

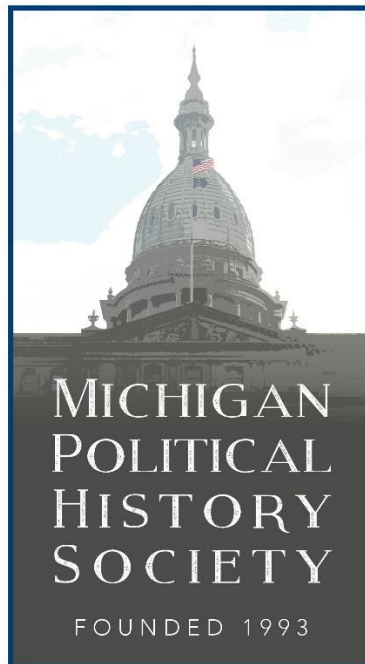
GARY OWEN

Interviewed by

Lynn Jondahl

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This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

- Lynn Jondahl: I'm delighted to be here with Gary Owen, former Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives.
- Gary Owen: My pleasure.
- Lynn Jondahl: You're not doing door to door in this political season, and are you missing that, thinking, "Damn I wish I could get out and hit a few more doors today?"
- Gary Owen: No, I don't miss that at all. You and I both served a long time. I was 16 years, I think you might have been 20?
- Lynn Jondahl: 22, yeah.
- Gary Owen: 22, and that was long enough for me. I was, at the time that I left the Legislature, I felt fulfilled with what I'd accomplished and what I set out to do, and it was time to do something else, and I felt that way. It was a very difficult job and I think being a legislator was a little easier than being Speaker. Being Speaker with the personnel issues was far more difficult. I got tired of that.
- Lynn Jondahl: Okay. Because you were dealing more with just administration, not so much involved in issues.
- Gary Owen: Right. I'd say out of an eight-hour day, probably three to four hours of it was dedicated to personnel and management of the house and those types of things. It wasn't what I signed up for, in all honesty, but it had to get done. As Lew found out, when you don't do correctly, you get in a lot of trouble.
- Lynn Jondahl: Lou Dodak, who was your successor.
- Gary Owen: Well, I'm talking about the House Fiscal Agency problems.
- Lynn Jondahl: Right, and the problems there.
- Gary Owen: Those are the kinds of things that you're responsible for, and you have to monitor very, very closely. It requires a great deal of time.
- Lynn Jondahl: Let's talk some about how you wound up being in the legislature. Your background, personally, where did you come from?
- Gary Owen: I'll give you the little program, because the Republicans were going to use it against me one time in a campaign.
- Lynn Jondahl: Oh, okay. It's too late now.

Gary Owen: Yeah, it's too late now, and it was all public anyway. They made it public, but I was born in my grandfather's house in Lawrence County, Alabama, on a little 40-acre farm. My dad was a character, to it mildly. He ended up going to prison when I was about six years old, I think. Five years old, 1949. He shot and killed his own first cousin. He owned a restaurant/bar type situation. They tore up his place and then came back drunk, and he shot one of them. Make a long story short, he ended up in prison for 25 years, but he only served like, 15 years of that 25 years.

Gary Owen: So, our mother raised four of us kids by herself, and three of us graduated from college. She did a great job, and probably a single mom long before they became fashionable. I came to Michigan after I got of service. I went into the service when I was 17. I didn't graduate from high school.

Lynn Jondahl: You did not graduate?

Gary Owen: Did not graduate from high school. Never have. Never have.

Lynn Jondahl: You could go back.

Gary Owen: I could, but I got an honorary high school degree.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay.

Gary Owen: And three honorary doctorate degrees, and two degrees from Michigan, so I got enough degrees to last me for a while.

Gary Owen: I came up to Michigan after I served two years in the Army, and immediately, my family, my uncle was here, and he was involved in politics.

Lynn Jondahl: You came here because he was here?

Gary Owen: Yeah, my uncle was here, and my father was here. My father, when he got out of prison, came to Michigan, actually worked as a bodyguard for Andy McFarland, who was the last whitehead of the Labor's Local. I think that was his name. I hope I'm correct on that. Then I went to work as a laborer, shoveling concrete, and then served a partial part of a carpenter apprenticeship, then decided to go back to school. I did take some night school courses at Wool Run High School, but not enough to graduate. Then they opened up the community college, Washtenaw Community College. I went there for two years. You didn't need a high school diploma to get into Washtenaw, and I graduated from Washtenaw and went to the University of Michigan, and got a bachelors and a masters degree from U of M, and I was teaching at Washtenaw.

Lynn Jondahl: What fields?

Gary Owen: I have a bachelors in political science and a masters in urban planning. I was teaching political science at Washtenaw Community College in '72, part-time, when I was completing my masters, and I ran for the house. I, like you, and so many others that had university communities, it was the first time the 18-year olds were allowed to vote at the universities, rather than in their home districts.

Lynn Jondahl: They could choose where to register.

Gary Owen: It was up to them. I ran against a popular Republican incumbent, and defeated him, and I think we controlled the house by one or two votes that time. It was right in that range. And the last person that voted in my election, voted about 7:00 in the morning.

Lynn Jondahl: There's a story. Is this an urban legend, or a true story about election day.

Gary Owen: The Boones Farm story?

Lynn Jondahl: Yes. The Boones Farm story.

Gary Owen: I can't say for sure whether it ever happened or not, but there's a lot of evidence that it did happen, that maybe some zealous supporters had pickup trucks full of Boones Farm wine and dropped it off at the polls when the kids were there voting.

Lynn Jondahl: In order to encourage them to stay.

Gary Owen: Stay, rather than leave, because it was raining. It was raining that night. There was a story in the Ypsi Press, a lady who had worked at the polling, and I think she was in her late 80s, or early 90s, had practically worked at every election they'd ever had in Ypsi, and they asked her, did she notice anything unusual, and she said, no, she didn't notice anything unusual, but she'd never seen people that happy to vote.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay.

Gary Owen: That was part of that story.

Lynn Jondahl: That was '72. You were running as a Democrat against an incumbent Republican. '72 was not a good year, nationally, for the Democrats. Why the long lines? Because 18-year olds could register and vote for the first time.

Gary Owen: Well, there was two things that happened. The Republicans controlled the city at that time, and so what they did is, they put both precincts into one house. When you got there, there weren't enough voting machines for people to vote. And we did a great job of voter turnout. I mean, the kids were very enthusiastic about voting for McGovern.

Lynn Jondahl: This was at the anti-war activity.

Gary Owen: Anti-war thing, Vietnam thing.

Lynn Jondahl: So McGovern was very attractive in the community.

Gary Owen: And we had a huge sheriff's race in Washtenaw County. Remember Doug Harvey. Very controversial, very conservative sheriff, and not very popular with the students. Not only did they turn out for McGovern, but they turned out, and Roy Smith was not a very, that was the Republican, was not very popular among the students stuff, and tenant's rights issues, and his hard stand on different issues, social issues. He wasn't very popular with the students on that. He was a very conservative social person.

Gary Owen: So, it was a lot of factors, and that's basically where I won the election. It was Ypsi Township. The other parts were very, very competitive, and very, very close. One's in Wayne County. In fact, it was a marginal Democratic city at that time, 52%, but it became over time, more and more Democratic.

Lynn Jondahl: Was that your hardest race?

Gary Owen: Yeah. That was the only one I ever really had. I don't think I ever had a competitive race after that.

Lynn Jondahl: Right. That was your first time to run for office?

Gary Owen: No, I was an Ypsi Township trustee at that time. I had ran two years before that, and got elected to the Ypsi Township Board, and two years prior to that, I ran Jim Krieger's campaign who later served on the County Commission, but I ran his campaign for state rep against Roy Smith, and Roy beat him.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay. What were you doing for a living before that?

Gary Owen: My brother and I built spec homes and garages, and stuff like that. We both had served. He went on and got his degree in architecture from U of M, and we, all the way through school, we worked part-time in construction.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay. Smith came back later, didn't he?

Gary Owen: He moved to Saline. He was City Administrator in Saline, I think, for two years, and then he got elected to the house from Saline, which was an adjoining district west of here.

Lynn Jondahl: Going into that race, were you expected to be the contender?

Gary Owen: I think that the feeling in Lansing was I had absolutely no chance. Well first, I had problems with the UAW in those days, but it was more local problems than a philosophical problem.

Lynn Jondahl: So, they didn't support you?

Gary Owen: Eventually, I think they did support me, but they never really publicly did anything for me. And MEA actually supported my opponent.

Lynn Jondahl: UAW did not, but MEA did.

Gary Owen: UAW did not, but MEA did. Then the chairman of Appropriations, who was Bill Copland at that time, endorsed my opponent. That was kind of interesting.

Lynn Jondahl: So, you had been two years on the township board.

Gary Owen: Yeah, in Ypsi Township.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay. Now, people who knew you before that, would they have been surprised that you were now running for office, that involved politically, or had you indicated interest in that before?

Gary Owen: Like I said, I ran a campaign for Jim Krieger, and I majored in political science in school, and it's sort of a southern tradition in this area, like it is in Taylor and some of the others, we have so many people who migrated from the south. So, it was really southern type politics, which is families oriented, where there's groups of families that control votes, and very sociable with barbecues and stuff. So, it was part of the social life of Ypsi Township, and still even today is still a little like that. Huge parties, huge barbecues, I continued that tradition for years with a big Fourth of July party. They call it Ypsi-tucky, and the reason being is so many residents here from the south came up to work at the car plants. I think when I was state rep, we had the highest concentrate of manufacturing workers in the world.

Lynn Jondahl: No kidding.

Gary Owen: No kidding, right in this area, because you had GM, AD, Ford, Ford Risen and Ford Saline, just both hydromatic division and the transmission division, so it was a huge, huge concentration.

Lynn Jondahl: And that's what brought your dad in and uncle up here eventually.

Gary Owen: They were all in construction, but they came up because of the work. That's the reason I came here, to get a job, basically. My son tells a story of getting the Latinos and the Mexicans to do work, and I said, Evan, when I came here, I was the Mexican. Talking about work that no one else would do, the southerners

were the one that did it. I started out hanging drywall and did the type of work that basically no one else would do.

Lynn Jondahl: All right. You're now in the legislature, not necessarily the most popular democrat from some of the Lansing folks' perspective. Where did you involve yourself? What did you go after there?

Gary Owen: When I got there, first I was very upset about Copland supporting my opponent.

Lynn Jondahl: He chaired the Appropriations committee, had been for some years

Gary Owen: Yeah, and Roy was on that committee, Roy Smith was there, and I went to the speaker and told him that I defeated a person on Appropriations.

Lynn Jondahl: The speaker at that time.

Gary Owen: Was Bill Ryan, and I told Bill that I wanted on that committee, because one of the big issues he used in the campaign was that he had been on appropriates and been effective, and I made the argument it wasn't effective, but I said, I have to get on that thing. I'm most positive he's going to run against me in two years. So the speaker said, freshman don't get on appropriates. We argued back and forth, but I had the reputation before I got there as being a maverick type person. UAW was very happy with me, and MEA didn't support me, and you remember those days. They were very, very powerful groups. They were coming to me and trying to reconcile, to try to solve their problems, and I said the only way to solve the problem is get me on appropriates. And Bobby Crim was very instrumental in getting me on the committee at that time, because he wanted to keep control of the house, and we only had 57 or 58 seats.

Lynn Jondahl: What was Bobby's role at that point?

Gary Owen: He was Ryan's administrative assistant, but he ran in a district and came back and was elected floor leader.

Lynn Jondahl: Oh, okay, in the '73.

Gary Owen: In '73. I think he was elected in '64, got defeated in '66. Then he worked as Ryan's administrative assistant when Ryan was speaker, and then he went and ran and came back and got elected floor leader. So, he was very instrumental, was very, very close to Bill Ryan.

Lynn Jondahl: Right. You wound up getting that appointment.

Gary Owen: Yes.

Lynn Jondahl: What did you spend your time on there?

Gary Owen: Initially Copland wouldn't give me a committee, so I had nothing to do, but Bill Huffman, who had become a very good friend of mine, had the higher education committee, which at that time, both the junior college bill and the four-year bill was in the higher-ed subcommittee. So, to give me a chairmanship, Huffman divided up the subcommittee and put me in charge of the community college bill.

Lynn Jondahl: So, Huffman was a rep from?

Gary Owen: Madison Heights.

Lynn Jondahl: Madison Heights?

Gary Owen: Yeah, Madison Heights.

Lynn Jondahl: And he chaired the whole higher education appropriations subcommittee, but he agreed to split off.

Gary Owen: He did it as a favor. He was a very nice guy. And Carl Purcell, who later ran for congress, did it in the senate. Bill, he worked it out where they did a separate thing in the senate. Then the next year he ran for the senate, so I was chairman of higher ed, then I became chairman of the regulatory bill, and owned joint and chairman of grants and transfers, and all those. Chairman Jacobetti wasn't very interested in some of those things, and so he just gave the responsibility to me, and I actually became very influential in the Appropriations process.

Lynn Jondahl: Were there particular issues that you got particularly involved in?

Gary Owen: Yeah. Well, in my masters program at Michigan, the urban planning is a lot more than just the historical plan that people see, the planning thing. I sort of emphasized local government budgets and structure, and so I was very familiar to the state appropriates process, I had classes from Tom Anton, who was the former head of department of management of budgets, state of Illinois, and people liked that, so I understood zero based budgeting, which was at that time was a very catch phrase. I think because of my background, which was unusual, being educated in the whole area of the budget process, that gave me a heads up on a lot of people there, because most of them didn't have that type of educational background.

Lynn Jondahl: Right. How long did you serve on Appropriations before you then became speaker?

Gary Owen: 10 years.

Lynn Jondahl: 10 years? Then, became speaker.

Gary Owen: I ran against Joe Forbes and Matt McNeely, and there was another one in there, I can't remember who else it was. Was Hollister running then? Hollister, I'm not sure. Matt McNeely and Forbes and I, I think, were the three main people.

Lynn Jondahl: Yeah, that sounds right. He may have been. I don't remember.

Gary Owen: I know I ran against him two or three times in different positions in the caucus. Maybe that wasn't it.

Lynn Jondahl: Your major contender, competition, was it Forbes?

Gary Owen: Yeah, Joe was the major competitor.

Lynn Jondahl: And you had served together. Well, he proceeded you in the legislature.

Gary Owen: Yeah. He was there before. In fact, one of his arguments, I had only been there 10 years, I hadn't been there long enough to be speaker.

Lynn Jondahl: Hadn't enough experience.

Gary Owen: Yeah, didn't have enough experience to be speaker.

Lynn Jondahl: Talk about that race. Was it representative of different philosophies?

Gary Owen: I never felt it was a philosophical race. Both Joe and I were both social liberals. I might've been, but that was only because of appropriation concept, maybe a little bit more fiscal conservative than Joe, but that's only because I served on that committee, and I don't know how Joe would react if he had been on that committee. I would say philosophically, we were very close. The UAW supported Joe and opposed me, but they couldn't get their horses together. They had problems because Bard Young who was my regional director.

Lynn Jondahl: Regional UAW director.

Gary Owen: Regional UAW director from this area, openly supported me even against the UAW, and then you had Buddy Battle from Detroit who openly supported me, and you had Coleman Young who supported me. So, I had almost unanimous support in the black caucus, and my coalition was primarily sort of the Irish group, which was Jim O'Neil and Dick Young and all that group, Mike Griffin. Traditionally more conservative, I think, than most of the caucus. I had a mixture. I don't think it was a philosophical race. The UAW obviously put their efforts with primarily Sam Fishman.

Lynn Jondahl: He was their ...

Gary Owen: UAW cap coordinator. At that time, I think he might've been AFLCIO president. I think he was. I think he moved, which the UAW then was within the AFLCIO. But

there was groups in the AFLCIO like the building trades that openly supported me for speaker because I had come out of the building trades. It was an unusual race. I obviously was the first speaker to get elected without open UAW support in the modern era, and that was sort of a major change. Another major change, the year I got elected speaker, Bobby had I think raised about \$30,000 in the caucus fund.

Lynn Jondahl: Bobby Crim

Gary Owen: Yeah.

Gary Owen: When I left there six years later we were spending over \$900,000 out of that fund, so that began a change that has only increased since I left there.

Lynn Jondahl: So, giving the figures again, they had raised you said \$30,000

Gary Owen: About \$30,000 that actually went through a caucus fund and operation, and ...

Lynn Jondahl: That, then, for electing and re-electing.

Gary Owen: In competitive seats, yeah, for competitive seats.

Lynn Jondahl: There really had not been that fund before?

Gary Owen: I think Bobby established it that year for the first time. Well, the first time I ran, that's not true. I was given about \$2,000 out of some fund in Lansing. That might've been a caucus fund. But I know the year I became speaker, which was quite a way back, they only spent \$30,000 the year before that.

Lynn Jondahl: Right. By the time you left, that was up to?

Gary Owen: We got it up to about \$900,000, I think.

Lynn Jondahl: Right.

Gary Owen: Somewhere in that range.

Lynn Jondahl: Yeah.

Gary Owen: So, that was a major, major change, and it's only just grown from there.

Lynn Jondahl: Right. That was funds raised independent of the whole legislative process, but from the interest groups and so on.

Gary Owen: Caucus fundraisers

Lynn Jondahl: Right.

Gary Owen: I remember we had them down, had the big dinner, we had Mondale as speaker down at Ren Center, and it really took on a much bigger role.

Lynn Jondahl: Go back to the race with Joe and Matt McNeely, Joe Forbes, Matt McNeely, those folks. How does a race like that work, when you're running against someone else in the caucus, and it's a contested race, and it could be divisive, then you've got to work together after that. How does that work out?

Gary Owen: Well, it was divisive, but it was more on individual personalities than a collective divisive. In other words, there was not a black caucus that was really upset because I got elected speaker, or identifiable body of people, but it was like I had about as liberal support as you can get, and I had Mike Griffin, who was probably about as conservative as you could get. It went across the philosophical lines. It was more on a personality race, which I think is a much easier situation to deal with and to put together. When you got personalities involved in it, those can be corrected in a relatively short period of time. I think if you had a strong caucus opposition, internally, like for example, an identifiable group like the black caucus, who would be really upset with someone getting support it would be much, much harder to deal with.

Lynn Jondahl: To bring together, yeah.

Gary Owen: I thought we brought our caucus together, or I brought my caucus together, along with my supporters in a relatively short period of time.

Lynn Jondahl: Right.

Gary Owen: I felt like we treated the people who opposed us, like you, fairly. We looked around, I looked at people's skill levels and made my decisions on committee appointments. There was obviously some commitments that were made during the campaign. I kept those, but I always left myself enough flexibility to make sure that in the end, I could pull the caucus back together and appoint the people that I thought could get the job done to the right committees, and we were able to do that.

Lynn Jondahl: Now, Joe Forbes wound up as floor leader.

Gary Owen: Right.

Lynn Jondahl: So, you had a working relationship. That worked well.

Gary Owen: Yeah, Joe and I, I don't think, ever had any personal animosity against one another. In fact, Joe and I probably got along better than anyone during that race, as individuals. Collectively, it was a lot of our supporters that got a lot more upset than Joe and I did. As you know, Joe had a great personality; a real funny guy, easy guy to work with, not a real intense person, I don't think. And probably the intensity was on my side versus Joe. We got along very, very well.

And then when Blanchard came in, and the Governor was basically told by John Dingell, and Bill Ford, and those people that he had to stay out of that race. He couldn't get involved in the Speaker's race. He just got elected. As a matter of fact, we had a meeting with him and both Dingell and Ford made it very, very clear to him that that would be unacceptable for him to get involved in the Speaker's election.

Lynn Jondahl: And Joe was very close to him.

Gary Owen: Yep, a close friend of his.

Lynn Jondahl: What was the year?

Gary Owen: Yeah, it would have been '82 because I left in '88, so six years.

Lynn Jondahl: So you became speaker coincidentally with Blanchard becoming Governor?

Gary Owen: Right.

Lynn Jondahl: So you immediately were confronted with a budget crisis.

Gary Owen: We had a budget crisis. We had a new Governor, new leaders in the Senate.

Lynn Jondahl: The Senate was Democratic at that point?

Gary Owen: Democratic. Bill Faust was the leader; very close friend of mine. Had been my Senator, State Senator. To start off with, I always thought Bill Faust was one of the better politicians in Lansing, and most people who knew him would agree with that. He was a very likable guy. He was handicapped from a car accident and was in a wheelchair, but Bill was a very, very effective politician, a very good politician. And he was the leader of the Senate and I was leader of the House, and we were very, very close, personal friends. That part was very, very good to start off with that.

Gary Owen: The difficulty was the Governor coming in, bringing different people. They were replacing a Republican who had been there, I think, 12 years; I think Milliken had been there 12 years, maybe even longer. And so, a whole new administration of new people coming in with new ideas and new ways of doing things, but their experience was in the legislature.

Gary Owen: I remember the Democrats had controlled the legislative process for a long time. People like Bill Ryan and Bobby Crim were still there. I think Ryan might have moved on before that. I can't remember. And Bobby had, too. Bobby had left because I replaced Bobby, so he left. I'm sure Ryan had left as well. But you had people who had been in the legislature for 10, 15, 20 years, 30 years, and been in control, so they were set in their ways, they knew what their

responsibilities were, they knew how the process worked. And then you had a Governor who basically had never been to Lansing.

Lynn Jondahl: He had served in Congress before. How well did you know him, Governor Blanchard?

Gary Owen: Not at all. I met him during the campaign obviously, and I supported him and worked for him. But up until that time, I didn't know him.

Lynn Jondahl: There was strain between him and the caucus for the reasons you're describing. Essentially, the caucus had been the Democratic voice up to that point. They were in a Republican administration, so there was some tension there.

Gary Owen: Yeah, I think so. I think the recognized leader of the Democratic party in Michigan was Bill Ryan and Bobby Crim and those type of people. They had strong Speakers. There was Frank Kelley, was attorney general, and Don Riegle I think was United States Senator, and Levin. But really, people looked to Lansing for leadership and looked to the Democrats for leadership. The Speaker was at that time probably the most powerful Democrat in the state.

Lynn Jondahl: Talk about how you got to know Blanchard then. How did that relationship develop?

Gary Owen: Governor Blanchard always made it an effort. The good thing about him coming from Washington was he had a lot of respect for the leadership, and that's part of being a Congressman, I guess. The Speaker is the Speaker, and he had a lot of respect for that. He made it very clear to me from day one that I would call the shots in the caucus; that he was not going to be in the caucus undermining me in any way, nor would anyone who worked for him. And he kept that commitment. The whole six years I was Speaker, the Governor pretty much stayed out of caucus politics and left that up to me. And I appreciated that because you can be under minded pretty easy in that process. I remember the President said, he told me one day, he said, "Mr. Speaker," he says, "I got two or three people meeting to get rid of me every day." And I said, "I got 10 to 20 that want to get rid of me every day, so it's a little different." I said, "Welcome to the world."

Gary Owen: But I had a good working relationship with Blanchard. I think he respected the leadership that was in the legislature. I don't think he ever established close enough personal ties with members of the caucus that he should have. Part of that may have been his commitment to not get involved in caucus politics and not overshadow the leadership. I never understood why he didn't develop better relationships with more legislators than what he did.

Lynn Jondahl: The budget situation that the state was facing at that point as I recall, Blanchard as Governor convened or commissioned a bipartisan group to come up with solutions for the budget process problem, and among those was a proposal to

increase the income tax. I don't know if that came from that commission, but at least that became his recommendation. So that was on your plate almost immediately as you became Speaker.

Gary Owen: And yours, if you remember correctly. We were already working at the time of that commission was on the income tax; preparing it and trying to figure out how it was going to impact, and looking at it politically. So when the Governor proposed it, I think everyone expected that and we were ready for it.

Lynn Jondahl: How did that go? I've heard you speak in other settings about the satisfaction of taking an issue and working it through the legislature. That had to be one of the major ones that you worked on.

Gary Owen: It was. It was probably the most difficult issue I ever dealt with simply because I knew that whoever voted for it was putting their political survival on the line. You did taxation that worked very, very hard on it. In fact, the whole committee did. And I wasn't so much involved in structuring the tax proposal as I was passing it because you guys did such a great job in the way you dealt with it. To me, that was the only way it was going to ever get done, and that was we were going to have to do it on a partisan vote, and no one wanted to do that. I tried every way, I tried every way at working with the Republicans. I worked with Mike Busch.

Lynn Jondahl: Mike Busch was the Republican leader back then.

Gary Owen: Right, the Republican leader. In fact, a couple times during that process we had what we thought would be a bipartisan solution that we could pass with moving the tax down faster and things like that, and I was optimistic. But after a while, it became very, very obvious that we weren't going to get any Republican votes. I went to the Governor and I told him, "You're not going to get any Republican votes in the House. You might get one, two, three, but I'd be shocked if you get any." So it was a stalemate. It lasted for a couple of weeks, and finally we decided to move the bill on our own, and we got 57 votes I think we had, out of 60-something in our caucus, and passed it over to the Senate. They passed it with one Republican vote.

Lynn Jondahl: The success of that led to almost immediately, to a recall effort to recall two Senators, Democratic Senators, which turned out to be successful, and then had the effect of changing the leadership in the Senate. You wound up then as essentially the counter voice to the new Senate leader, who was John Engler. He had served with you in the House before that so you knew him, but what was your relationship generally? Did you know him? Had you worked together on issues in the House?

Gary Owen: John, when he as in the House, was not in the leadership; he was just a House member. And I'm not saying that in a derogatory sense, but in a minority party in the House, if you're not a leader... He wasn't on appropriations, so I really

hadn't dealt with him very much at the time. I first started dealing with John when he became the leader in the Senate.

Lynn Jondahl: How do you characterize that relationship?

Gary Owen: It was back and forth. I actually got along with John fairly well, a lot better than what was the public perception of how I got along with him. John had a problem. He had a very difficult caucus, and most of the times that John Engler and I had problems was when we'd make agreements and he couldn't sell it to his caucus. He would come back after we had reached agreement, and be unable to get the votes in his caucus to get what we'd agreed to. That was probably, I would say about the only major problems we ever had. I never accused John of lying or going down on his word only since he just couldn't keep it. And I can't remember a situation where our caucus didn't go along with something we agreed to as leadership, so that was a contentious part between the two of us.

Lynn Jondahl: What were the partisan feelings there? The majority, clearly it was a Democratic majority. What was your working relationship with people like Mike Busch?

Gary Owen: I think Mike and I had a great working relationship, and even to Hillegonds later on.

Lynn Jondahl: Oh, Hillegonds, who became the minority leader and then became Speaker.

Gary Owen: And I felt first of all, we were honest. We were transparent about House operations. There were no secrets. I had turned the budget over to him, showed him how it worked. They saw the numbers. So I think the transparency of the whole process helped me in working with the Republicans. Obviously, they were partisan on issues, that was to be expected. But as Speaker, you've got the responsibility of the day-to-day operations of the House, and it's so much easier when everyone there knows what's going on.

Gary Owen: It wasn't transparent to every, single member. That would be an absolute disaster. But it was transparent to the leadership of the Republicans and the leadership of the Democrats in the sense that there was no hidden bodies. People were working there and getting paid. And then I actually proposed, it became quite controversial, giving for the first time the Republicans aides. And put it in the budget, and a few Republicans didn't vote for it, and I refused to give them aides.

Lynn Jondahl: Oh, okay. You proposed that minority party legislators would have aides.

Gary Owen: Have a staff person.

Lynn Jondahl: And when that came to a vote, those who didn't vote for it, you said you don't get them.

Gary Owen: The NOW caucus, I think they called them, which was Walburg, O'Connor, and Nye. They called it the NOW caucus, Nye, O'Connor, and Walburg. So I said fine, if they don't vote for it, they don't get them. And we had those type of instances, and that's what the papers always are about; how authoritarian and how abrasive I was as a Speaker.

Lynn Jondahl: You were saying there are consequences of your votes. Did that make it easier next time?

Gary Owen: I think that was the end of the issue because most of the Republicans in the House were extremely happy to have staff assistance, which they should have had, and that was not a controversial thing only in the sense of publicly it was. They kept raising about all the expenditures, but all the money was going to them.

Lynn Jondahl: What was the makeup of the legislator. What kind of staff did he or she have?

Gary Owen: It depended. The larger committees had larger staffs. The appropriations committee had an independent agency, kind of the House fiscal agency, which I don't remember the numbers exactly, but they had a substantial number of people. Then the taxation and judiciary would be the next in line that had the most staff people, and you just went down. You probably can answer that better than I can, how many people you had when you were Chairman of taxation. I know this, Perry Bullard was in every day trying to get some staffers. And Debbie Stabenow. Those two, Debbie Stabenow and Perry Bullard were two you could never keep happy for getting staff.

Lynn Jondahl: Speaker Ryan, I think most people saw him as starting to build the operating ability of the caucus and of the House as a strong body. You've built on that, I'm assuming, in terms of bringing in both research staff and administrative staff?

Gary Owen: Yeah. I think Bill Ryan started it, and recognized that in order to be an effective legislator, you had to have adequate support. And as you know, Bill was a self-educated person, but an intellectual in the true sense of the word. He didn't just regurgitate things, he went out and created things. And I think when I became Speaker, Bobby, who had been an administrative assistant to Bill Ryan prior to becoming Speaker, already had worked on initiating that House staff. He improved on it, and I like to think that I improved on it. And I think when I left there, the House Democratic staff had a tremendous amount of respect throughout the state. And their ability, we didn't hire people. There's always a few political people in every process, but I'm very proud of the testing procedures we had and the quality of the people that we were able to hire. And I think that quality is one of the reasons that they maintained control of the House for a long time.

Lynn Jondahl: You had worked in the House as Speaker when Blanchard was Governor. Before that, you'd worked in the House when Milliken was Governor. Talk about your working relationship with Governor Milliken.

Gary Owen: Governor Milliken and I had a very close working relationship. Chairman Jacobetti didn't like to go to meetings.

Lynn Jondahl: Dominic Jacobetti was chair of appropriations.

Gary Owen: The chair of appropriations. He had his thing. He did his thing and he was a very good Chairman.

Lynn Jondahl: He became chair after Copeland.

Gary Owen: Copeland. And it was his preference, but I loved going into the Governor's office and sitting there and negotiating targets. Bobby Crim did that initially when Ryan was Speaker and Jake was Chairman. But when Bobby became Speaker, I sort of picked up that role from Jacobetti. So when we wanted to set the revenue targets or when we were in a budget battle, which we were under Milliken as well, we were increasing taxes and doing all that. I represented appropriations in all those meetings, and so I got to know Governor Milliken very, very well.

Gary Owen: And I had a lot of respect for him, tremendous amount of respect. He was a very easy person to work with. He was there for all the right reasons. The true idea of a public servant would be Bill Milliken. I never once felt going into his office that he had any agenda other than what was best for the people of Michigan, so that made it very easy to work with him.

Lynn Jondahl: As I recall, there was a self-conscious development of a concept called The Quadrant. Was that at the time of Milliken's time?

Gary Owen: That's when it started, with Milliken.

Lynn Jondahl: Where there would be a meeting of the Governor, a representative of each caucus, both caucuses in both houses.

Gary Owen: Right, it is. You had the Speaker and the minority leader there, and the leader in the Senate. And at times, they would bring in, like if they were dealing with a budget, people from appropriations or people in taxation, depending on the issues they were dealing with.

Lynn Jondahl: And that was an effort to try to what? Reach a kind of understanding what the problem is and what options we've got.

Gary Owen: There was a lot of complaining about it because a lot of people felt left out of the process. That The Quadrant and the Governor would reach an agreement

and they would implement it, and that's basically the way it worked. But in doing that, I remember one instance where Bill Bryant couldn't deliver his caucus.

Lynn Jondahl: Bill Bryant was the minority leader?

Gary Owen: The minority leader in the House, and it was kind of an embarrassing situation for him and the Governor. I won't get into those details, but it wasn't always automatic when we reached agreement, but generally it was.

Lynn Jondahl: During the time you were Speaker, Mike Busch and Bill Bryant at different times were minority leader?

Gary Owen: I think Bryant was the minority leader the first two years, and then I think Busch, the last four I was there.

Lynn Jondahl: And then Engler became the majority leader in the Senate. You start out working budget stuff together. What was your understanding of the relationship you had with John Engler? Did you face conflicts over your philosophy?

Gary Owen: Oh, yeah. John is totally different philosophically, and his caucus was different philosophically from where I was coming from. I think it reflects back on your background. I come from a public housing project and government subsidized housing. My dad was in prison. I was in the Army. I went to college on the G.I. Bill. And although I worked all those times, I recognized and appreciated the support that I had gotten from government my entire life, and I still feel that way. I'm fortunate enough to know and see how government can be an important factor in a person's life and keeping a safety net. So that's the reason I was a Democrat. And still that's the reason I'm a Democrat today. Society can't operate without an effective government. We've seen that for the last eight years. The least effective the government, the more problems you're going to have, and we saw that under Busch. It's been a total disaster.

Lynn Jondahl: So you had basic philosophical disagreements.

Gary Owen: I never bought the limited government argument. I never bought the 'less government, the better off everyone is.' I felt that when you went to DNR and you want a permit, there should be adequate staff people there to give you a permit within a reasonable period of time. I felt that the people in our public schools and even private schools deserved the type of support that government could provide for them so they could be competitive in society and in the world. That was the philosophy, and the Republicans said, And I believe that it should be as accessible as possible. Of course, they went from that. They wanted you to pay higher fees, pay higher tuition, and less government support, and that's where the state's at now.

Gary Owen: It started to trend under Engler. It was really after Blanchard left. It was really exaggerated in the sense that they were cutting taxes and increasing spending in some areas, but in many instances putting the burden onto the individual in the sense of fees and tuition, and things of that nature. And even property taxes in some ways, although they did I think come up with a better property tax situation than what we had before; not a perfect one, but a better situation.

Lynn Jondahl: And under proposal, you mean Proposal A.

Gary Owen: Yeah. The property tax had gotten to the point in our state to where it was so contentious that it was really almost self-destructing. We had to have some form of relief, and moving to the sales tax was probably the only solution that we could get done, so I thought that was the right thing to do.

Lynn Jondahl: Were you still in the House when Engler became Governor?

Gary Owen: No.

Lynn Jondahl: You had already left.

Gary Owen: Dodak was Speaker when Engler became Governor.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay. You left appropriations, became Speaker, so you were saying earlier this kind of took you away from some of your engagement in issues into more of an administrative role. Is that a difficult transition?

Gary Owen: That was very difficult. I didn't particularly care for the administrative part of my job, but I got great advice from Bobby Crim. And when he left, he took me out to lunch one day and he said, "The thing you're going to distaste the most about this job is something you have to pay the most attention to, and that's the personnel and the behavior of the legislators. You've got to protect them, you've got to take care of them, you've got to watch out for them. At the same time, you've got to be strong, you've got to turn them down, you've got to learn when to say no. And you've got to know what's going on with your budget, your House budget, because if anything goes wrong, it's you, and that's the thing that can bring you down, is that House budget and the way it's handled, and House Operations, and you had to be particularly attentive to it. He recommended Neil Kuhnmuensch who I hired and was very, very good at that.

Lynn Jondahl: You hired her as your Chief of Staff?

Gary Owen: Administrative Chief of Staff, and she did a great job, but it was very time consuming. As you know, when guys are in for trips and eliminate out-of-state travel, that certainly wasn't very popular during the budget crisis. We just did a lot of things. I can remember when the fiscal agency guys where we found out they were going out lunch and staying to two, three o'clock drinking every day, and I said, you can't drink on House time if you're a House staffer. You're just

not allowed to drink. Well, that was very un-popular and the unions started complaining.

Gary Owen: It was just a part of the job that I never really enjoyed. Now, the legislator was on the floor interacting with legislators and interacting on legislation, getting things done. I really enjoyed that. That was a fun thing to do.

Lynn Jondahl: Were there issues particularly legislative battles other than the budget and tax stuff that were especially fun?

Gary Owen: It's hard to remember the little battles that you have every day. There were always ongoing battles that you had to work in the budget. I always, still even when I was a speaker, I had a great deal of input into the budget process because of my experience in that area. Many instances, like one-time Morris Hood wouldn't cooperate. I had to take over higher ed and pass it again as a speaker and go to negotiations. We ran into instances like that, and then settling conflicts among the legislators which occurred often. Many times it'd end up in the speaker's office where something happened in a committee, or something happened on the floor. These people didn't get along. It was just different conflicts that you had to resolve.

Lynn Jondahl: What was the biggest majority you had? Number.

Gary Owen: Sixty-four I believe, I may be wrong on that number. I know we got back all the ones we lost in the tax thing. We went down to fifty-seven, I believe, and then we went back to sixty-four when I left there.

Lynn Jondahl: You got sixty-four people, and they're pretty diverse in almost any way you describe diverse. Philosophically, ideologically, kind of communities they represent. How do you keep them talking to each other and working together? What are the mechanics of that?

Gary Owen: I think, first of all, you have to realize ninety percent of them, I say even higher, probably ninety five percent were there to do a job. They would recognize, themselves, that you had to eventually get along. You had to eventually do something. You had to pass something. You had to deal with the issues. It isn't like you're the only person there that has a common good in mind. That would be wrong to think that or even imply it.

Gary Owen: It was like herding chickens, and there is a lot to that. When it got right down to it, even today, in Washington or Lansing, wherever it is. When the pressure is on, when it got right down to it, people would generally do what's the right thing to do with the right kind of leadership. I do think though that the people in leadership positions have to demonstrate leadership ability in order to accomplish hard things and tough things. It's not gonna happen automatically. I felt when I was speaker that I did in adequate job. I wasn't one that was visited

a whole lot by self-doubt. I made a decision. That was it, and I moved on. I didn't sit around and worry about it or whether is the right thing or wrong thing.

Lynn Jondahl: Had you pictured yourself that way? Did you know yourself as a leader in that way?

Gary Owen: No, I think Lynn, it is more the way I was raised. I didn't have an option. When you come up in your raised on the streets like we were. Mother worked nine to nine six days a week, that's twelve hours a day, and we were on our own. It was a little family, little kids running around. We raised ourselves. In boys club. On the streets. When you come up, even though it was in Montgomery Alabama, still a public housing project. The drug abuse. Alcoholism.

Gary Owen: Even though drugs in the sense that we have today were not a problem in the fifties when I was there, but alcohol. Basically, people in public housing projects were there for one reason or another. A large part of that was alcohol. I can remember back in those days it was very, very common was women getting beat up. Husbands getting drunk. Blaming 'em and seeing women waling around with black eyes and teeth broken out and stuff like that. You're raised in that environment, and it has a major impact on you.

Gary Owen: You have to make the decision on a day-to-day basis. You're not allowed to sit and wonder whether or not what you do is correct or incorrect. You just make it and go on. That helped in that sense. Then the way my education came about. I was basically illiterate and then started to college. The effort I had to put into that compared with speaking with other students. It taught me quite a bit. It developed a lot of discipline and study habits and work habits that I don't think my kid has today or many other people have because I basically learned how to read and write in college. It's hard enough to pass college, but to learn how to read while you're doing it is a little more difficult.

Lynn Jondahl: When you would come into a room with Governor Blanchard, Attorney General Kelley to discuss policy proposal, what is it that Gary Owen brings to that table?

Gary Owen: I thought I always brought my caucus's position to that. I had a real good sense of where the caucus was at. Where did we go? What they would do and what they wouldn't do. That was my strength.

Lynn Jondahl: That was true even though you had come in on the undivided vote, but the caucus came behind you, and you were confident in that?

Gary Owen: I think so. I think I knew the caucus as well as any person. I think that's the reason I beat Joe in the sense that I had a very, very good understanding of the caucus. Where they were coming from, what they're concerns were, what their personal ambitions were individually. I'd interacted well. I had good, what you call people skills. I'm a very sociable person. I knew everyone in the caucus. I got

along especially well with the African Americans at that time. My roommate was Morris Hood, who was black. Paul Rosenbaum was Jewish.

Gary Owen: We had a strange combination. Not that that meant much, but it just demonstrated ability to interact with all the different facets of the caucus. Therefore, when I walked in a meeting, and I think they recognized that, that I had strong support behind me. I knew what I was talking about I would say we can do this and we can do that. That was my strength in those meetings. The fact is, you get that by producing. The fact that we produced the tax vote, and we produced several other votes. Budgets. Done in a timely manner and done effectively and balanced in most instances where we controlled the Special interest groups in the budget process.

Gary Owen: Many times in special interest where it became, probably for the first time, that people began to recognize that the UAW didn't necessarily call all the shots for the Democrats. Obviously, they had a great deal of influence on the labor issues. Almost all the Democrats supported them unanimously on the labor issues. They were sort of stopped there where before they had input into every issue. They used to say you couldn't pass anything until Sam Fisherman saw it back when he was head of the UAW CAP but was always that rumor. Whether it was dog tracks, or any other issue.

Gary Owen: I think when I became speaker the MEA and other interest groups became more involved in the process. It felt more comfortable with the Democrats. We made strong inroads into that profession to getting support, which basically meant divided because of Parochiad the MEA was supporting I assume almost all Republicans at that time cause most of them opposed parochiad. Times flip around, but back in those days that was the case. When I was speaker, we had thirty-two members who were pro-choice and thirty-two who were right to life. Fifty, fifty right down the middle. That was on their Medicaid funding abortion issue.

Gary Owen: It was a difficult caucus. The caucuses have changed over the years. I don't know what it is today, but I would bet you probably don't have any more than ten right to lifers in entire Democrat caucus.

Lynn Jondahl: There was a commitment though beyond the issue commitment. It'd be pretty hard to get when you got thirty-two, thirty-two to get agreement on an issue like that. There was an understanding of a common goal in terms of the caucus.

Gary Owen: I think the process. We had lots of caucuses in those days.

Lynn Jondahl: Caucus meetings.

Gary Owen: Caucus meetings. People come in and express where they're coming from and I felt that where we were dealing with the issues in Detroit. Detroit equity package. Many of the tough votes that people in the suburban Wayne county

and Macomb county had. We'd have those caucuses. We'd listen to people's concerns and then we would go from there. It never bothered me to have a caucus to go and sit and listen and argue my point. Most of the time the caucuses were very very productive. That's just the way that process worked.

Gary Owen: I can't tell you what I'm hearing it doesn't work that effective. Now with term limits. In fact, I know for a fact it doesn't work that way. It was a far better process in getting things done without term limits and what it is today with term limits.

Lynn Jondahl: Because?

Gary Owen: Because of institutional memory, better legislators. Not better in a sense they're better people, just better educated to the process and understand how the process works and appreciation of the process. When you can go in, and my point I'd argued, I'd been there ten years, been on the most important committee there, had been involved in it from day one, and he could argue he had a lot more experience, and I hadn't had enough experience, but he's figured I'd wait a few years and take your spot later down the road. Well now a guy comes in and two years is Speaker of the House. That couldn't happen under the old system.

Gary Owen: The fact that Bobby Crim got in there right away is only because he'd been there before, sixty-four, and he worked in that process for many years as Bill Ryan's administrative assistant. Even then, most people recognized Bobby was one of the more knowledgeable people in Lansing at that time cause of his staff position. If he'd of just came cold off the streets, he didn't ever been a speaker in two years.

Lynn Jondahl: You talked before about the growth in political funds that the caucus was able to raise. That suggests to me that you must've got on the good side of some of those groups that were not very happy with you at the onset].

Gary Owen: We saw the trend coming. Talking to Willie Brown in California.

Lynn Jondahl: Mayor of San Francisco. and speaker of the California House.

Gary Owen: This time he was Speaker of the House in California. He was saying these races are becoming, and California is generally the first state to experience a lot of things, and this was one of them, and he warned me. He says, "I'm telling you Mr. Speaker you're gonna have to raise a lot of money cause what's happening in these caucus funds are into the competitive seats out here and becoming more and more expensive each time." We kinda got to jump on the Republicans in the first election, and I think it helped us after the tax vote in getting those seats back.

Gary Owen: We recognized that problem. When I went to the MEA and told them they had to raise more money because we basically had raised the taxes to maintain the level of support in the public schools, and they had an obligation to participate to a higher level than what they historically had. They were soon gonna be facing people that weren't gonna provide the resources of them to get the job done in the public schools. There were arguments we could make. Then Republicans got right on it as well. At the end, it's about like any other battle. It ends up being even.

Lynn Jondahl: The UAW became, once again, a major supporter.

Gary Owen: No, I think less of a factor, Lynn, up until that point I think they had been the major funding group for the House Democrats. As the caucus funds grew in proportion, I think the interest groups like the MEA and the UAW individually, they're effectiveness was reduced.

Lynn Jondahl: So other groups as well were then brought in.

Gary Owen: Once you broaden this big pile of money that's controlled by the House Leadership, they then can distribute it to the competitor seats where historically you had to go to UAW, the MEA individually as a legislator and get that money. Now all of a sudden you can go in and in a very competitive race get fifteen thousand dollars out of the House caucus fund. Where from the UAW you might only be able to get two thousand or three thousand.

Lynn Jondahl: That gives you greater, a stronger role, greater power in the caucus itself doesn't it?

Gary Owen: I think it does. It's only in a few seats that you end up spending the money as you know.

Lynn Jondahl: There's contested

Gary Owen: There's only about maybe out of all the seats, maybe ten or twelve that you're really into. To show you how ineffective it was. John Maynard and Richard Fitzpatrick, I raised I think around fifty

Lynn Jondahl: Now, John was Macomb county and Richard Battle Creek.

Gary Owen: I raised 'em each about fifteen thousand a piece and took the money to them during their campaign and then they both teamed up with Republicans to get rid of me the next time. If you ever want to see money doesn't work in the process that was one of the examples you could've used.

Lynn Jondahl: There was an effort, well we can't say impeach, in a caucus rebellion right?

Gary Owen: It was two people. Actually, they met with the Republicans and began to come up with a strategy because they only needed two Democrats to switch. They could get up to fifty-six votes. Once you elect a Speaker, once he's elected, he's elected for two years. The Constitution says you will meet on the first Tuesday, I think it is in January, or second Tuesday of January whatever it is, and elect a Speaker of the House. It doesn't allow for any other elections. It would have been an interesting battle even if we have lost that initially and a Republican had got elected. What would happen if we'd of got the votes back three weeks from there and went back to a different? Don't know if you coulda done that. The guy would still be the Speaker, even though he may not have had control of the process or person would be the Speaker.

Lynn Jondahl: This took place at the time of the initial vote?

Gary Owen: Yeah. We found out about it the night before the vote sometime in the afternoon. That afternoon prior to the vote being the next morning. Found out about it and we had people we couldn't get there. There was some Republicans that weren't very happy about that too. They wanted a republican position. They didn't want a House Democrats running as a coalition with them. There were some philosophical arguments.

Lynn Jondahl: What was at work there?

Gary Owen: One of them was gonna be Speaker and the other one was gonna be chairman of appropriations I think.

Lynn Jondahl: I see, and that might of been hard to settle in the Republican caucus.

Gary Owen: It never got past the Republican leadership to sell to the Republicans as a whole. We were able to stop that. We had people flying in from Florida and people on sail boats. It was a office mess you ever saw. We won. It went forward from there. That was a very difficult time because we only have fifty-six votes I think or fifty-seven, I can't remember the exact number. I probably did a better job in those two years than I did any time I was Speaker in my own, when I look back and evaluate what I did as a Speaker.

Gary Owen: The fact that I was still able to get things done in a highly partisan charged atmosphere because of the recalls, the animosity that it generated. Myself had been weakened because of the tax increase in some caucus members doubted that I knew what I was doing. That was a problem. It was a difficult two years. The last two years I was Speaker was a lot easier because we won all those seats back. I had a tremendous amount of credibility then. It was back up here again. I went here to here and here.

Lynn Jondahl: Did you ever run for another office?

Gary Owen: No.

Lynn Jondahl: Did you ever look at Congress?

Gary Owen: Governor.

Lynn Jondahl: Governor?

Gary Owen: Jim Blanchard called me and asked me when Martha Griffins was, would I want to run for lieutenant governor again. I thought about that. I said no. I didn't wanna do it again.

Lynn Jondahl: Why not?

Gary Owen: I'd reached the point where my boys were very young, but they were getting at the age where they were beginning to do things. I didn't want to miss the hockey games and the soccer games and watching them grow up. I know if I was gonna take another elected position, I don't think it would have had any more responsibility being Speaker of the House, but it would've required a great deal of time and effort away from my family. I made the right decision. I got to watch them grow up. I'm very proud of them. I was right there with them every step of the way.

Gary Owen: Some of it fun, some of it wasn't. Some of it challenging. Even today, it's very challenging. I know I made the right decision in watching my family grow up. Now I can look back at it and say if I had been governor or if I'd have been Speaker, Congressman, or United States Senator, I would not have had the fulfillment I have from watching my boys grow up. I missed out on a lot of my daughter's life when I was in Lansing. I missed out a lot on her early life, and it cost me one family. My first wife and I had a divorce, and I blame that on myself, not her. It was entirely my fault. I just was bound and determined it wasn't gonna happen again. It worked out well. Worked out well.

Lynn Jondahl: I was thinking the other day. I remember you were an early promoter and supporter of Al Gore for president back when he first was.

Gary Owen: Eighty-six I think, wasn't it? I know I ran his campaign in Michigan. We didn't get a single delegate. I was also an early supporter of Bill Clinton's and also an early supporter, in fact, Dave Holmes and I were the first two.

Lynn Jondahl: Dave Holmes was Detroit-based senator.

Gary Owen: An African American senator in Detroit. He and I were the first two to endorse Jimmy Carter. I jumped on those campaigns not because they were southerners, which I was once accused of, but because I felt at that time that they were different. They were outsiders that brought a breath of fresh air into the process. In my opinion, Al Gore is one of the smartest human beings I've ever met. I still have that opinion today. He's an extremely intelligent person. I thought that eventually he would be president.

Gary Owen: Even after we lost as bad as we did. I went to New York with him. I campaigned there. I campaigned in Colorado. Hopped around, did stuff, but I was so impressed with the person. This man is gonna be president of the United States someday. May not be this time, but he's gonna win it eventually. Then he went on vice president and I thought he would end up being President, but he just barely missed it. I got kinda, not lucky, but I was a little perceptive in a sense of recognizing his ability and talent. He's still a very significant person.

Lynn Jondahl: For sure. Did you ever look at Congress as an option?

Gary Owen: When Ed Pierce ran.

Lynn Jondahl: Ed Pierce was in the state senate and from Ann Arbor.

Gary Owen: UAW and MEA and several groups came and said we want you to run against Purcell. You can win. The polling data shows you the strongest candidate we've got. You will beat Purcell. Pierce was running from Ann Arbor, which was the further most part of the district. They thought, and it turned out to be true, that he was gonna have a harder time outside the city than where I was susceptible in Ann Arbor but I was also susceptible in Wayne county, which a part I already represented part of Wayne county before the reapportionment brought me back in. I represented Van Buren township in Bellville.

Gary Owen: In that, I had had to work with the old fifteen district people. I was in that congressional district, so I worked with those western Wayne county officials, Democrat officials. They knew me very, very well. I was reasonably popular there. The polling data showed that I would be, by far, the most electable Democrat. I didn't want to go to Washington. I had no desire to go to Washington. I had no desire to be one of four hundred and some odd people. I said nah, I'm not gonna do it. I stayed where I was at.

Lynn Jondahl: If one of your kids or one of their peers came to you now and said Gary, we really are interested in running for state legislature. What would be your advice?

Gary Owen: I'd tell them it would be one of the best experiences they've ever had in their life, even given as bad as the people have messed it up with term limits. It would still be a very rewarding experience for anyone.

Gary Owen: I think that any person who has an opportunity to serve in public and does it in an honest and faithful way, that they walk away with it with one of the best things that can possibly ever happen to them. I've always felt that way, I still feel that way.

Gary Owen: And I think most people who've done it, like yourself and others, can still feel the same way, that I would highly recommend it to my kids or anyone else, and

I'd point out to them, "You know, you can lose." Fortunately, I've never lost an election, but you can lose one.

Lynn Jondahl:

I can tell you about that.

Gary Owen:

What'd you run for? I thought you won?

Lynn Jondahl:

I first ran for state senate.

Gary Owen:

Oh.

Lynn Jondahl:

Before I ran for the House.

Gary Owen:

I didn't know that.

Lynn Jondahl:

Then I ran in the primary for governor.

Gary Owen:

Yeah.

Lynn Jondahl:

In '94.

Gary Owen:

Well, I don't think you felt that you were the leading candidate of course.

Lynn Jondahl:

I believe that's true. I peaked much too early. So, you left the legislature kind of ready to get out because of your experience had just been so demanding and went on to lobby for several years.

Gary Owen:

Well, I looked into it. The first option was my brother had tried to get me to come back to Alabama for years to work in his development company, to work with him as a partner, and I invested with him a lot of the time but I hadn't had an active role.

Gary Owen:

Actually, at the time that I quit, I agreed with Little Cesar's to pick up the Little Cesar's franchise in Alabama and mostly from Montgomery down through Gulf Shores and southern part of Alabama.

Gary Owen:

And we were seriously looking at the possibility of moving back, going to Alabama, getting involved in the development business, and maintaining a home in Michigan but doing both. And I was trying to weigh that on how it would work with my whole new commitment to my family, and Bobby Crim came to me and said he wanted out of the lobbying business and wanted to know if I was interested. And I said, "Well, I don't know, Bobby, that doesn't appeal to me."

Gary Owen:

And he just kept working at me, and finally I ended up agreeing with him to buy him out of his business and went in there. Bobby was tired of lobbying at that time, which you get tired of very quickly, especially if you've been an effective

policymaker, I'd say a leader of some. I don't think you can stay in that business very long.

Lynn Jondahl: And what are you doing now?

Gary Owen: Not a whole lot, you know? I'm retired, and I do a little volunteer stuff here and there, but not enough to be significant. I play golf and stuff like that. And I'm not really active politically. I was active in the Granholm campaign. I supported her both times and held fundraisers and those types of things. I've done it for John Dingell, who I worked very hard for campaigning in the primary when he ran. I worked very hard for John, recognized his value to Michigan. We have a relationship that went all the way back to 1970, so very close relationship.

Gary Owen: So other than that, that's about it. My wife Didi and I have a nice spot way out in the country, and we love it out there and spend most of the time right there.

Lynn Jondahl: Okay. And as you look at the legislature, you were saying you would say to a young person, "This is a place to be. Take advantage of it."

Lynn Jondahl: But you're also saying there's some changes that are really disquieting in terms of term limits. What else is going on there that you look at and say, "Boy, I wish I were back there now."?

Gary Owen: Well, I think right now, Lynn, is a great opportunity for the right kind of people to make a difference. And when we were there, the auto industry was up and down, but it was never any thought in our mind that was going anywhere. It was going to be there, even with 12% unemployment. And you knew eventually GM and Ford and Chrysler would be back, and people would be back to work.

Gary Owen: And when the economy turned around, Michigan would be the first one that would be the bell winner. All of a sudden, you noticed things were turning around in Michigan. That was an indicator the whole economy was beginning to turn, because people started buying autos again.

Gary Owen: That isn't the case today, and so the challenges in Michigan are probably the greatest it's been in my lifetime since I've been here. And it's a great opportunity. It's an opportunity for the right kind of leadership, the right kind of people to put the policies in place that will move Michigan forward and get it off of the dependents of the auto industry and restructure society. It's also an opportunity to make sure that the policymakers don't destroy the very things that has historically made Michigan one of the best places to live and that's our infrastructure.

Gary Owen: And I think it's extremely important that the legislature be effective and be productive and that it's extremely important that we have strong executive leadership, because the way society is today, if you notice the recent liquidity problems in the banking industry, everything is so instant. It is global and it

happens in seconds. You can go from one week, and all of a sudden nobody can borrow a dime. The whole credit markets are frozen and all commercial papers tied up. That's the way society is today.

Gary Owen: And how the leadership, the political leadership, adapts to that and how they take Michigan into that structure is going to determine for probably our grandkids and all those what kind of lifestyle they're going to have and what kind of standard of living they're going to have.

Gary Owen: And the worst thing that can happen in Michigan is if they dismantle the infrastructure that we presently have. And I see a lot of that happening already in the fee structures at our universities, where people can't afford to go there and none of the kids staying here that are graduating from Michigan and Michigan State. They're going to Chicago or California or some other place. We've got to keep our young people here, we got to convince them this is a place to be in the future.

Gary Owen: And in order to do that, you have to have effective government leadership, you have to have an effective legislature and effective governor. And that's the critical component right now. And it's a great challenge. It will happen, and I have a lot of confidence in people.

Gary Owen: I would love to see one of my kids run. Evan has talked about it. Maybe he'll run. And if he wins, fine, he'll be one of those people that can make those kind of changes that are necessary.

Lynn Jondahl: Yeah. You're right. It is an exciting time if people will step up to it, that's for certain.

Gary Owen: I don't know which one comes first, that adversity builds character or character comes out of adversity. I don't know how it works, but I know this, that it'd be a great time to be back in the legislature if they had an effective legislature. It's not effective now.

Gary Owen: The term limits have made it basically is not a body that can respond to Michigan's needs, and it needs to be changed awful fast. I don't think they can wait much longer. They've got to get an efficient legislative process in Lansing, and they need to do it by stretching the term limits. If they need term limits, fine, 16 years or 14 years or some reasonable time like that. If that would solve those people out there who their whole philosophy is that anybody there is a bad person. I don't know you can ever deal with that.

Gary Owen: But the process certainly is not effective now. And I hear that from people in it and people outside of it.

Lynn Jondahl: Pete Fletcher was your constituent all the time that you were in the legislature, and he was also a leader in the Republican party in the state and nationally. What kind of working relationship did you have?

Gary Owen: When I first went to Lansing, I never felt that Pete was overly fond of my opponent, and I got that impression from him a couple times, I'd had conversations for him. I'm sure he didn't vote for me.

Lynn Jondahl: You said you're sure he didn't vote for you.

Gary Owen: No, I'm positive he didn't vote for me.

Lynn Jondahl: Yeah.

Gary Owen: But he didn't like my opponent as well. He didn't think he was the best person in the world to represent. So I went to him and said, "Look, you can either fight with me or we can work together," because I think at this time he was head of the state highway commission. And Ypsi, we haven't really gotten a whole lot from Lansing through the years. It hasn't been very effectively represented up there. And this is an opportunity that we can do a lot of stuff for our community, and we either work together or we can work adversarially.

Gary Owen: And we established a very, very good working relationship, replaced about every bridge in Ypsi, every road in Ypsi, and we did all the highway work for the new U of M hospital, worked together on that. He would help me with Milliken when we were pushing building the U of M hospital, which was probably one of the best investments this state's ever made. It has turned out to be a fantastic revenue generator, grants coming in, the life science thing. It's just a great thing.

Gary Owen: But Pete was very, very close to Milliken, very, very close. And then even after Milliken left there, he was still a very effective person in the Republican party and a national committeeman. And we were able to get an awful lot done for this community.

Gary Owen: I remember one time he and Billy Huffman were having just a war, and I set up a luncheon for them to sit down and work out their differences. And they became good friends. But he was still always a Republican, always an adversary and willing to debate, a very articulate person. Where I have absolutely butchered the Queen's English, he mastered it. And there's probably not a more articulate human being alive when he wants to be.

Gary Owen: In fact, he can be, I don't know what the word for it is. What's the word when you use the wrong words, you use the words that no one can understand?

Lynn Jondahl: Malaprop?

Gary Owen: Is that what it's called?

Lynn Jondahl: Malaprop?

Gary Owen: Yeah. That's what he would be in many instances. But he's a great guy.

Lynn Jondahl: Thank you very much, Speaker Owen. I appreciate you taking the time for this.