

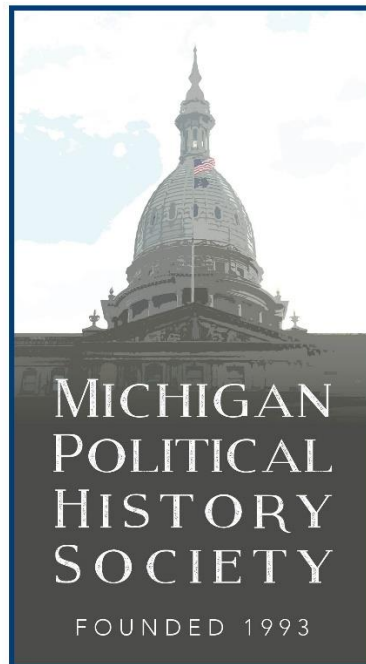
PETER B. FLETCHER

Interviewed by

Bill Ballenger

October 15, 2008

Sponsored by the
Michigan Political History Society
P.O. Box 4684
East Lansing, MI 48826-4684



This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History. Peter B. Fletcher, it's a great pleasure to interview you for the Michigan Political History Society. I think you described two different kinds of people who get involved in politics and government. What are those two categories?

Peter Fletcher: Well it's an over simplification I am certainly eager to confess to that, but generally speaking, there are people who want to seek and occupy public office and they want to do this for a variety of reasons. Some noble, some not so noble. Then there are those of us, I think more like myself, who want to help the right people get elected to the proper offices and then discharge those responsibilities in a very honest and forthright manner. I have worked on many campaigns over the years. I have thoroughly enjoyed that, but because of my involvement in politics, I was rather dragged, rather reluctantly into occupying four different constitutional offices in the state of Michigan.

Peter Fletcher: Then, I was elected to one local office on the City Charter Commission. All of these were very interesting experiences and I think I learned a lot about human nature, which is of course the key to success. Understanding human nature because it is the only unchanging thing in this universe. Study the Greek philosophers, the Roman Philosophers, the German philosophers, English philosophers, French philosophers, all of them have a constant theme. Human nature is so predictable. Political science is not an oxy moron, just understand politics the way you would understand human nature.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so is the Charter Commission the only office you were ever elected to?

Peter Fletcher: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: For the city of Ypsilanti?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, yes.

Bill Ballenger: Now, was that before you got involved?

Peter Fletcher: No, that was after I had been involved in the state politics.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so you started out involving yourself in local elections.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, city council.

Bill Ballenger: Like, city council, school boards, stuff like that?

Peter Fletcher: That's right, that's right. Exactly.

Bill Ballenger: Then what? You got involved with Governor Romney? We won't talk about Governor Romney necessarily, but go ahead.

Peter Fletcher: Here's what happened originally. A very good friend of mine J. Don Lawrence, a very prominent local attorney, was interested in running for the constitutional convention that we had in 1960 the election was in '64 I believe, around in there. He wanted to run for delegate, he'd run for nothing else before, came to me, I managed his campaign and we won very handily, so he goes to the constitutional convention. There is where we meet George Romney for the first time.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, right.

Peter Fletcher: We had known about him, understood his interests and George Romney had been very successful in getting Michigan to amend it's constitution so we could then finally have a state constitutional convention. Romney was elected, with one of the vice chairs Steve Nesbitt, a wonderful choice for being chairman of it. J. Don Lawrence was our delegate from Ypsilanti. So I would attend sessions. That's where I met President Eisenhower and President Truman as they both spoke. I got to meet them because J. Don Took me down on the convention floor.

Peter Fletcher: That's where I first met George Romney and very impressive character. When he decided to run for governor, I signed onto his campaign, strictly as a volunteer and was recruited to some degree by Bob Teeter, who was very active in Republican politics back then.

Bill Ballenger: A pollster.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, yes, yes. Very prominent.

Bill Ballenger: Albion College Professor.

Peter Fletcher: You got it. Right, right, right. Very prominent. We worked together very nicely and we got George Romney elected to Governor.

Bill Ballenger: In 1962.

Peter Fletcher: That's right. That worked out very well. Then from then on, I was involved in the Romney campaigns, each succeeding campaign. Then, when he departed for Washington to be part of the Nixon Administration as the Secretary of HUD, Bill Milliken becomes Governor, but I had also worked with Governor Milliken when he was running for Lieutenant Governor. I was very active in that campaign. Once he becomes Governor, I'm even more involved because he needed some very quick additions to his kitchen cabinet.

Bill Ballenger: That was like 1969 you said.

Peter Fletcher: Right, right, right, right, right. He was immediately faced with election in 1970.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: That was a very tough election and he won by a very slim margin. Oh and by the way, the state constitution had been involved, the new constitution was involved, has been adopted by a very slim margin and we always claim the Washtenaw County provided that margin because it carries big votes.

Bill Ballenger: Big 7,000 boats.

Peter Fletcher: Oh yeah, it was big in Washtenaw County. So of course we always take credit for it. We deserve it.

Bill Ballenger: Well you should. You should. You should.

Peter Fletcher: The politics is much about the myth of power.

Bill Ballenger: In that case, probably a valid claim on your part. Let me ask you this. Did George Romney appoint you to any state office or offices or was that only Governor Bill Milliken?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, Millikan appointed me to the Highway Commission.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: He then appointed me to the board at Michigan State University. Then, James Blanchard is the one who appointed me to the State Officers Compensation Commission.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: And John Engler, much to my chagrin, to the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, the worst two years of my life.

Bill Ballenger: Well we'll get to all that.

Peter Fletcher: Oh yes.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you just one question about George Romney. Wasn't there some incident involving a bar mitzvah in a mental facility?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Bill Ballenger: What happened?

Peter Fletcher: Here's what happened. George Romney was very good at doing Fourth of July parades. He would get on a helicopter and hop around to about five or six Fourth of July parades, with Ypsilanti being the final one at 11:00 in the

morning. He would start out 9:00 down river someplace. But this one year, when we got to Ypsilanti, everything was all set and we were gonna have lunch at my dad's farm. It was right west of town, so was the parade. As soon as we finish the parade, the state trooper pulled me aside and said "Peter, the Governor wants to go out to the Ypsilanti State Hospital" which was right south of my dad's farm, about four or five miles. I said "Well that's fine, whatever he wishes to do." But he says "We gotta be very careful of security because there could be some hazards there. Would you be willing to go with us?" I said "Of course."

Peter Fletcher: So we went out and it turned out that the reason the Governor was going there was because some Jewish family that knew Romney through some connection, I think it was way back in American Motor days. Their grandson was at an age, he was in the psychiatric, the youth psychiatric unit there, so he could not leave the facility, so they were gonna conduct his Bar mitzvah there. They asked the Governor if he would be willing to participate, which he did, readily.

Peter Fletcher: So we went out there, the Bar mitzvah was all set, the Governor walks in and it was the most remarkable thing. Here was the Governor of the State of Michigan, participating in a Jewish Bar mitzvah. He was of course very active in the Mormon Church. Everybody knew that. But the Governor gave a very, very compelling presentation on the bonds of similarity, Judaism, Christianity, the Mormon faith, all of it. It was very moving.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Peter Fletcher: The family was very touched, but nobody knew about it. One of the requirements was no press, nothing. So, I believe I'm one of the few people that was actually an eyewitness there, who could still tell that story and it's absolutely valid.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, that is amazing. That is an amazing story. We'll get back to George Romney in a minute. Let me ask you, you get Governor Bill Milliken elected to a full four years term in 1970 and so he rewards you by appointing you to some state agency?

Peter Fletcher: I would characterize it more as a punishment because I had made it crystal clear I didn't want to occupy the public office, but the State Highway Department and Commission had been through a terrible grand jury. Lots of problems, lots of problems. Governor Milliken for some reason thought I was a rather radaman-themed character. He said "I've gotta get somebody in there who's gonna not want to take bribes, not want to twist the rules, not want to cheat on anything."

Bill Ballenger: And maybe ask some hard questions.

Peter Fletcher: Right and demand answers. There were good aspects of the Highway Department, but they were so discouraged because of all the problems they'd been through. So, he appointed me to the State Highway Commission.

Bill Ballenger: Now, was this about what ... '72, '73?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, 1972.

Bill Ballenger: '72, okay.

Peter Fletcher: And of course the Democrats were incensed, oh yes, this was a payoff, therefore they were gonna block my confirmation. Well as you recall, the constitution required that they had to act in 60 session days, but there was an even split in the Michigan Senate.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Peter Fletcher: It was split, so the Republicans just held back. So 60 days went by and I was by default confirmed, so I loved going around the state telling people not a single vote was cast because of my confirmation and of course, not a single vote was cast for me.

Bill Ballenger: Well that's right.

Peter Fletcher: But I was a full fledged Commissioner.

Bill Ballenger: So what did you find when you became a member of that body.

Peter Fletcher: I found that the department was very severely scarred by that whole experience and eager to get back on the right track. Unfortunately, when I arrived, it was almost coincidental with the hiring of John Woodford as the Director. John Woodford was an excellent, absolutely excellent Director. One of my proudest accomplishments was seeing that John was the Director and I supported him completely and he supported us.

Peter Fletcher: John often said afterwards ... he said "Fletcher was a tough boss, but he was absolutely a straight arrow." And he would really get after us. He'd put the pressure on us, but when he went over to the legislature to testify, when he spoke in public meetings about the Highway Department, he was a big proponent, big proponent. He explained to people why we had to become a transportation department, not a highway department.

Peter Fletcher: So we had to be interested in public transportation. We had to be interested in all forms of transportation, whether it was air crafts, whether it was boats, everything. John and I thought we made a pretty good team.

Bill Ballenger: How many people were on the commission at that time, do you remember?

Peter Fletcher: Four. There were two democrats, two republicans.

Bill Ballenger: Do you remember some of the other members?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, Vin Erickson was there, well Charlie Hewitt was the chairman at the time and he of course was a democrat, so he was a little suspicious. But before it was over, Charlie and I got along just fine. When I was first appointed, Tom Shauber who had worked for the free press and followed me in politics was the Director of PR for the Highway Department. He came to me "Oh Peter, we don't want to have anything in politics. Anything politics, you gotta be careful. You gotta be careful. I know you're a big part."

Peter Fletcher: I said "I'll make you a deal Tom, I'll make you a deal. You watch me for the next year and you come back in a year from now and tell me if I had been inappropriate with my politics." "okay, okay." He never came back to me.

Bill Ballenger: Never came back.

Peter Fletcher: Because I knew that politics had nothing to do with whether or not you were gonna have a great department.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: And we were there to serve the people, the public interest and to make certain that every dollar we collected from the taxpayers was spent prudently. I found all kinds of ways to save money and focus it directly on solving problems of transportation.

Bill Ballenger: How long were you on the Commission?

Peter Fletcher: Six years.

Bill Ballenger: Six years all together?

Peter Fletcher: The day I was appointed, I handed the Governor my signed, undated resignation. "Governor, if you find anyone in this felicitic commonwealth who would rather have fulfilled this odious task, please make me the happiest person from around and just put the date on it and I'm gone."

Bill Ballenger: In my misery.

Peter Fletcher: Right, right.

Bill Ballenger: But actually, I think you secretly got something out of it.

Peter Fletcher: Every two weeks they have to trudge you off to Lansing.

Bill Ballenger: Is that how often they met? Twice a month?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, but guess what? When I became chairman, we cut it to once a month and the meetings were two hours. I mean none of this federal. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Come on folks. Give us the information. We make the decision. Give it to us in advance so we can think it over. There were more efficient ways of doing virtually everything in state government.

Peter Fletcher: All that bureaucracy about to drive you nuts. Two of the worst things about state government was civil service because it protected the incompetent and the indifferent and the indolent. I couldn't fire anybody. I couldn't fire anybody.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: We caught a guy stealing money from us at the Blue Water Bridge. Oh no, no, we had to put him on some sort of leave. The only one we could finally fire was the guy that was caught sneaking around the women's restrooms harassing women. That one we could finally get rid of, but it was a tough challenge.

Bill Ballenger: Well, was it you or the commission that could fire or not these people? Or was it John Woodford?

Peter Fletcher: Woodford was of course the day to day administrator, so he had the ultimate responsibility. But the final policy decisions were made by the commissioner.

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't there a famous map that came out while you were on the commission?

Peter Fletcher: I was accused by Keith Bolean, who was then the Director of the Department of Labor I think it was, our U of M guy, he said "Fletcher, you're not being faithful to the University of Michigan because you're allowing them to repaint the Mackinac Bridge green and white, the colors of the arch enemy in East Lansing." Well I had no control over that because this Federal Highway Administration determined that green and white were the safety colors, they used them all over the country.

Peter Fletcher: I said "Well I'll do something that proves I'm as faithful to the maison blue as anyone else." We were getting ready to put out the new state highway map, so I called in Tom Shauber, who was in charge of the map project. I said "Tom, here's what we're gonna do. Have a section of the map for which we have no legal liability, we're gonna put two new towns. One of them is gonna say "GO BLU" the other ones I gonna say "BEAT OSU", but we're telling nobody.

Bill Ballenger: Was it like rural Toledo?

Peter Fletcher: Yeah, yeah, right, right, right. Just south of the border. Where they have cultural wasteland and call it OHIO, four letter word. So, we told nobody, introduced the

new map and oh fine, it was the year rents had opened in downtown Detroit, so that's where we introduced the map.

Peter Fletcher: The conclusion, the press conference said "By the way ladies and gentleman, there's something on the new map, which is not on the old map." That's all I said. Some smarty went home that night, put the two maps up to a bright light and found my arrant towns. William, I'm here to tell you that my life has not been the same. What I thought would be a modest amusement, over a 20 minutes duration, has taken on a life of its own. To this day, 30 years later. Not a month goes by, something doesn't come about that silly map paper. Unbelievable.

Bill Ballenger: It was a great incident, I mean it was front page news all over the state.

Peter Fletcher: When I went on the MSU board, they wanted to know what I was gonna do to the MSU campus map. I said "Nothing, nothing". That's a one of a kind.

Bill Ballenger: Was it just that one year?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, because the minute I left the commission, the cartographer jerked it off because he felt so violated it wasn't accurate. It was not an accurate thing.

Bill Ballenger: You didn't really get in trouble over that did you?

Peter Fletcher: No, no, but the Governor got about six letters of complaint from people.

Bill Ballenger: Only six?

Peter Fletcher: About six letters. He said "Peter, what should I do to answer this?" I said "I'll suggest an answer Governor. Why don't you answer them and say Mr. Fletcher serves without any compensation. He's entitled to \$60,000 a year from the public treasury. He pays all of his own expenses, even though he's entitled to complete reimbursement and therefore, in exchange for that, he spent about \$6 in extra ink on that map. Therefore, I believe that the people have come out ahead financially." Guess what? No more complaints.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, let me ask you this. Six years pass, the commission term to which you were appointed ends.

Peter Fletcher: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: And what?

Peter Fletcher: Well it didn't end, I had been re-appointed once, so I still have another couple years to go. I said "Governor, we have not got re-elected and I wasn't out. I need my peace and quiet."

Bill Ballenger: You wanted freedom at last.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, please, please.

Bill Ballenger: He said okay, but did he demand that you take something else?

Peter Fletcher: No, no, no.

Bill Ballenger: He gave you a hiatus.

Peter Fletcher: No, no, here's what happened. I handed in a resignation as soon as we knew we were re-elected in the election, I would have handed him my resignation and say "You've got to give me my freedom." "Oh please, please." So reluctantly, he accepted my resignation. Okay. Two years go by.

Peter Fletcher: One day out of the clear blue sky, they'd had a resignation, they forced a person off of the MSU board of trustees because there had been all kinds of scandals. He was cheating and everything. It was bad, bad. He was in jail for non-support, the whole thing. Okay, so here's this vacancy. There hadn't been a vacancy on the board at MSU in years. The MSU board is an elected board, so the Governor very seldom would make an appointment anyway. There hadn't been an appointment. As soon as this guy resigned, 200 people immediately applied. Begging, pleading and whining. All these bleed green types.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Peter Fletcher: Well, all of a sudden they're sitting around the office one day according to Joyce Braithwaite who was the interpreter appointments person.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Peter Fletcher: Suddenly, the Governor says "Wait a minute, I know who I'm going to appoint." She thought he was going to name one of these five or six names they were down to. "I'm going to appoint Peter Fletcher." "Peter Fletcher? He's never even been on the campus." "I'm appointing Peter Fletcher. I'm gonna prove to the people of Michigan that you get a better quality by appointment than you do by election. And Fletcher won't take anything from them."

Bill Ballenger: He's convinced that you would be this passionate objective.

Peter Fletcher: Right, exactly.

Bill Ballenger: And you would do the same kind of job you did on a lot of things.

Peter Fletcher: Exactly.

Bill Ballenger: But did he realize there might be a big backlash.

Peter Fletcher: Oh boy was there a backlash. When he called me, he said "Peter, I'm going to appoint you to Trustee of Michigan State University." I said "Governor, do you realize you're talking to Peter Fletcher in Ypsilanti?" "Yes." "and this is the Governor of the state of Michigan?" "Yes." I said "Governor, do you realize how controversial this will be?" He said "I found that some of my most controversial appointments were some of my most successful." "But Governor, I don't wish to be a Trustee of Michigan State University." "Peter, I have done things for you I didn't wish to do, now it's your turn to do this for me." So, there I was, stuck.

Bill Ballenger: You were stuck.

Peter Fletcher: When he announced it ... for three days, absolute hell broke loose.

Bill Ballenger: Well you are kind of downplaying the fact that you're a famous Maison Blue guy.

Peter Fletcher: I agree, but the third day, guess who called me?

Bill Ballenger: Who?

Peter Fletcher: John ... the president. Long time president.

Bill Ballenger: John Hannah?

Peter Fletcher: John Hannah called me.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, John Hannah.

Peter Fletcher: He said "Mr. Fletcher, if Governor Milliken thinks you will be a good trustee at Michigan State, that's good enough for me." But then, they all quieted down. I showed up at the first bidding.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, that was it huh?

Peter Fletcher: Baring my green and white tie and everything.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Peter Fletcher: On my car, I got a personalized plate. On my car was my M go blue sticker on the window and the license plate said MSUTOO.

Bill Ballenger: That's pretty good.

Peter Fletcher: So I had a dual allegiance.

Bill Ballenger: That is very good.

Peter Fletcher: After I left four and a half years later, I often said "A wide body of opinion, hell, that was the finest trustee they ever had." Of course it was my wide body, but so what.

Bill Ballenger: How long were you on the board?

Peter Fletcher: Four and a half years.

Bill Ballenger: Four and a half years. You never actually ran, did you?

Peter Fletcher: No, no, no, no, no. I served out the term.

Bill Ballenger: You served out the balance of the term.

Peter Fletcher: Right, the balance of the term and then I left them a question. I said "I will respond to the wishes of the people of the state of Michigan." And guess what? Not one person asked me to seek re-election, including myself. So I understood that

Bill Ballenger: Well now was John Hannah ... he was an emerits president.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, yes, but still.

Bill Ballenger: Was Wharton a president? Who was president?

Peter Fletcher: No, they were just in the process.

Bill Ballenger: DiBiaggio?

Peter Fletcher: They were just in the process of changing presidents.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. Wharton had just left?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, yes, and they hired John DiBiaggio.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Peter Fletcher: No, no, Cecil Mackey.

Bill Ballenger: Cecil Mackey was there? Okay.

Peter Fletcher: Cecil Mackey was there and Cecil was having a tough time. Cecil had all of the qualifications for being an excellent university president except one. He had no political instincts. It was very sad. Cecil was an excellent president otherwise. I tried my best to protect him from some of his political blunders, but boy oh boy, it was tough. It was very tough.

Bill Ballenger: He's still there today.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, he's an emerits professor.

Bill Ballenger: Is he still teaching? He's the merits professor. He's still very active in the community.

Peter Fletcher: I agree, I agree. Fine, fine people, but oh boy, it was one of those sad circumstances of where ... he worked for Estes Kefauver. Estes Kefauver was a great politician, but for some reason, Cecil just never quite got that.

Bill Ballenger: Maybe it was cultural.

Peter Fletcher: Who knows.

Bill Ballenger: He was from Alabama.

Peter Fletcher: Yeah, but who knows. It was very sad.

Bill Ballenger: What else did you find out as a Michigan State University Trustee?

Peter Fletcher: Michigan State University is a fine and remarkable institution, a great asset for this state and for Midwestern America and I was very pleased to be able to speak on behalf of a number of their ... but their priorities were so distorted on the board of trustees. For example, they badly needed a \$50,000 appropriation to buy a microscope for two of the top cancer research people in the country that were right there at Michigan State. Well, they had a terrible time finding that, but they did find \$175,000 to pay in hush money when George Perles got into all that mess when he left the Philadelphia stars or whatever it was, to come back to Michigan State.

Bill Ballenger: So now, you were on the board when that happened?

Peter Fletcher: Oh yes.

Bill Ballenger: What about all of that?

Peter Fletcher: I kept saying "Wait a minute, wait a minute. He's got a contract. He's breaking contract." They said they're gonna sue us. What about ... "Oh no, no, no don't worry, don't worry." So they hire him and sure enough the day after Christmas, we get served with a ... I don't know, million dollar lawsuit. I said "What about ..." "Oh don't worry, don't worry, don't worry. It's all gonna go away."

Peter Fletcher: About two weeks later, I get a call from someone in the press. They said "Mr. Fletcher, what do you think about this settlement the University's made? Paid \$175,000 in hush money and \$20,000 in legal fees." I said "Nobody told me anything about this." So I called Cecil Mackey. I said "Cecil, what's going on?"

"Oh I wanted to come down and talk to you. I want to come down and talk to you." So he comes down and try to placate me, we made this secret deal and the federal judge said we can't talk about it, well I said "You better tell that federal judge I have no intention, not accounting for every penny of the public's money here at Michigan State. With that, the next day, I blew it all. Oh my word. I said "There is no such think as a pig skinned messiah. I refuse to worship at the cheap and tawdry shrine, built at the Gods of greater glory. There are more important things at this university then the peculiar prancing after a pig skin on a Saturday afternoon."

Bill Ballenger: Okay well now, is the University of Michigan situation with Rich Rodriguez and the University of West Virginia any better of situation than the Perles and Philadelphia stars situation? What's the difference?

Peter Fletcher: Here's the problem. Cecil Mackey and I both sat around his office many times and Cecil said there is no such thing as a clean program and I thought in the big time athletics ... no. Money, money, money the TV. The money is just unbelievable. But, I must say that I am a very dear, longtime friend and huge admirer of Bill Martin.

Bill Ballenger: Who is the athletic director-

Peter Fletcher: Yes, at the University of Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: For the University of Michigan.

Peter Fletcher: Right. He came into a very messed up program, he's cleaned it up. He is a straight arrow and whatever complications they may have at the University of Michigan or in the Michigan Athletic Department are not of his origin or doing and he will clean it up if that's what it requires. Therefore, I am a big fan of Bill Martin.

Bill Ballenger: Well, but on the other hand I must say, the Rich Rodriguez thing all happened on Bill Martin's watch.

Peter Fletcher: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: Long after her became athletic director.

Peter Fletcher: Yes, but remember, Bill Martin cannot be everywhere at everything . Bill Martin juggles many, many responsibilities and he does them all very well. Plus, I will be the first to confess, he's done me many personal kindnesses and therefore, I am prejudice.

Peter Fletcher: Have a lot of faith in Bill Martin. Bill Martin leads our bank, which is very successful, and that's all Bill Martin's doing.

Bill Ballenger: What else happened at that time? Were you still there when they tried to make Perles athletic director?

Peter Fletcher: No, no, no. That was after my time.

Bill Ballenger: That was afterwards?

Peter Fletcher: That was after my time.

Bill Ballenger: That was long after your time.

Peter Fletcher: That was after my time. Now, of course, he's a Trustee of Michigan State. The people in their infinite wisdom have ignored my warnings, but my warnings have been ignored before. Remember, the year after I left the highway department they got right back into another grand jury thing. A contract I would not approve, they snuck through the month after I left. Therefore, I don't like to be "I told you so" type, but I can't help myself.

Bill Ballenger: Now, were you out of office by the end of 1982 when Governor Milliken left the Governorship?

Peter Fletcher: No, no. I was-

Bill Ballenger: Extended slightly into Blanchard's?

Peter Fletcher: ... overlap. Yes, yes, yes.

Bill Ballenger: So you go off of the MSU board of your own volition. How many years pass before Governor Blanchard, a Democrat, summoned you? To public duty?

Peter Fletcher: Two or four years. We have this peculiar institution called the State Officer's Compensation Commission, which is unnecessary and a bad dodge of legislative responsibility. Trying to set the Governor's salaries, the judges salaries, the legislative salaries. So they needed a Republican. Gary Owen,

Bill Ballenger: The Speaker of the House. The Democrat who was from Ypsilanti, who you knew well.

Peter Fletcher: ... Right, right, right. We worked together very well. Gary said, "Well I've got this guy in Ypsilanti and Blanchard knew me somewhat. He said, "Why don't we appoint Fletcher?" Oh okay. So I reluctantly, oh okay, here again. I got up, this is a useless commission performing an idiotic responsibility that shouldn't be ours. Insulated from the public. It just makes no sense. I want complete disclosure of everything. When I was on the highway commission there were no executive

sessions. No conference telephone calls. Nothing. The door was physically locked open to every commission meeting. I mean, sorry, I want it absolutely open.

Bill Ballenger: By the way, a Michigan State board, just to sidebar for a second here. Was there a secrecy there or was it as open as you would have liked?

Peter Fletcher: Not when I was there, there wasn't any secrecy. They tried to have some of those and it didn't work. The final, they had a secret meeting when they were hiring DiBiaggio after Cecil left and they had a secret meeting.

Bill Ballenger: Were you still there?

Peter Fletcher: Yes I was still there. They said, so they have this secret meeting therefore about-

Bill Ballenger: Secret meeting without you?

Peter Fletcher: ... Yeah exactly. They didn't tell me about it.

Bill Ballenger: You mean some members of the board had a secret meeting?

Peter Fletcher: No they could be at a secret meeting without me to finish up this deal.

Bill Ballenger: Because they were afraid you would blow the whistle?

Peter Fletcher: Right, right, right. So this was about two months before the end of my term anyway. I said, "I'm done. I'm out. I'm not going to be part of this." I left. So they had no farewell for me. Imagine that?

Bill Ballenger: You actually resigned before the end of the year?

Peter Fletcher: Yes I submitted to the Governor Blanchard. I will not be part of this.

Bill Ballenger: What did you think of the hiring of DiBiaggio by the way? Beyond the messy sort of process.

Peter Fletcher: DiBiaggio was okay. He was okay.

Bill Ballenger: He had a hard time too.

Peter Fletcher: Of course, of course. Because he had an impossible board. These elected boards for ... I mean Michigan is one of half a dozen states or so where they elect directly. Idiotic system.

Bill Ballenger: We're the only state that elects our three major higher education board and our state board of education state wide.

Peter Fletcher: And it's electoral Russian roulette.

Bill Ballenger: It's just really bad.

Peter Fletcher: It's dreadful, it's dreadful.

Bill Ballenger: Did you think the board members were really not up to snuff, most of them?

Peter Fletcher: The whole problem was they were far more interested in what they were going to get out of ... see pay was forbidden but you could get actual expenses reimbursed. They wanted free football tickets, they wanted free rides on the planes to ball games, they wanted free, free, free everything. They got down they were arguing over a free library card. Wait a minute, I said, folks what's wrong with just taking the sense that you performed a duty faithfully on behalf of the public. That's the all the compensation I want. Oh no, they wanted all these perks. I wouldn't take a one of them. They had cars they were assigned to them. Everything.

Bill Ballenger: They had cars?

Peter Fletcher: Yeah.

Bill Ballenger: Really?

Peter Fletcher: Crazy, crazy.

Bill Ballenger: But you turned it down.

Peter Fletcher: Nope, wouldn't take it.

Bill Ballenger: Okay but you finally get appointed to a board who's a good one. Was the State Officer's Compensation. I mean they hardly ever meet. Right?

Peter Fletcher: I'll tell you though, what I got from them. Soapy Williams was the chief justice. He was just finishing up. So his last day in public office was December 31, some year and he came over to speak on behalf of judicial salaries. As he finished up I said, "Just a moment ladies and gentlemen. Governor Williams, chief justice Williams and I are on opposite sides of the political fence, but I would be remiss in my duties as a public official if I were not to stop and put on the record that this commission, this the final public appearance. A final public responsibility that this distinguished citizen of Michigan is performing and I want the record to show that we all applaud his service to the people of the State of Michigan. You may not agree with his policy decisions but you could not disagree with his motives and serving all of the people in Michigan. I want to thank him on behalf of our six million citizens."

Bill Ballenger: Wow. That was his last public address.

Peter Fletcher: I got a very nice letter from Soapy afterwards. He said, "Peter that was very kind and certainly didn't have to do it." I said, "I felt compelled to Governor."

Bill Ballenger: So he, in other words, he was arguing on behalf of hiking judicial.

Peter Fletcher: Right of course. We were having judges that were having to borrow from pay day to pay day and that kind of stuff.

Bill Ballenger: What did you think generally speaking as a member of that commission? Even though you felt it was an unnecessary administrative and executive appendage that shouldn't even exist. Did you feel that their mission in looking at pay for public officials was valid in the sense, somebody had to do it.

Peter Fletcher: As long as we were stuck with the responsibility let's do the best job we can.

Bill Ballenger: Did you feel that public officials, most of them were under paid and that they should have at least cost of living increases every two years, which is basically what the commission had directed?

Peter Fletcher: I believe that public officials should be paid appropriate salaries commensurate with the private sector so that we can recruit the best and brightest to seek public office. We shouldn't restrict public office to those who only can afford it through their private means. By the same token, we should then be more responsible in who we put in those offices.

Bill Ballenger: So did you get a backlash from the public in the news media every time you made these recommendations and then the legislature at that time could allow them to just take effect without even voting on it? There was a lot of controversy from time to time.

Peter Fletcher: We never heard from anyone. I never did. I made them institute public hearings around the state on what we were doing. Nobody showed up. No, no. At least we could say, "If you've got a complaint, where were you?"

Bill Ballenger: Which years? Was it like '86, '88? What it about the time George H.W. Bush was elected president? Around that time?

Peter Fletcher: I have a vague recollection.

Bill Ballenger: There wasn't that much human cry or backlash or negative reaction?

Peter Fletcher: They would grouse about it and local meetings or something like that, but we never heard a thing.

Bill Ballenger: Now they later, as you may know, amended the statute in the constitution to say there as to be a vote. There has to be a vote by the legislature on the

recommendations of the commission. You don't have any problem with that, do you?

Peter Fletcher: No, no, no, no. But still, who pays attention?

Bill Ballenger: They probably, in other words, it gives the legislators less cover than they used to have.

Peter Fletcher: I know.

Bill Ballenger: They have to vote.

Peter Fletcher: Bill, you and I both know that one of the huge defects in American government is the colossal neglect that voters lavish upon it. I mean nobody, nobody in the State of Michigan, you included, can name all of our state wide elected officials.

Bill Ballenger: All of them! Seven thousand plus!

Peter Fletcher: Because we elect too many. We elect too many.

Bill Ballenger: We've got over 5,000 townships.

Peter Fletcher: It's crazy. No, no. Just take the state wide offices.

Bill Ballenger: Just state.

Peter Fletcher: Like those boards and commissions.

Bill Ballenger: Oh okay. I probably could do that.

Peter Fletcher: Very few. Very few.

Bill Ballenger: So how long were you on the State Officers Compensation?

Peter Fletcher: Four years and that's a term limited thank goodness.

Bill Ballenger: So when you got off, then Governor Blanchard was defeated by John Engler in 1990. John Engler comes in and how long were you free before he lobbed on to you?

Peter Fletcher: I knew John Engler from way back when he was in the state legislature. John and I had gotten along just fine. The minute he became Governor I said, "Now remember Governor, I don't wish to be appointed to anything." Every time I see him, "Now remember Governor there are a lot of people clawing at you. Why don't you appoint something?" I'm not one of those. "Oh I understand, I understand." Fine. Year 2000, February 2000. I get a call from Governor Engler. He said, "Peter I'm going to appoint you to the Michigan judicial tenure

commission." I said, "Governor, remember, this is Peter Fletcher from Ypsilanti, you promised me faithfully you would appoint me to nothing."

Peter Fletcher: He said "Peter I'm desperate. You're the only person I know in the state of Michigan who's not intimidated by judges or attorneys and that's what I need on that commission." I said, "Well I can't argue with that but who am I intimidated by?" He said, "I'm hoping on this one occasion you're intimidated by your Governor." I said, "Okay, all right, but remember you're getting a signed and dated resignation like every other Governor."

Bill Ballenger: I'm sure he loved that.

Peter Fletcher: "I understand, I understand." So I go on the JTC. The worst two years of my life because what we let judges get away with in this state is an absolute disgrace. The first meeting I attended they're having this hearing relating to a Governor in down river Michigan here who's had five sexual harassment complaints filed by his own staff. He wastes his time playing darts in the back of the room and he's supposed to be conducting court. He's going around to these titty bars in an unmarked car so the police won't harass him. He was abusing the public trust beyond anything, even remotely reasonable. They were doing, well we don't, well we don't. I said, "Throw him off! Throw him off"

Bill Ballenger: Were you the only public member of the commission?

Peter Fletcher: No, no there were two public members.

Bill Ballenger: There were two public members. You have any help from the other public members?

Peter Fletcher: Nope, nope, nope. They're all intimidated because there were five judges. There were five judges and two attorney's sitting there. I wasn't intimidated. At any rate, throw him off, throw him off! No, no, no. Three years later, three years after I've departed they finally had to throw him off and they said, "Peter, why didn't we listen to you?" Well I said, "I've heard that before." Then, and then, we had this attorney member who was busy auctioning off his service on the JTC in front of judges.

Peter Fletcher: Remember, I'm a member of the JTC. He would say that right in an open court. He made a deal with one judge. He made a deal that one judge we apprehended in the men's room in illegal activity in Metro Airport, so Henry, and I shouldn't give any name, but he went to the judge and said-

Bill Ballenger: Henry's the attorney?

Peter Fletcher: ... Yeah, yeah. He goes to this judge and he said, "I've got this big divorce case in front of you and I want a half million dollar fee on that. You give me that half million dollar fee, I'll see to it that the JTC goes easy on you." Which is exactly

what happened. Guess what? The other side found out and raised so much pain that the next time around Henry was not re-elected to the JTC by the state bar. It was so bad, but what do you supposed happened a year later?

Bill Ballenger: What?

Peter Fletcher: Granholm reappoints him to the board of the open community college. I mean, folks. I mean come one. Money. Money, money, money, money.

Bill Ballenger: The members of the JTC became members in what way? I mean you were appointed by Engler.

Peter Fletcher: Five were appointed. But see the various trial courts elect one of their members. Then there are two appointed by the State Bar and then two appointed by the Governor.

Bill Ballenger: I got you.

Peter Fletcher: So we were automatic disadvantage. Anything like that to discipline any public official should have a majority of public members. They should not have a stacked deck against them.

Bill Ballenger: How long did you serve on that?

Peter Fletcher: Two years.

Bill Ballenger: How often did you have to meet?

Peter Fletcher: Once a month.

Bill Ballenger: So you had to travel from Ypsilanti up there.

Peter Fletcher: No, no Detroit.

Bill Ballenger: In Detroit.

Peter Fletcher: Yup, yup. Because that's where most of the activity was.

Bill Ballenger: Did you get per diem expenses and that's it?

Peter Fletcher: I didn't get anything. I think you were supposed to be paid expenses but I didn't file for any expenses. I made them for the first time, I made them publish a budget. Sure, it wasn't a big budget, but I said, "Look, we're spending public money here. Why aren't we telling the public about it?" "Oh I never thought of that."

Bill Ballenger: What about Engler? You must have communicated with the Governor at some point saying, Governor, you just don't realize how bad this particular commission is?

Peter Fletcher: I tried to communicate with everybody.

Bill Ballenger: There wasn't reaction? Were there any other new members that were appointed while you were a member that made things any better?

Peter Fletcher: Nope. Nope, nope, nope.

Bill Ballenger: Not even.

Peter Fletcher: I will say good things on behalf of Bill Murphy, who was on the State Court of Appeals. He became the chairman shortly after and he was very sympathetic and everything and he said, "Peter I understand your frustrations. I know what this means to you and everything but," he said, "We're up against a huge, tough block of influence and the judges are ..." I mean we put on that black robe and we get that gavel out there and boy oh boy.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you this. You think the fact that the judges are elected makes the situation you found yourself in as a member of the commission harder, tougher?

Peter Fletcher: Yes, way back in my constitutional convention days with J. Don Lawrence, he tried his best to get a modified Missouri plan here in Michigan, but there were too many attorneys there and they just wouldn't go for it. That's what we need.

Bill Ballenger: They didn't want an appointed judiciary. They wanted an elected judiciary.

Peter Fletcher: Yup. Because then they could have more direct impact. Every time there's a campaign who's giving money to whom?

Bill Ballenger: Turning to your political career. You were a Republican National Committeeman for the state of Michigan for how many years?

Peter Fletcher: I was there for about five years. I filled out a term for Creighton Holden so I came in just about the time that Nixon was in the mess and then Gerald Ford becomes president. I'm a national committeeman at the convention in '76 out in Kansas City. That's where we planted the seed to bring the convention, the first time ever in national political convention comes to Detroit in 1980. That's where Reagan and Bush the first are nominated President and Vice President. It was also the beginning of the Tim McBride from Michigan becoming the personal aide to the President of the United States and then his wife, today, is the deputy of the president and chief of staff to Laura Bush. All with the Michigan connection all because of that convention.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. That Kansas City convention. You were very much involved at that convention in the nose counting on delegates for the nomination. Weren't you? Reagan, Ford. What happened there?

Peter Fletcher: 1976 where the Reagan and Ford had these continuing battles all through the primaries and there was a Michigan primary. They sent Secretary Austin sent the letter, the notification to the big shots in Washington and they partially forwarded me a copy. They didn't realize that in Michigan you had to file an affidavit of candidacy no matter who you were.

Bill Ballenger: The Ford campaign?

Peter Fletcher: Oh no where he's the president, he's automatic. I said, "No he's not." I called Austin's office. I said "Is Gerald Ford going to be on the ballot? He hasn't filed an affidavit of candidacy." So I called the Washington big shots and said, "Would you please check."

Bill Ballenger: How far away was the deadline?

Peter Fletcher: About 48 hours. So I'm begging them. I'm saying he's not going to be on the ballot here. So they checked. They called back in an absolute panic, "Oh my god. Oh my god. You're right, you're right. You go out to Metro airport tonight and they'll be a special envelope from Northwest Airlines Flight" so and so and so with this affidavit candidacy. Okay fine. So I got out there. I spend five hours out there. They search the runways. They couldn't find it. They call the president of Northwest Airlines, "Where is this envelope from the president?" Nope. So I called the next morning, "Is Gerald Ford still interested in being President?" What do you mean? I said, "I didn't get the affidavit of candidacy."

Peter Fletcher: "What! What! What! You go back there this afternoon. 3:00." So I go back out 3:00 that afternoon. Wander around. This particular office. I find this way back in the back room.

Bill Ballenger: And you're doing this all on your own?

Peter Fletcher: ... Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Bill Ballenger: What the heck is the matter with these people? It's unbelievable.

Peter Fletcher: Remember against stupidity, even the gods labor in vain. So I finally find this guy in this back office. His desk is piled high with junk. I ask, I said, "Do you have this envelope?" He said, "That sounds familiar." He's shuffling around. I stood there thinking, are all great moments in politics like this? This is such idiocy. He finally found it, "Oh yes, here it is." Jump in the car. Race to Lansing, rush into the Governors office, hand him the envelope. He walks over to Austin's office, files with two hours to spare. It was that close. He goes on to win the Michigan

primary. Gets 59 delegates. He wins Kansas City by 50 votes. Am I the reason that Gerald Ford was the candidate that year? I don't know. I don't know.

Bill Ballenger: Well let me ask this too. Didn't Ford also do a whistle stop tour?

Peter Fletcher: Oh he sure did.

Bill Ballenger: Do you remember that?

Peter Fletcher: That was Jerry Roe.

Bill Ballenger: That was Jerry Roe?

Peter Fletcher: That was wonderful.

Bill Ballenger: Great idea. Were you on the train?

Peter Fletcher: Yup, sure was. A lot of fun.

Bill Ballenger: That was a big success.

Peter Fletcher: A lot of fun.

Bill Ballenger: That helped him. Once he got on the ballot, you know maybe that was instrumental in getting the nomination. So this was all for the presidential primary, which in those days was much later than it is now. Wasn't it in like May?

Peter Fletcher: Yes. Absolutely. May 20th I think it was.

Bill Ballenger: So you're in Kansas City and you've got a really close vote. Even though Ford won the Michigan primary, Reagan then won a lot of later primaries as we know. So, what actually went on to lead to finally Ford winning it?

Peter Fletcher: I believe that in Kansas City there was just enough. Reagan was looked at as just still a little bit of an outsider. A little bit, if you in effect toss out an incumbent what does that say about your chances? Doesn't that really mix things up for November?

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't there a big deal although with Reagan picking Richard Schweiker the US Senator from Pennsylvania as his running mate. Announcing it beforehand.

Peter Fletcher: It's smart.

Bill Ballenger: Trying to pry the Pennsylvania delegation loose from Ford and I think there was some Michigan people involved in trying to hold that Pennsylvania delegation.

Peter Fletcher: That's right, and it was tough. It was very tough, but one of the things that helped us is that when we had campaigned, we were campaigning in order to get the convention in Detroit and we did a little trading on that too.

Bill Ballenger: So you were already lobbying and working toward getting the convention in 1980, beginning right there.

Peter Fletcher: Sure, sure.

Bill Ballenger: OK working for those three or four years up to 1980 what really clinched the deal getting the convention for Detroit?

Peter Fletcher: We said Michigan is going to be a battleground state. Even Coleman Young, the hardcore Democratic mayor of Detroit will kind of quiet down if we go to Detroit. That's what sold it.

Bill Ballenger: What about Odie Fish? From Wisconsin. Do you remember him?

Peter Fletcher: Yes I sure do.

Bill Ballenger: Big cigar smoker.

Peter Fletcher: Yup, yup, yup.

Bill Ballenger: I heard they took him over to Windsor and got him a lot of Cuban cigars that he couldn't have gotten otherwise. And wasn't he chairman of the site selection committee?

Peter Fletcher: Exactly. Exactly. Plus I'll tell you the other thing we did. When we brought the site selection committee here, the committee that visits, we took them to every upscale, we took them to the Edsel and Eleanor Ford estate. I mean we showed them elegance, they were really impressed because they kept thinking of Detroit as the motor city. Except what they didn't realize is the motor city made a heck of a lot of money off those motors all these years and there was a lot wealth. We showed them all of that.

Bill Ballenger: Did you feel that Michigan really came through when it had its convention here and National Republicans were really pleased?

Peter Fletcher: Oh they thanked us profusely. They were impressed, but I'll tell you who else helped us was Windsor. Windsor knocked themselves out to help and was the only convention where delegates were put into two countries. America and a foreign country.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right.

Peter Fletcher: Only one. Voters love that. Windsor, boy they made it so easy. They waived all the usual barter things and everything. Those buses, if there was a convention bus, man it went through the bridge and the tunnel, right off.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. Peter Fletcher you were a national committeeman for the Republican party for five years. Were you always a Republican? Was your family Republican? How long were you a Republican? Tell us the story.

Peter Fletcher: My father was an FDR Democrat. My mother was a Wisconsin socialist. So in order to be a rebellious youth I decided I'd be a Republican. My great aunt from Coldwater, Edith Phelps, contemporary of Rob Teeter, pinned a Fitzgerald for Governor pin on me in 1938.

Bill Ballenger: Frank Fitzgerald the Republican.

Peter Fletcher: I was very intrigued. What is that all about? That got me started in following politics at a very young age.

Bill Ballenger: Did you meet Frank Fitzgerald?

Peter Fletcher: Oh yes.

Bill Ballenger: How many Governors have you met?

Peter Fletcher: I have met every Governor that was Governor during my 76 years here on this earth.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Peter Fletcher: I've met seven different presidents and I don't think there are too many people who have done that. I found it very interesting.

Bill Ballenger: Who is the earliest Governor in Michigan you met?

Peter Fletcher: It would have been Wilber Brucker.

Bill Ballenger: '31 and '32. Of course you were barely alive or not even alive at that time.

Peter Fletcher: Much later. I was born on February the 29th, 1932.

Bill Ballenger: That's right.

Peter Fletcher: Date that will go down in infamy.

Bill Ballenger: So you're actually much younger than I thought. Right?

Peter Fletcher: Well, 19 birthdays.

Bill Ballenger: Right you're only 19 years old.

Peter Fletcher: Right, exactly. It's wonderful.

Bill Ballenger: You're a baby. Wilber Brucker was Secretary of the Army, I believe in the Eisenhower administration so that's probably under those circumstances.

Peter Fletcher: That's right. For example, Pat Van Wagoner, 1940, he was on the Mackinac Bridge Authority.