

Governor McNair Oral History Project
South Carolina Department of Archives and History

Interview

with

Robert E. McNair

Interviewer:

Cole Blease Graham

Date:

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CBG: This is Tape 17, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is February 14, 1983. Governor, we were talking about kindergartens, and we had generally considered legislative treatment of the issue. What was the status of federally-funded programs like Head Start? Did that help provide a base from which to proceed?

REM: It really did. Those funds were available to us, and we began to use them to create the various Head Start programs. This gave us an opportunity to sort of, as much as we could--and you recall at that time it was difficult to have good coordination between the federal programs and the state programs.

CBG: Why was that?

REM: Well, there was a total lack of confidence on the part of the federal officials that the state, through its organized effort, would do what it should do. So you had to create a separate board with community people involved to obtain Head Start funds and others. When we started the kindergarten program, we wanted to try to put it all together, so that we'd have a well-coordinated program, and pool the funds and really sort of reach a larger number of people by cutting down on the administrative costs. Unfortunately, we were not able to do that to any great extent, but I do think we were able to get some coordination between the federal and the state effort. Head Start played a very, very important role because it was primarily for the low income, underprivileged children, and we were able to reach a large number of them in the various communities. Of course, it reached a wider range than we were able to reach in just the kindergarten program that in the beginning was designed to reach the preschool five-year-olds.

CBG: With all the unique boards and commissions, do you think the Head Start program was providing different levels of activities across the state, or was it basically consistent? In other words, were federal officials able to do consistently what they set out to do?

REM: I don't think so, and that's what bothered us. It depended largely on the local involvement and the local leadership and whether or not the school people could get actively involved. Wherever there was a good relationship and sort of a working together between the school people and the folks involved in Head Start, you had a much more effective program. Where it was totally at arms length and no communications, as we had in many, many parts of the state, you really didn't accomplish as much. I suppose if you had to evaluate them on a one-to-ten scale, we ran from one to ten, the full spectrum, in the Head Start program.

CBG: Was this an example that a lot of people have written about where federal officials may have bypassed the State House in implementing a program?

REM: Well, this was the problem we were experiencing in all of the federal effort, to bypass the governmental leadership and go directly to the people in the community. They felt that was necessary for several reasons. It was part of their experiment to get people involved, you know, the people who were the recipients involved as in Head Start, like they did in the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] programs. So you set up all of these, and they had a distrust in the South for the public officials and didn't feel that either he would or that politically he could do all the things that they wanted done. So there was a conscious effort to bypass in the initial stages, and that was fairly uniform throughout. We tried early to convince them that we wanted to utilize those dollars to do everything we could. We communicated from the top level and tried to communicate at the very upper levels of the federal government to assure them that, if we could have some input and coordinate the effort, we would certainly utilize them to the fullest extent and do more than they could do by setting up a separate superstructure, as we called it, almost a separate agency to deal solely with the Head Start program.

CBG: How did you try to convince them? Did you write letters?

REM: Well, you know, the first thing with us was our relationship with the president, with President [Lyndon] Johnson, and his attitude toward South Carolina and towards what we were trying to do on down through Wilbur Cohen, who was then Secretary of HEW [Health, Education, and Welfare]. I think he recognized early what our attitude was and what our desires were in South Carolina and became very cooperative. Through his people, trickling on down, I really think we began to get more input and to have more involvement. Then we worked with the communities. We worked with them out there directly and through people at the state level and the local level, to become involved, to help plan, and to help develop those programs in order to make them better and to reach more people. So we tried it from the upper levels of the federal government down to the communities themselves where we were putting in the Head Start program.

CBG: Was the biggest fear of the federal government that South Carolinians were still so basically concerned about race that they wouldn't do any thing, or was it that we didn't have enough money or that we didn't have the expertise?

REM: Well, I think it was the combination of things. They, you know, really in the beginning looked on the South as being just one section, one region, with similar attitudes. They ignored the fact that we all might want to take different approaches to the problems that existed and treated us that way. As I say, most of the people who were brought in we classified in the “do-gooder” level. I think that was the term we put on them. They were “do-gooders” and didn’t know a whole lot about what they were trying to do good for, and they had no understanding of the people who they were trying to perform all these good deeds for. Well meaning and very idealistic people, and it was hard to deal with them. It was much easier to deal at a level above them than it was directly with them. In time, we were able to coordinate this program quite well, and I think once they saw our commitment in the state to kindergarten and our desire to reach those same people, those coming from the lower income levels, the underprivileged, in order to get them prepared to enter the public school system, that we got better cooperation from them.

CBG: How was the big problem of finances dealt with?

REM: Well, you know, when we got into all this, we had done those studies and had the results of the studies to show that this really was a cost-saving program. The first grade repeaters were so high that it was costing us so much to just run them through the second and third time and still lose them along the way. The statistics showed that the first grade repeater was your dropout. He ultimately was going to leave the system because he just couldn’t perform and couldn’t keep up. We developed some statistics and figures to show that, if we could reduce the repeater rate, we could pay for the kindergarten program without overall investing any more money in the program. So with that, I think we got better support. At the same time, we had pretty strong support for kindergartens in the state. The educational community was totally committed to it. The young, progressive legislator was totally committed to it, and we felt we had created a climate, then, that the public really was strongly supportive of the kindergarten program.

CBG: How did you work this out with the legislature? Did you call individual legislators into your office and discuss these?

REM: Well, we met with everybody. We met with the committees, we met with individual legislators. I suppose we had the same type of approach that we did with other major programs, to communicate with them directly, individually, in groups, in breakfast meetings, in luncheon meetings, in office meetings, and everything that we could do to do it. We did it by giving them full information and making this one of the key programs. This was one of the priority things that we felt we had to do in South Carolina if we were going to really do something meaningful for public education, to get back first to the compulsory school attendance

law, to develop a kindergarten program, and then to sort of assault the whole educational program in South Carolina at every level.

CBG: Would you consider the passage of the compulsory attendance law and the development of kindergartens as one of the achievements of your administration that would be on the top of the list?

REM: Well, I don't know that I would take it for the administration frankly because it was something that had to be done, and had to come. We'd repealed a school attendance law with the decisions which knocked down segregation, and we felt it had to be reinstated because we just couldn't afford to have another generation of illiterates whom we were going to have to take care of through welfare. So we had to come back to that. We recognized educationally that kindergarten was an essential thing for South Carolina, more important than it was for other states if we were going to prepare people to enter the school system. So we put them as priority, sort of pre-priority items, to getting into a, you know, broader program for education. I do think they were very critical, yes, and it was critical in many ways. It was critical because we had to accomplish it politically. We had to get over those hurdles politically if we were going to satisfy ourselves first and Washington and the world that we wanted to get on with the job of educating South Carolinians and building a better state.

CBG: What was going on in elementary and secondary education during this time?

REM: Well, there again, you know, the sales tax had come in the early fifties and had been primarily devoted to facilities and transportation.

Some of it, as we know, went to operations, but a limited amount when we looked at it as a part of the whole program. So we felt, looking at what we were doing, that we had some serious problems. Something was causing the dropout rate. There had to be some look at that. There had to be something wrong when we had so many people who would get to the eighth grade and then drop out, and we had a tremendous number of people who would complete what was then elementary school, seventh grade, and never get to the eighth grade and certainly not get through it. So we, in doing the studies and looking at it and meeting with the educational community and everybody else, determined very quickly that there had to be another frontal assault on education, but this one designed to getting right into the teaching and all of that, to improve the quality of education. We had good facilities, we had good transportation, but we really needed to focus on the schoolteacher and the classroom and the quality of education.

CBG: Did the leadership from the State Department of Education provide the focal point for making these recommendations?

REM: The leadership from the department was good. We had Dr. Jesse Anderson who'd been, you know, very strong and stalwart. Then came Cyril Busbee about this time. I've spoken of him before. He was a big influence who came from the school system, fresh from the school system, with solid support from the educational community, and he was very helpful. So was the department because he reorganized the department, brought some new blood into the department.

We got a lot of support from the school superintendents themselves, from the classroom teachers, because we were able to bring in committees representing the various groups. In just about everything, we did representatives from the Classroom Teachers' Association were always involved because I was particularly interested in what they thought. After all, we were sitting up here and designing a system and talking about what needed to be done, and I wasn't sure we were always asking the front line soldier what they thought and what they thought the greatest needs were, and what their priorities were. We asked them, and we got it, and, as I said before, the thing that impressed me when we got it from them was that salary wasn't number one. Classroom size was always up in number one or two priority, adequate teaching aids. The things they needed to teach with were always up high, and salary was down low. That impressed me.

I know we still talk about salary as number one, but the teachers themselves would not put it at the head of the list and neither would the educational folks. At that time that was a critical problem because I think we had one of the lowest, if not the lowest, salary schedule in the southeast and we knew we had to do something about that because we knew we couldn't improve with what we had. I mean, it was acknowledged fact that you couldn't improve with what you had, that we had to do all of these things and at the same time attract better, brighter people into the educational system. That could only be done by improving the salary schedule, again, setting a goal to get to the Southeast average in order to be competitive. We knew we couldn't set an unrealistic goal.

CBG: Do you think this was a unique situation where elected officials and the special interest groups, such as the education associations and administrators were involved in a positive dialogue, where there was understanding and mutual support?

REM: Yes, I really do, and I think the circumstances under which we were operating made it possible for us to do that. It sort of forced it on us. You have to realize, again--and I think we had to keep reminding ourselves--that prior to this time we were running the dual school system. We were running a system for whites which was fully funded and fully supported and then another system that was sort of overlooked.

Here we were having to integrate those two systems all into one and assault the problem of quality which made it almost an impossible situation.

CBG: With all that change, didn't the teachers backlash into teacher associations?

REM: I don't think so. I really don't, not then. That came later.

CBG: Yes.

REM: That came with changing situations and changing attitudes. At that time the teachers became very vocal. The classroom teacher spoke up, and I can remember having presidents of the Classroom Teachers Association who were extremely outspoken, you know, and had their say. We had some confrontations with them, so, yes; maybe it did start to develop during that time. If I could name some of them, there was a Nancy Hanna who was president of the Classroom Teachers Association. She was a very outspoken person, talked very candidly and frankly with anybody about what she thought needed to be done, and I give her a lot of credit for talking strong enough and loud enough to have input into what went on. The teachers really convinced me that they were interested in quality and they wanted to put first things first. Where they had almost developed a conflict between the administrative and the classroom teacher levels, I think we were able to pull that together and sit them down with us because we gave them all opportunities to have input together collectively and individually. I would listen to representatives from the various groups and try to put it all together.

CBG: Yes. In looking at the people who had dropped out or the people who wanted to, let's say, continue in the traditional education approach after eighth grade, were special plans or special programs like . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: . . . adult education . . .

REM: We had, as you recall, an adult education program in South Carolina. Let me back up a little bit.

CBG: Yes.

REM: This is where we began the study. This is where people overlooked part of the Moody Report. The Moody Report dealt with our financial ability to do the things that we finally concluded had to be done, that we didn't have the option of not doing. But built into that was the study by Warren Rovetch, who took a look at South Carolina, I mean a broad look at us, educational programs, health programs, transportation, and tried to tie it all together so that we'd have a comprehensive approach. Our feeling was it was hard to separate one from the other if you're really going to move South Carolina forward. Of course, the department had all the statistics to put it all together so that we could look at what the repeater rate was, the first time, the second time, and what the dropout rate was and how one related to the other, to look at the educational level of the people of South Carolina, the various age groups, and then to look at industry and what industry required, and the type of jobs we were creating.

We were beginning to develop a problem because we were going out and creating so many new jobs with so much investment that we were about to use up the available labor force. Industry then wanted high school graduates or the equivalent thereof. It had reached the point where we were having to deal with them and say, "Not all of you need that. Some of you can use tenth grade level or ninth grade level or elementary level. You really don't all need high school graduates." So working with them we were able to get them to lower their minimum standards and take more people in, but then we had to start helping them recruit and train those people.

So we looked at the whole thing and determined that it was pretty difficult to say, "We're going to put in the kindergarten program, and that's going to take care." It was going to be twenty years, well fifteen years before those people got out into the labor market. So we had to do something beyond that. We felt we had to have what we called, for lack of a better term, an adjunct education program, and that was to develop new programs that would hold people in school. The vocational program was not what we would like for it to be. It was not meeting the need, and in a lot of places wasn't operated, really, as part of the school program. It was sort of a satellite program to train people in welding and auto mechanics, but it really wasn't part of the basic education program. So we began to work to make that a part of the system and make that a part of the adjunct program, to give people a chance, if they weren't going to college to sort of veer off, not into a second class, but into a job-oriented-type that would lead to employment when they got out of school, rather than just drop out and go find nothing to do out there.

The adult education program we had in existence had a very aggressive leader in Ken East, and the federal government came along--well, we've had an adult education program since Dr. Wil Lou Gray had put us in the business because that was her whole commitment, that South Carolina be able to do that, and to pick people who couldn't stay in the conventional school program and to do something to prepare them for the job market, to make something out of them. So, we'd been a pioneer in that, but we'd really never done a whole lot about it. With Ken East there the federal government came along with an adult literacy program.

That was what it was, literacy, to teach people how to read and write. It went through grade eight--my recollection was--was as far as that program went.

Well, when it came, we saw a real opportunity to do something in South Carolina. So we determined that we wanted to be the first state in the nation to have a very comprehensive, complete, total educational program for everybody. That's when we took that, and then we sold the legislature on giving us enough money to fund a complete adult program through grade twelve and put it in every school in South Carolina. So, almost immediately, we had an adult education program, not an adult literacy program with the state on top of the federal. That was an easy opportunity to coordinate because we used one to a certain level and then ours on through. That was the most successful program I think we had because it literally reached out and got hundreds of thousands of people back into school. We did it at night. We were able to use the closed circuit educational television system to put it in every school district in South Carolina. One of the problems we were confronted with to begin with was, "Mom and daddy aren't going to sit in the same classroom that the child sits in. It would be embarrassing. They just won't do it." They did. And we then extended that program into technical centers because there they were training people for jobs, and we felt, if they could offer this at the same time, that they could upgrade people much more quickly. So it became a complete, comprehensive program, and that's when we had to go find the resources to fund all of this program. That came with the increase in the sales tax and adjustments in other taxes in order to get enough money to fund it.

That's where my idea came from that you don't go in and just raise taxes and then decide how you can spend it. If you get a program that the public supports, they'll support you in getting the revenues to fund it. So that's what we did. We came with the adjunct education to hold people in the schools, lower class sizes, increase teachers' salaries--working toward the southeastern average--broaden the program in the high school.

We really tackled the adult education program. We tried to coordinate the vocational and technical, put it all where hopefully we were developing one total, complete system to meet those needs, and then we began to run into the higher education problem.

CBG: I just want to ask one or two things. Do you think using the sales tax as the basic funding mechanism gave you advantages of having a centralized financial source so that you could really provide the leadership across the state somewhat uniformly?

REM: Yes. The sales tax had been identified with education in the beginning, committed to education. The act putting on the sales tax initially committed all of those funds to education. So we felt that the public identified the sales tax with education, and, too, that was a tax you could sell the public on for the purposes

we wanted. We really wanted to reach those people out there who needed it most and this was a way of everybody sharing in the cost.

Also at that time was when we began to talk more nationally. South Carolina certainly had that commitment to public education as a primary function of state government just as national defense was a primary function of our national government, and we felt strongly, with the realignment that was going on, and the sharing of revenues at the local, state, and national levels, that, if from all of this emerged a system where the states took on almost full responsibility for public education, that's what ought to happen. We ought to lift some of that burden, more of that burden, off the local communities for many reasons. One is the inequities that existed in the resources that were available because of the assessed valuations. By doing it from the state level we made it uniform. It went to every school in the state on a more uniform basis.

CBG: Did the established vocational education program react to all of this development?

REM: They did, and they reacted both ways. You had those who were very positive to it and those who were very negative, and we had a real difficult time in getting any input into how the vocational education funds were to be used. Early on, when Congress passed that act and made monies available to the state, they were smart enough to go to the legislature and get not the State Department of Education but get the Vocational Education Division named--in an act here in our legislature--as the agency that would receive and handle those funds.

CBG: That's critically important.

REM: That was extremely important.

CBG: Yes.

REM: We had some real battles. We had some strong discussions, many meetings, even to the point that we finally arbitrarily--and it got difficult--carved out some monies from them and put it in other programs to compensate for the federal because we couldn't use it. So we did have some. I don't want to say we didn't have cooperation. There was Floyd Johnson up in York County, who was the national president of the Vocational Education Teachers Association. He was one of the most outstanding men in this country and really was committed to a good program. We borrowed him and brought him in at the state level and let him work directly with us because that gave us some credibility. The vocational education teachers respected him and admired him and trusted him. We brought him in and later on brought him on and made him deputy

director of the technical education program when we tried to coordinate those two. We felt like, if he could be brought into that, that the lack of trust could be overcome.

END OF SIDE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO

CBG: This is Tape 17, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is February 14, 1983. Governor, did you have the sense that these developments may have reflected a type of tension, let's say, between the established, small farm, vocational education interest and the new industrial interest as really the edge of change in the state?

REM: Well, yes, there was tension, and there was considerable disagreement, public disagreement . . .

CBG: Yes.

REM: . . . and public debate and discussion and, therefore, a lot of opposition to, you know, to what we were trying to do, and it would surface. What I was trying to accomplish was to really bring vocational and technical education together so that we could get some coordination there. The vocational people resented TEC. There's no question about it. They felt that it was, as I said, the fair-haired boy and was getting priority. They'd been doing the job, and many of them thought they could continue to do it, that they could do it all. See, some of them had adult programs, too, historically. Most of them had the opportunity to do it, so they had been doing summer and evening courses for the adult community and didn't want to give this up, and in many places we didn't want them to give it up because we didn't have a TEC center everywhere.

What we were trying to do was to get TEC responsible for the post-high-school programs, and what I really wanted and tried to do and publicly said we were trying to do was to make the public schools responsible for programs through grade twelve or eighteen years of age. When someone had completed the twelfth grade and/or reached the age of eighteen, then they would go to a program that was under the broad supervision of TEC, whether it be in a public school building or not. We could never accomplish that because a lot of the vocational education teachers just would not accept and would not buy that, and I was never able to persuade them to do it. So we never really got that kind of coordination and had to move on with a more rapid expansion of the technical education program. We accelerated its growth in accordance with the plan that it had to get it moving faster. In many areas we were able to do this.

I became an idealist during that period of time when I thought I could get Allendale, for instance, to, in effect, become a satellite technical center in the evenings and summers. Thus we wouldn't have to build

as many technical centers as we did because we could have satellite centers around in the various vocational schools. Those facilities were there. They were not being fully utilized. Where we built new schools, we built very spacious areas for vocational education that were not always being used and in many instances weren't being properly used. So we had a tug of war. That was one of the battles I think I lost, but we approached it in other ways than by expanding TEC and improving the vocational education program.

CBG: Did you have to go outside the state to get leadership for TEC?

REM: Yes, we did. You recall when TEC was created during Senator [Ernest] Hollings's administration; they brought in Wade Martin, who was in North Carolina. There's a good story and a good lesson to that. Wade Martin had come from the vocational area but was a very imaginative, creative, farsighted individual who in my judgment just had an unusual talent for developing training programs to meet the needs of industry. He had his vision and knew what he wanted to do. Well, he'd started in North Carolina, and they had begun to create the comprehensive community college concept, and Wade was one of those committed, because he'd been through it, to the view that the academic and the occupational just didn't blend together and that, when you did that, you began to destroy the purpose of technical education and its flexibility to do things. So he then was ready to leave what he'd tried to do and he was seeing it sort of eroded away from him.

He came to South Carolina and was given a total free hand with a very good, strong, small committee to create technical education in this state. So our technical system is the creation of Wade Martin and became nationally and internationally to where thereafter and even today people are still trying around the country to create something like it. I don't think any of them have ever really gotten the concept totally in mind as to how we did it and all, so they haven't been able to totally copy it.

CBG: The basic thing was that Mr. Martin went beyond vocational education but stopped short of a . . .

REM: Yes.

CBG: . . . two-year college.

REM: He did not want to get into the college parallel for the purpose of being in the academic area.

CBG: Yes.

REM: His college-parallel-type programs were upgrading programs and designed primarily to prepare somebody for the training and technology that he was going to give him.

CBG: Yes.

REM: Where he got into it, it was part of the support for his technical education program. He had a strong disagreement when it came to the comprehensive community college, like that in California, and was very strong along with Walter Harper who was then the director of our State Development Board. They were a real two-man team. They both felt so strongly--and it didn't take them long to convince me--that this was not the way South Carolina wanted to go, that this would erode away the technical program, would change it over a period of time. That's the reason I became so strong in opposition to what was then beginning to come into South Carolina.

CBG: The idea was that you could change the curriculum to meet the training need of a particular occupation or . . .

REM: At any time.

CBG: Oh, yes.

REM: You could discontinue it, or you could use anybody that could teach . . .

CBG: No tenured faculty.

REM: . . . no tenured faculty. You didn't have to have a Ph.D. to teach if you just were a good teacher. You didn't have to have all the accreditation standards to teach welding and things of that nature. We wanted to stay away from that.

CBG: What was the secret of Mr. Martin's success in South Carolina? How did he do that?

REM: Just energy and absolute support. You know, very few people have come to this state and been able to get such total, complete support as he was able to get. He would perform. I think the performance of TEC satisfied everybody that we were doing the right thing, and Wade Martin had no difficulty getting funds for any program that he wanted. Wade also was a very conservative fellow when it came to that. He wanted it

done right, but he was very cautious about overdoing, moving too fast, or trying to get too much support. He knew he had problems with the educational community, particularly with the public school system, and I think he was smart enough to recognize that, but he was also strong enough to move forward and develop this very innovative system for South Carolina.

CBG: Do you recall some of his more notable supporters in the legislature?

REM: Well, I really would have difficulty in finding anybody who didn't support technical education and who didn't look on Wade Martin as being Mr. Technical Education in this whole country. So he had support. Senator [Edgar] Brown, who was chairman of the Finance Committee, all the Ways and Means, Speaker [Solomon] Blatt, though most of the rural counties didn't benefit as much, saw what he was trying to do and gave strong support. The governors and the Budget and Control Board always supported him very strongly, and I think that was the key to it. At that time the governor devoted a substantial part of his time to the industrial effort. That was always probably the highest priority, was to go out and look for new investments for the state. Therefore, we worked very closely with the Development Board and with technical education.

CBG: How he was able to finance building?

REM: Well, what we did in the beginning was we had the plan for technical education in South Carolina with, I think, originally, some thirteen centers programmed. We knew that if the state put up those physical facilities it would be difficult not to have forty-six, one for every county. So the program was designed so that the local communities were responsible for brick and mortar, physical facilities. That then forced the grouping of counties and the coming together of whatever number it took to support a facility. We had done studies to decide on population and potential enrollment and all of that, and, with them having to do that, that made it politically possible to follow through with the program and to not proliferate the technical centers over the state. That would have destroyed it, frankly, because we'd have had a whole bunch of small, inefficient centers not really needed at that time and misusing a lot of the funds that were available. Money was limited. So by doing it that way, the state paid for the program but not for facilities.

CBG: And by decentralizing enough, but not too much, you could also eliminate the need for living quarters of any kind.

REM: There was never intended to be, and that was part of the concept originally, that they would be commuter schools, not boarding facilities. Also, by keeping control of the program at the state level we were able to determine and avoid, you know, everybody getting into different things and having somebody turning theirs into a junior college and things of that nature. Along the way we lost some of that, and, as a result, Greenville became, you know, a college wanting to become a university, and we were never able to pull it back in. The other centers have stayed pretty much like they were intended, but, as time went, legislation in the seventies sort of gave them more autonomy than they had initially. As a result of that, we have different centers in different parts of the state.

CBG: Was the ETV [educational television] tie-in and development of help to TEC?

REM: ETV was always, and that's where we recognized that we had a very valuable resource out there that wasn't being utilized. We were using the closed circuit to get it into the public schools, but we could also use it in the TEC centers, yes. It became sort of the communications link for us with all of the programs that we were doing. We used it in the teacher training program, we used it in the technical centers, and we used it in law enforcement training programs. It just became a resource--we could do most anything--and I don't think we fully recognized that.

CBG: Where were the colleges and universities during all this time?

REM: We were getting to that, and, you know, it's part of, I suppose, spending an awful lot of time personally meeting with people and listening to people and looking at things and trying to get a grasp on what we really needed. It didn't take us too long, though, to recognize that South Carolina was such that, as I said earlier, kindergarten wasn't the answer, the elementary school program wasn't the answer, the public school program wasn't. TEC was part of it, adult education, but it didn't take us long to realize that we had a problem at the level of higher education. That's where, from taking a look at it, we had created, back in the fifties, what was then the Higher Education Commission that was set up to do a study in an advisory capacity and make reports and things of that nature. It had just died a natural death, and I had become involved nationally and had seen what was going on.

I didn't feel that we needed a board of regents, a super board that was going to do it all, and didn't think we could do it all politically. I wasn't sure that's what we wanted. Of all the things that had been tried around the country, what I thought impressed me most were the coordinating commissions where you had this commission that had coordinating responsibility and power and program approval, so people wanting to start new programs had to get approval. That would avoid unnecessary duplications and all. We recognized

that, if we were going to do something at the level of higher education, we had to have some control over it because what we had was a bunch of autonomous, independent colleges all going their separate ways and all lobbying for the dollar.

That's when we reactivated the Higher Education Commission and went to the legislature for some very minor changes. We took out advisory and made it, literally, the coordinating commission with approval powers for all new programs. Then, as I had felt strongly before that no commission is any better than the people who serve on it--and that had to be one that had some blue chip, strong, recognized leaders--we made a strong effort, a real diligent effort, searching out and getting the kind of people that we wanted on that commission. We felt they would have the credibility and the image and could gain the support of really accomplishing some things. That's where I started out with John Cauthen, who'd sort of become a leader by reason of his representation of the textile industry. I call him the father of ETV. He had supported us in all of our efforts in the legislature, been very helpful and we felt like John was the kind of person that ought to head that commission up. We searched out people like Bob Vance, the chairman of Clinton Mills, who had never been involved, Alester Furman III from Greenville, and we picked those kinds of people not only for who they were but what they were and what they brought to the table.

We knew we had a problem developing between public and private education. That was when we had to keep that balance. We felt strongly that we wanted to protect our private schools and try to keep them viable, but at the same time we had to do something with the public schools. Alester Furman was a big benefactor of Furman. So by putting him on there, we let Gordon Blackwell and the people in the private sector know that we weren't stacking the deck against them, but I also had somebody that I felt comfortable would make the right decision regardless of what the circumstances were. Craig Wall, Sr., from down in Conway with Canal Industries, one of the largest landowners, private landowners in the South, was appointed because we were wrestling then with the Pee Dee area and the coastal area and what we were going to do there. We had Florence, the university branch at Florence, the university branch at Conway, both running to see who could become the four-year school for the Pee Dee region. In our own mind, we knew that it had to be Florence because that was the center of the Pee Dee. Even with as much support as they had, it couldn't and shouldn't be the Conway campus because to the east of it was the ocean, as we said, with all the whales and the fish, and we weren't ready to take them on as part of the potential enrollment. But it got very difficult and very delicate.

There was Craig Wall, a strong fellow who had never served. I mean he would talk and tell you how he felt. I knew he was the type of fellow that we wanted on there, had respect for him. He was strong, tough, had a lot of, you know, interest in the state and when the chips were down, if Craig Wall felt that it ought to be Florence instead of Conway, though he was from Conway, he would say so. John Lumpkin, who was then chairman of the board of SCN [South Carolina National Bank], never noted for his modesty and

always willing to speak out, head of the largest bank in the state. He was a good friend and I felt was the right kind of person. So we blended that group together.

I gave you a little background because what we were trying to do was to get support for it and at the same time to build credibility with the people themselves and where they came from and what they represented. That commission then became one of the strongest in the state and really took on that responsibility. That was the way we took to coordinate the effort.

We recognized, as I said, that we had several things we had to do. We had to boost our private schools, and that's the reason I supported a tuition grant-in-aid. I felt that they were such an important part of South Carolina that we ought to figure some way to support them. Secondly, they were good. We had some good small schools that ought to survive, and, number three, that was an economical way to educate youngsters in this state without forcing them all to go to private schools. So we began that program that came through and got declared unconstitutional. Then later we came back with a new board.

There's a history to our recommendation and to the tuition grant-in-aid program. Paul Hardin was then president of Wofford, and Paul prided himself on being the finest constitutional lawyer in the whole country, and the one thing that I had said, when we were proposing it, was we wanted [James] Jim Morris and those to administer it on the Higher Education Commission. He made that commission after it floundered in the beginning with a staff that I didn't think was at a level it ought to be and a staff that was beginning to develop it's own little programs, not looking at the big picture. We brought Jim Morris in from the university because I wanted a peer-level person with the head of the universities. I didn't think it could function if we didn't have somebody who was at their level. We brought him in, and really he did a tremendous job with that commission, such a good job that later it ended up chopped in so many pieces by politics until he had to resign and leave it.

But back on the tuition grant-in-aid, we wanted it administered by the Higher Education Commission because of our constitutional provision that we couldn't do anything for them directly or indirectly, and we wanted it going to the student. Paul Hardin didn't like that idea. He wanted to create a separate board with them on it to administer the program, and the legislature finally went along with that, and naturally the court said that's unconstitutional. So once we convinced Paul Hardin he wasn't the finest constitutional lawyer in the state then we had to come back and take out that indirect provision from the constitution and administer it in a separate way so that it really became the lifeblood and I think the salvation of the small schools.

We had to do something for the quality and quantity levels of higher education. With the aggressive new program in the public schools we expected to increase the graduate rate where only about a third that entered were coming out. We knew we were going to start doing something because we had assaulted it at all levels, not just at the kindergarten level. We also recognized that we had to do something for the quality. State College, for instance, had really been sitting there in Orangeburg totally neglected, with inadequate

facilities, with a faculty that the students were coming to me, student body representatives, complaining about, why they didn't have good math teachers and good science teachers and all of this sort of thing. So we recognized we had to do something for that. Winthrop needed to reach out more. The two universities needed to become universities in my judgment. They had been colleges, and they weren't doing the kinds of things and turning out the kinds of people that they needed, and the private schools were saying, "All right. We can't find people to teach. We're having to go out and recruit. They tell us we've got to have a certain percentage of doctors on our faculty, and we don't have any way to go get them. If you want to do something for us, get the universities to do what they ought to be doing and improve their graduate program so that they can in turn take care of our needs." That's where we moved back into that program.

One of the first things we did was to supplement graduate education in order to stimulate that and to make it possible for the universities to move more into it, and then we began to look at the public college availability in the state. The study very simply showed us something that we hadn't thought about. We had two universities. We had State College in Orangeburg, predominantly black. We had Winthrop in Rock Hill, which was all female, a teacher college, and we had The Citadel in Charleston, which was an all-male, military college. That was the offering for higher education in South Carolina. So if you didn't want to go to a female teacher's college or if you didn't want to go to a predominantly black college in Orangeburg that had totally inadequate facilities and at that time not a good faculty or to a military college, you had to go to one of the two universities. Yet we were trying to raise the level of the universities by increasing the requirements for entrance and all of that sort of stuff and forcing them to take everybody that wanted to go, on the other hand.

That's when we looked at Warren Rovetch and his study for part of the Moody Report and determined what we needed to do really was to take the two-year branches of the university and convert them into a two-year junior college program as a part of a state college system, not university, but that we needed a four-year college, a liberal arts college, in the Pee Dee area, and surprisingly we needed a four-year liberal arts college in the Midlands area, and we needed one in the Piedmont area. In the Piedmont, though it was overrun with colleges, it was Wofford which had an extremely high academic rating and only took the very, very top level of students, an exclusive girls' school, high society school, Converse, and Furman that again was striving for excellence under Gordon Blackwell.

There just wasn't anywhere for the average youngster to go to school. That's where we got in trouble. Gordon Blackwell and others went up in arms over a four-year liberal arts college in the Piedmont area, we said somewhere between Greenville and Spartanburg, and the university said, "We don't need one in the Midlands area. We've got General Studies. We'll educate everybody." Paul Dietzel said--and that was never publicized--that you'll destroy my athletic program if you take all of that out and make us a super-university with a bunch of intellectuals and all the average, ordinary people going to college. That's where

my athletic program sort of fits. We ended up then with--and one at Charleston because we only had the military college. The College of Charleston, a very historic institution, was literally withering on the vine, the ivy vine, with absolutely no support and about three or four hundred students.

So we determined that what we ought to do is to take the two-year branch in Florence and make it into a four-year college, a commuter college, no dormitories--we didn't want to get into that at that time--and take the College of Charleston into the state system. So we created the State College Board, again picking and hunting and blending and putting on blacks that represented certain interest groups and all of that and recommending at that time that Winthrop and State College in Orangeburg come under the umbrella, that their boards be blended into that board so that it then administered a two-year program of two-year junior colleges to feed in and a system of four-year, state-supported, liberal arts colleges which would be Winthrop, State College, Charleston, and Florence.

We got embroiled in all the battles, and we ended up losing. Mr. Blatt got into the picture and won his battle with me for the university over the two-year program, and the two boards naturally, as we had expected they would--we had left The Citadel out to start with because we felt it ought to be a separate institution--Winthrop and State College were able to prevail, and we ended up then with four-year programs in Charleston and Florence. Then they later took in Lander, administered by that board.

I still feel very strongly that the best thing that could have happened to South Carolina would have been the putting of Winthrop and State College under that one board so that they would all be a part of a state liberal arts program and still feel very frankly, as loyal as I am to the university, that for South Carolina it would have been much better if the two-year programs could have become two-year junior colleges under that board. Then TEC would have stayed technical. I wanted a state system of vocational and technical education, not a system of comprehensive community colleges. We would have had an ideal system in the state.

END OF TAPE