where you want your child to attend. So there's no restriction whatsoever on that. But the person who's got, you know, middle income or lower income, don't have the means they can't do that. Or in the old days, if there was a residency requirement, you couldn't do that. (Jim Goenner: You literally have to sell your house) You have to sell your house, but then you lose your job because in that jurisdiction, if you work for the Detroit Institute of Arts, they'd say what city employee, you have to live in the city of Detroit, you can't go. So you're a curator there with a high profile job at the Detroit Institute of Arts but you can't put your child in let's say the Southfield schools, because you have to be in Detroit. So we swept a lot of that stuff away, that that's hugely important. And the court vindicated that. And so I felt good about that. And now, and you mentioned earlier that, you know, 45 states now have laws. I think Michigan's among more of the creative laws and one of the things that was done in Michigan, that was done deliberately was to not, if you're trying to impact a monopoly, it's probably best not to give the monopoly decision to whether they're going to have competition or not. They might naturally say- (Goenner: Might not like that?) Why do I want competition? So we we allowed the university governing boards the authority to charter schools, and why not because guess what, they're the recipient of a lot of these products of these K-12 system so they have an interest and there used to be, in years past almost every university had a University School. So they were in the K-12 business at one point. So it's not so far removed and I think that innovation caught on around the country.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 51:06

It has. Michigan's known for its higher ed authorizers. We have eight universities plus Bay Mills Community College, Jackson College, others that have now chartered schools. But really, those eight universities led by Central Michigan University and by Grand Valley State have really elevated this idea that higher ed can charter, they can do it at scale, and they can do it in a quality way that connects K-12 with higher ed in an innovative way. So that's just been a tremendous force, and one where people come to Michigan still today to look and say, How do you do that?

G

Gov. John Engler 51:41

Yeah, it was interesting, it was just an idea that we came up with, because we knew those were public bodies. We weren't- the State Board of Education is completely and hopelessly inept, we should get rid of that, or at least allow the governor to appoint the state board or appoint the State Superintendent, then you might have some accountability. Today, there's no accountability and most of the time, no direction. Michigan is one of just a handful of states left that has such a dysfunctional department, and even a highly functioning department should be run a lot differently than what we've got in Michigan. So that's a weakness in the Michigan system that generally works against reform. But I think what we've done with the universities and into their credit, then they in turn, have Grand Valley and Central look at the performance of charter schools. They're helpful in evaluating what's going on. They're helpful in informing the public, that's really been a very strong part of what we're trying to do. I think the future is

that you're going to see, I'm convinced you'll see more creativity. And one area where I underestimated as I thought there would be more groups of teachers who would say, you know what, we're pretty darn good group of teachers here, why don't we charter the school, or get somebody to provide the administrative services and we'll run the school, the way it should be run, and we'll show you how to get high performance and high results. That has not happened. I think there are a couple of examples of it, but it's very, very limited in and to me, that remains an opportunity, especially now you're looking at these grants, I think the foundation grant is nearing \$10,000 a child, well, all of a sudden than a classroom is let's say, a classroom of 20. And that's in some cases, a small classroom, that's \$200,000 revenue there. We're not paying the teachers \$200,000 quite yet, but we could pay them a lot more than we pay them today, and still have enough money to, you know, especially think about the elementary school. I mean, gosh, these teachers could dramatically enhance their own wages, have enough to, you know, supply the school and get superior results. So I think there's a real opportunity there.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 54:08

There's no question that's untapped. But I actually want to take you back to that from the idea. So Ted Kolderie, again, talked about chartering as a strategy, that it was not just about the schools, it was an institutional innovation, and one that would allow people to do different things and new people to enter in. So in Michigan's case, people like J.C. Huizenga, wouldn't have come through the traditional education routes, but certainly has made a big impact a gentleman like Bob Thompson, countless others. Can you talk a little bit about? Did you see those types of people coming into education and helping build out systems of schools?

**G** Gov. John Engler 54:49

It's interesting, we didn't know who it would be. We didn't know the individuals, but it was completely foreseeable that there's got to be somebody because there's so many people, there's so many organizations that talk about education, talk about being interested. Now the people that have been, you know, slow to respond here. Why haven't more companies done this? I thought hospitals would want to charter schools and they their supply chain, if you will, for the licensed practical nurse who becomes the RN, who becomes the baccalaureate nurse. That's at risk. I mean, we have shortages of different health care professionals. They could be doing more of this. There has been a lack of creativity, some of it, I think is, you know, there was pushback. You remember when the universities were chartering, I mean, you had some local teachers union said, 'well, we're not going to take any student teachers from that university because they chartered a school-'

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 55:52

Oh yeah, 'we won't let our high school grads come to your university, we won't take your student teacher, we won't employ your graduates-'

**G** Gov. John Engler 55:58

There was all of this stuff, that's kind of all melted into the background now, we don't hear so much about that. And I think and rightfully so, we shouldn't have heard it was sort of

much about that. And I think, and rightly so, we shouldn't have heard, it was sort of ridiculous, because again, it was just that reaction. I don't want any competition, how dare you. But a lot more people, I think, to meet the skilled trades demands. I've thought the union should do some of this, especially the trades, there ought to be a way and that would be an area where we should be exploring what more can be done. I mean, Ford Motors got some wonderful programs, for example, during the training a mechanic of the future, well a mechanic today, half of their time is on a computer doing the diagnostics about what's wrong with the vehicle. Well, that's not something you, you know, you don't just why isn't there a charter school for that? And we saw some things like Henry Ford did one at the museum, which was a wonderful-

**G** Gov. John Engler 56:00

Well, Governor, I'm smiling because I gotta go back. I actually was there at the ribbon cutting and I remember the CEO of Ford, saying, Governor, it was easier to open up an auto plant in Germany than it was a charter school in Michigan. Yeah, I mean, the resistance has been difficult.

**G** Gov. John Engler 57:23

It has, but I think we should, again, if we put the kids first, we put the kids first, how can any resistance stand against that because we're saying this is a better opportunity. And or it's a different opportunity. It may not be better than something, but it might be right for certain kids and we have to acknowledge that the traditional public schools still have a lot of kids who drop out, who lose interest and walk away.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 57:54

When we talk about people voting with their feet. And so all of a sudden, you let parents and students vote with their feet. And even educators vote with their feet.

**G** Gov. John Engler 58:04

Yeah, I mean, I've, you know, maybe it my next life here, I'll be able to come back, you know, and I'd love to run a couple of these schools, because it seems to me there's so many opportunities to, to do things that are different and that will be successful. And that's- it is truly, conceptually, it's let the 1,000 flowers bloom, let's let everybody get creative here. Now, you know, you've got to guard against the fast buck artist, if someone's out there thinking I can make a dollar here doing this, that's not what we want. And I think in the early days, there were some people that came forward that had less than stellar reputations, and they disappointed, but they went out of business. That's the other thing. They were discovered and they were put out of business, if the same thing has gone on. And I mean, you've got a district somewhere in this state where literally, one in 20 children after four years in schools can read proficiently, that's unacceptable. That is completely unacceptable. That's that's a different kind of fraud, right? I mean, you can't possibly fail on that scale, and defend that as doing education or running-

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 59:27  
Imagine you're a store and two thirds of your customers leave and you're still open. Like how would that work?

**G** Gov. John Engler 59:33  
Yeah. No, I mean we'll go in with the Public Health Department and shut a restaurant down because it's, you know, that we detect that it's not sanitary. It's not this. It's not that. There's no equivalent to go into a school and say, this is unhealthy because nobody's learning anything. We don't-

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 59:51  
But you know, that's part of the institutional innovation of chartering. It said if you don't perform, you can be closed.

**G** Gov. John Engler 59:58  
Yeah, that is true.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:00:00  
And it's happened.

**G** Gov. John Engler 1:00:01  
It has indeed. And I think that to me is not a sign of weakness, that's a sign of strength.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:00:07  
Absolutely.

**G** Gov. John Engler 1:00:08  
And that's that, again, that's an accountability of a different kind that's not at all present in the traditional, old monopolistic structure.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:00:19  
When you let the thousand flowers bloom, not everyone is going to work out, right? So there

needs to be an ability to close them. But we also have that system of checks and balance. And it works.

**G** Gov. John Engler 1:00:30

Well and again, not to continue to use the university as an example but universities have gone out of business. Universities have actually in this country closed in recent years, more than a couple actually. And lots of things have happened. I mean, they priced themselves out of the market, they didn't have an offering or faculty that could attract, you know, whatever it was, they failed, and they're gone. And the other group that I think has been less than as a group, now there certainly are outstanding examples within the group, but I think community colleges have been very, very slow to understand. And community colleges, really, in some ways are ideally positioned to charter at least, if I were thinking of the education reform I'd like to see in the future. The community college is a two-year pathway, most of the time for an associate degree. Well, rather than having a child be held in the traditional school, we've opened up a lot of this where the child in the traditional school can take a community college course, but the community college could go into the high and offer those last two years themselves. And then that two years that junior and senior that year one year two for the associate degree, that collapses easily into three. So now we've reduced, either we've cut the cost the associate degree in half, or in some cases, we have young people today that are graduating high school to get the diploma, gaining the associate degree at the same time.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:02:07

So Governor, we have two examples that: Washtenaw Community College and Jackson College. The student literally can go up and get their high school diploma, walk five more feet and get their associate's degree without a penny out of their parents' pocket.

**G** Gov. John Engler 1:02:19

Now, that is fantastic. You think about - so somebody says I want to do something about the cost of college or I'll make college free, guess what those two colleges just made college free, or at least half of it. And often depending on what they're studying, they may well now have a relationship with an employer who said look come to work for me now and we'll finish up those next, we'll help you pay for the last two years to get that bachelor degree in mechanical engineering yourself.

**J** Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:02:45

So you've always been forward looking full of ideas and vision. You've hosted somebody that has a similar reputation. So it's 1997. It's March, and you host President William Clinton.

**G** Gov. John Engler 1:02:59

Well, you know, my first two years as governor overlapped Bill Clinton's last two years as

governor, so I got to know him in the Governors Association. He was a pretty talented guy there, watching him work among the colleagues. And, of course, he'd been there a dozen years, 10 years, so he knew them a lot better than I did, I was one of the newbies. But, you know, we invited him, I asked him, I wanted him to come to Michigan, and he was - we hadn't had anybody. Teddy Roosevelt was the last president that came and addressed the Michigan legislature, so it'd been a while - and he was actually excited to come. What was absolutely wonderful about his visit, though, because we knew he was a charter school advocate. And, you know, and the charter school movement in Minnesota really came out the Democratic side of the political spectrum. It's never been, and should never been I don't think it is today a partisan issue. It in most of the states where you don't have strong teacher union, it didn't become necessarily a partisan issue in some of the unionized states a little bit more so, but Clinton came out of Arkansas, that's not a strong teacher union state. Romer in Colorado, kind of the same thing. But when Bill Clinton came to Michigan, he came and one of the things he wanted to talk about was charter schools. And it was hilarious, because here's all these Republicans legislation by and large had supported the efforts to bring charters online, and we were in the early stages, because it's pretty early on yet. And he'd also, people forget, but while Clinton had vetoed welfare reform twice, he did sign the third one and that opened up a door for all kinds of reform, and we were, Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin and I were two of the three, Mike Leavitt from Utah was the third, that we were the three Republican governors that were sort of the negotiating team, if you will, for the Republican governors in Washington on welfare reform. So we had that also in common, but Clinton comes in and he tells legislature about his plans to have funding 100 new charter schools or something he wanted to have and we're all clapping and it was just hilarious, because it was such an awkward and delicious moment, because here's the Democrat president and the President, by the way, who said the era of big government's over too after, but he was also very much for the era of innovation and I don't think he mentioned in his speech in Michigan, but he also had Al Gore off on the reinventing government project. Well, this is part of reinventing government, you know, how do you charter schools, but he was all for that and he was for competition. He understood that intuitively. And he also understood that the education offerings needed to change given the changing, dramatically changing society that was unfolding. And so it was really a, I thought, a message of federalism of encouraging state experimentation without the heavy hand of Washington involved, and a bit of a pat on the back for hey, way to go Michigan, because look, you guys have done this stuff and there were references to what we had done. So we were very pleased with his visit. I think there was a few maybe on the other side of the aisle were a little more chagrined, or the fact that he was so positive, but he had a blast, he enjoyed the trip and we did, too.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:06:47

One of our teammates on the Library is Ember Reichgott Junge, the Minnesota Senator that passed the nation's first law as the sponsor. And she says when she passed the bill, she cried because it was so compromised, she thought she had really failed. And then she got a call from Dave Durenberger, and then from President Clinton, now look at what's happened with the charter idea. You had so many challenges. Did you ever feel like, you know, you failed, or this was just marginal, it really wasn't going to change the world?

G

Gov. John Engler 1:07:19

Well, we were very much, we were frustrated by how long it took us to get through the courts

before we could get going because, you know, governors never know what their shelf life is. And I happen to have had the privilege of serving in third term, so I got to stay with it a little bit longer. But because it literally took almost the first two terms, to see this all sort of stabilize, and then we started to see things, you know, pick up the pace. So I'm, having been part of the legislature a long time before being governor, I mean, I understand things take a long time. And I also understood how litigious the world is, I mean, we everything we wanted to do, we had to we had to win in court. And it was one of the reasons that I had made, you know, having a rule of law court a priority, because I remember being a legislator, and working on something, and thinking we've done a good job, only to lose it in the court. You know, there were areas and some of these are pretty contentious where we get into workers compensation laws, or unemployment compensation laws, you work out a compromise, and maybe the trade off is we're gonna increase the benefits, but we're going to, we're going to restrict some of these things which clearly have been misused or abused. And all of a sudden, those limits get tossed out by the court, but all the benefit increases stay. And so you get frustrated by that. We went through that with some of the changes, we tried to move money from the mental health system, where you had maybe an institution look, you know, 200, 150 employees and a handful of residents and say, let's put that money in the communities, we serve more people, and you had to litigate all of that. So, I mean, it is a slow process, and this is one of the things that frustrates the public because they you know, they want instant gratification, too. I do too, but it takes time and I guess I wasn't ever despondent over the fact we weren't gonna get it done. It just seems like it took so long (Goenner: you're a can do let's go guy.) Yeah, you you want to, I mean, that's the I think the the excitement of having the privilege of serving as governor, and the governor's job in American government is one of the best. I think the most important roles you could have because you really are kind of your chief executive for your state. You can you can get a lot of things done. And it's so much more productive. I've never really thought about Washington because it just seems such a morass there. And there, you do, literally spend years waiting for a moment to do one thing, and that, that would probably drive me crazy. And so I cherished my time in Lansing, but never really had a desire to go to Washington to be part of that. I think if I look ahead, what frustrates me now, looking back, you know, if you could have a do over on some things, I'd probably do a couple of things, quite different and I think one is that we talk a lot about accountability and the what does that mean? Well, you would like people run programs or schools, you know, how are they doing? How are they as stewards of tax dollars? And what's their performance? And I think, by we probably ask, we didn't ask too much, but the way in which we asked, it didn't allow us to get the results we'd hoped for. And I've often said, If I could do it over and I think what we should be doing, is, let's start with the fundamentals. Children go to school. And there's an old saying that, you know, up until the fourth grade, you're learning to read from the fourth grade on your reading to learn. I think that's pretty true. And that transitions, awfully important. So you better get the first part, right, you better learn to read. And when we look Michigan, of late is now dropped below Mississippi in reading scores for our young kids. That's just unacceptable. I mean, we should not be in that position. And I think we got to go back and really emphasize it. Every child's got to learn to read proficiently, and four years of school ought to be enough time to get that done. And we ought to know how every school is doing on that. And we ought to ask everybody to be very transparent. And there's where I do think, some assessment tool or something from the state that's administered fairly across. And when it's administered, the results are pretty quickly available, not something where you give a test, and a year later, you get a result. Now, that doesn't work, you know, that's real time, real time. And let's let people know. And then if I want to send my child to school, this is what my expectation is, because this is what their record is. If I'm going to go over here, it's not so good. I'm gonna go over there, it's even better. So you know, that'll do more. It doesn't solve all the problems. But I'll tell you who will appreciate that fifth grade teacher, the sixth grade teacher, everybody's trying to do this job, which is hard

anyway, but trying to do it with a kid that hasn't mastered reading profiles and fundamentals of reading. And I think it also gives a community gives libraries gives everybody else a purpose. You know, I think people have been a lot of patting on the back, or we're really helping the school. We're doing this, we're doing that. And I remember Betsy DeVos, one time talking about every time she talked to me, well, I've got the answer. It's seventh grade math, it's eighth grade. It's everybody's got a different answer for this thing. And it does get a little confusing out there. But let's, let's get the basic done here. Let's get everybody reading if we had that. And I think you could track down Massachusetts or the best in the country at 50%. We can be better than 50%. We got to start with the kids started this year. And where are they in four years? Let's be better than, let's see if we can't get them all reading-

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:13:36

Keep the main thing the main thing.

G

Gov. John Engler 1:13:37

Yeah, exactly.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:13:38

Governor, I want you to in our last few minutes, look back at legacy. You did so many things as a governor and received so many accolades, but one of them is you are now the Governor John Engler Center for Charter Schools at Central Michigan University. What is that like to?

G

Gov. John Engler 1:13:59

Well, I'm very proud of that and it is the only thing that I've allowed my name to be put on, I guess. I mean, people have said other things. I said, Look, I don't need to do that. I mean, let donors or others do those things. But the Charter School Center was something where the university came in, they said, we'd like to do this. And I was honored and happy to say yes, that's great because, number one, the university and people like Sid Smith on the board that played such a key role in those early charters that set out the model and the university itself with the way in which they evaluate charter schools and they have been, they were a leader, they are a leader. So that's a source of pride. And this is something I think if you say well gee, you 12 years what do you what do you think that we talked about this at the time, but the debate over how you restructured the funding of education, how you changed, it fundamentally, was really intense and didn't get done until literally Christmas Eve day morning. It was completely all night sessions. But all of the other changes that came along with that really made a big difference. And here we are, you know, we're 30 years beyond that now and all of that's kind of enduring. It hasn't really. I mean, I think there have been some improvements, but it hasn't certainly, it hasn't gone away, and certainly hasn't been reversed and it can't be ignored. I mean, it's now part of Michigan's education framework, and hopefully, we can continue to make it better as the years go forward-

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:15:51

Well we're all eternally grateful, you laid the groundwork for significant change, that change is still in motion. And the true insiders understand you had one heck of a constitution to deal with too, because of our Blaine Amendment in with some of the recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, what the next creative education-focused Governor might be able to do based on your framework and what might be possible could be breathtaking.

G

Gov. John Engler 1:16:18

I absolutely think so. I think we're at the point now, I mean, we had a very, very difficult choice, because there were proponents of trying to tackle the Michigan amendment was put in in 1970, was put in, in a gubernatorial election year. And I think it was a difficult time, it didn't probably have the kind of debate nor was it necessarily even understood at the time. And so in it goes into the Constitution as one of the toughest in the country. I mean, no funds, direct or indirectly, no public funds. Well, now, the constitutional basis for that's under assault, and I think you're going to see federal courts continue to look with a kind of an eye, wait a minute, this is really quite discriminatory here. And so as that opens up, and you see states like Arizona go forward with a kind of a full blown choice program. I think that's where we go, and we're getting much closer to the idea that that money to educate the child is going to go on that backpack, and that child's going to have the maximum array of choices, including a school that may be faith based. It's not, it cannot be a school, that's, you know, it's not for the promotion of the religion, it's for the education of the child. And, you know, a Lutheran School can do that, or a Jewish school can do that, or an Arab American school can do that. That's fine. But we're not talking about schools where there's the kind of indoctrination this is not a well, different examples, we don't need to cite, but I mean, but I think there's an opening here. And I've felt even under the charter school law, there was an opportunity for organizations who have a faith-based component to actually run a charter school, it's nondenominational. And at the same time, maybe in there, when school closes at three o'clock, if they wish to do a religious instruction, that club can exist, just like a club can exist for chess, or archery in our sights. And so there's, there's a way to do this. But I think we're in an interesting period now, where the United States Supreme Court is willing to look at some of these issues. And if they do, that can only benefit children. And that is, again, the bottom line, every child needs to be educated. The price for not being educated today, the price for dropping out, not completing school, not obtaining a skill is horrific. And we've got to, we've seen these welfare rolls, I think, especially under the Obama administration, there was a backing away from the idea of work being important. We've got to get back to work matters, families, individuals have to work and we've seen even the number of white males dropping out of the workforce, and they're frustrated, but a lot of that has to do with skills. And we just kind of bring that back and, and we we know a lot more about remote learning, but we also know about remote work too today and figuring all this stuff out, it's a great challenge that's in front of us, but we've met these challenges before and that's what the leadership today is got to really focus on.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:19:45

Well, if you could do all that when you had a bag phone, imagine what we ought to be able to do with today's technology.

G

Gov. John Engler 1:19:50

Well, I completely agree. I mean, I think I'm very excited about what the opportunities are. I mean we're taping this at a time when there's gubernatorial elections going on all over the country. But I have a lot of faith that new leadership that emerges in the states are going to continue to be creative and there's going to be answers that are going to be found and and when they are, they're going to be replicated. Governors are great copycats, if somebody's got a better idea you're looking at that's why we were looking at Minnesota. Oh, what's that? That's interesting what they're doing or what was Tommy Thompson doing in Wisconsin? Or what was Pete Wilson doing in California? I mean, you take these ideas, and you try to fit them to your state, because your goal is to have your state win. And, you know, we got the number one, in terms of job recruitment, at one point during our administration after a lot changes, a lot of years, a lot of things to go right. We got to triple-A bond rating back, you know, it was just a little marker, but those things, those all matter. And so you want the state, whatever state you're living in, you want to be competing to the maximum and and that's what governors do.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:21:08

Yeah. So Governor, on behalf of the National Charter Schools Founders Library and the kids of Michigan and this country, we want to thank you for your time and we'll give you the final word.

G

Gov. John Engler 1:21:17

Well, I would just say that this concept of a National Charter School Library is very important and I hope we are able to collect all of the stories and all of the history, because it's not, maybe it's a roadmap, but maybe it'll also be inspiring to people to say, look, let's go to the next step. Let's go the next level. And let's continue because the goal here is an education system that truly gets back to being the best in the world, educating all of America's children because that's how America wins and we won't do it if we don't educate our children. Thank you for your work.

J

Jim Goenner, Ph.D. 1:21:52

All right, thank you.