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Dr. Lionel Newsom interview conducted on April 11, 1984 about the Boonshoft School of Medicine at Wright State University

Lionel Newsom

James St. Peter

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Wright State University
School of Medicine Oral History Project

Interviewer: James St. Peter

Interviewee: Dr. Lionel H. Newsom, President of Central State University

April 11th, 1984

Room 214 of the Administration Building at Central State University

James St. Peter: President Newsom, can you tell me a bit about your background and your tenure here as president?

Lionel Newsom: (coughs) Well, my background is that I came to Central State from Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina where I was serving as president to a private, uh, Presbyterian, uh, college. And I came here in September of, um, '72. (coughs). I have a Bachelor's degree from Lincoln University, Master's degree from University of Michigan. Did some work at Ohio State and uh, Associate Administration, took a Doctorate in Sociology and Anthropology from Washington University in St. Louis, I taught for, oh, many years, and served as President of two colleges before coming here.

JSP: When did you first, when did you come here to CSU?

Newsom: September of eighty—really came, uh, I came to meet the faculty and to work with them in September but I came for full time duties in October. Of '72.

JSP: '72. At that point, President Jackson was still here?

Newsom: Yes, President Jackson was still here. And I'm certain that President Jackson can give you much more information about this than I can.

JSP: When did you learn about the Central State University involvement with Wright State when you came?

Newsom: Well what I found was that, uh, Wright State was trying to get a um, new school established in Medicine and Family Medicine. They felt that they had done all the background research for, for it, and the understanding I got was that they needed these two schools, Miami University and uh, Central State, as co-founders of the institution. However, I knew, and I guess the President of Miami knew, that, uh, it was going to be housed at Wright State and the real authority was gonna be there. And that we were trying to open up doors for our students who were interested in medicine. And we felt this was the best way to go. It's that we thought, at least I thought, that certain slots would be more or less allocated to Central State and that if we could fill those slots we

would be accepted, and if we could not fill them, then they would fill them with someone else. Now, that was never said directly but that was my thought and my thinking.

JSP: Who's in, was there anybody in charge of the effort of Central State, was it still being carried out at the board of trustees level with Carl Jenkins?

Newsom: It was still being carried on at the Board of Trustees, yeah. That's true. With Carl Jenkins.

JSP: Was there any Presidential Directive by President Jackson? Was there a staff member assigned to it?

Newsom: I wouldn't, ah, no there was no staff assigned to it. It was President Jackson who worked with Dr. Jenkins and then when I came I worked with Dr. Jenkins. There was no staff person assigned.

JSP: When you arrived, who were some of the other members besides Dr. Jenkins who were involved in, in trying to get Central State involved in the medical school?

Newsom: Umm, I believe Dr. Pemberton and Mrs. Gluck. G-L-U-C-K. Mrs. Charlotte Gluck.

JSP: What were they doing, do you know? Did they have a specific role or were they just lobbying?

Newsom: Supporting, they were just supporting.

JSP: What was Mrs. Gluck's position?

Newsom: Uh, she was a member of the board, just a housewife.

JSP: Oh, as a member of the board of trustees at Central State?

Newsom: Yes. And so was Dr. Dwight Pemberton, a dentist, but uh, was on the board of trustees at Central State.

JSP: What was the, was there any formal interaction with Miami University? Did you have a series of meetings or something when you came on board with Miami—?

Newsom: Well, yes, we had several meetings at Miami, with Dr. Shriver and members of that board. I think one or two, maybe two members of that board. We had dinner meetings in which we discussed, um, I believe the question of selection of a Dean, getting a budget together, and uh, hopeful that we would, uh, see the medical school born within six or eight months.

JSP: Were there Wright State people there giving you briefings at those—?

Newsom: Oh, there was Wright State people there, Dr. Kegerreis, and members of that board were present.

JSP: What was the feeling of, what do you think the feeling was of the Wright State people?

Newsom: Well I think that the Wright State people felt that they were taking the leadership in this and that, uh, the school would actually be Wright State's medical school. And that, uh, we would, we were supporting, uh, along with the, I guess the politicians who were supporting both Miami and uh, Central, would help them in getting their budgets through and funds for this institution.

JSP: Were there any means, was there any talk of developing minority programs here at Central State? In line with the Wright State University—

Newsom: There was some talk, um, but, um, the, um, yeah there was some talk about it. Realized, I realized, that the minority students were, um, uh, behind, and that we would need um, some special, uh, catch up education for our students to readily qualify. And it was my hope that such a program of um, remediation and enhancement would be, ah, forthcoming, uh, as a result of both Miami and um, Wright State. Uh, they had research capabilities and uh, faculty members in the graduate school, whereas we only had an undergraduate college, really. And, uh, I knew that a great deal of help was going to be needed to get our students ready for medical school. And I expected that to come from Wright State but I can understand that Wright State was really concerned about the medical school, they were not that much concerned about remediation or about, uh, the role that minorities or farmers or real people were going to play. You see, they wanted the medical school and I believe if I'd been in their position I would have done the same thing.

JSP: When you finally agreed to set up a trilateral committee of all the, basically of all three universities—

Newsom: Right.

JSP: How was that set up, how was that agreement arrived at?

Newsom: Well, it was asked, I don't have a copy of the agreement but I'm sure Dr. Kegerreis has. Uh, I had one somewhere but after the, uh, tornado, we've had some difficulty getting our papers back in the proper places. Uh, it was equal representation, in the agreement for the medical school. There was some statement somewhere in it that when it reached a certain number of students and a certain level, that a part of it or a certain segment of it might be established at Central State. So this was I think one of the carrots that had been, um, used in order to cause us to be a very active, play an active role and support of the medical school. And that we would have a share in the selection of the Dean of the college, and, uh, would have ready access to, um, the, um, counselors I guess at the Wright State who would be concerned with admissions, and we would have

members on the admissions committee. And that a member of our faculty would be a member of the faculty over there. And I think the same thing happened with Miami. But I'm sure they'd let you see that agreement.

JSP: Who was the faculty member?

Newsom: Dr. Johnson. Dr., uh, Melvin Johnson, who was a biologist, who *is* a biologist and is the chairperson of our department of Biology.

JSP: Were there any other faculty members who held, who held appointments?

Newsom: No, there was no other faculty members. Now we had two others who worked with them in the admissions, uh, program. Dr. Shell, S, no, S, no, Dr. L. Shellbert Smith, in Chemistry and Dr. David Hazel, dean of our college of Arts and Sciences, who is a political scientist. And those two worked with them.

JSP: You mentioned before that some of these options you had of trying to choose the Dean and members of the admissions committee as carrots held out for you. Do you feel there was a real need by Wright State to win your faculty and board of trustees over?

Newsom: Yes, I think so.

JSP: Why?

Newsom: Well, it's a truly political game, let's face that. That you cannot start a school in the, in an area where you have, where you depend on political clout to get it actuated, really, uh, actualized, and uh, there was need for support from McLin, who was, uh, in Dayton, to use his influence in Columbus, and Central State, of course, could, was the predominantly black institution and it is uh, important that we produce more black doctors. We don't have enough doctors, we have very—very scarce in black doctors and so all of us thought that this meant we were going to get more black students in the medical school. Either from Central or from some other place. But that it would be fair that here is a place where certain slots was going to be designated, without writing it out, that black students are gonna get in.

JSP: Do you think that Wright State's held up to their share of the agreement?

Newsom: I think Wright State tried. I think that Dr. Beljan tried, I think he tried very hard, but, uh, it is not, um, there was never really, you see, the difficulty is there was never a written agreement that this was going to happen, really. So therefore you don't have an obligation as such, you have a gentleman's or a, a gentle-people's agreement. You have to be careful with women now that you say men all the time. So there was kind of a consensus here that all of us were going to do the best we could to get a large enough number of blacks admitted to medical school and a larger number of rural young people around this area from Wright State and Miami to go to the medical school. Both Dr. Shriver and I felt that that was gonna happen. And uh, and I think that Wright State made

a gigantic effort to do that. Uh, we uh, Dr. Washington was one of our leaders later on in it, and Dr. Willy Washington was on the scene about the admissions and we were working with our students, he can give you more direct information as to what really happened there. I could only hear from them from time to time, and get the reports. And frankly I was unhappy that we were not getting more students in the medical school. But I'm also a realist, I've been in the field of education now a long time and I know unless you qualify you don't make it.

JSP: Is there anything that can be done to enhance the abilities of black students to get into the medical school? Any special programs?

Newsom: Oh, I'm sure there are many, but the question is finding the funds and the desire on the part of the students who are willing to take the rigorous training that they must take over a long period of time for that admission, and to be admitted. It's not an easy thing, and uh, the question of sacrifice is difficult for many minorities to be willing to pay that great price for admission to medical school. Like many people want immediate answers, they want immediate gratification. And isn't easy to get a larger number, you can get two, three, or four who are willing to pay that great price, but to get seven, eight, or nine, it's difficult. And I realize that, so, I cannot blame Wright State as much as others will do that from our, from Central, I'm sure that Dr. Washington will blame them more, and Dr. Thomas will blame them more, and no doubt Dr. Johnson will. I've just taking from comments made by them, and by me, with reference to the low admission rate of black students to the medical school.

JSP: Did—

Newsom: But I'm trying to make it clear: I do not blame them, I understand. Ok (laughs).

JSP: Uh, you mentioned Dr. Willy Washington.

Newsom: Yes.

JSP: Were there others besides him who came on later, got involved in the medical school? Dr. Thomas—?

Newsom: Only Dr. Thomas and Dr. Washington I recall, uh, are later on. And Dr. Casey has been involved in it, but to a minor extent. Dr. Casey is a physician himself, from Cincinnati. Now he could give you some other information about how this thing came off. Uh, there was a time when, uh, a member of the board wanted me to devote an awful lot of time to the development of some part of that facility here at Central State. But Wright State was not, uh, apt to do that.

JSP: Why not?

Newsom: Well, it was really, they were not, they were developing their own program, over there. And they had not finished the building of their school, and think of when the

tornado came. There were, um, well at least one of the members of our board, felt that this was a great opportunity for us to develop a facility at Central, which would help us in the medical program at Wright State. But, uh, we needed both staff and other funds. And at the same time we were down to our ears in all the efforts trying to get this school back on its feet. And I felt that I could not sacrifice the university for a, uh, early small share in a medical school which would satisfy a very small number of students when I was concerned with 2500 students. And I could not devote a great deal of my energies and effort to this little small section when I was trying to...So maybe I was not as hard working as maybe I should have been, in the development of it. I'll be very honest about that.

JSP: As President of Central State, you've been pretty close to the black community in the Miami Valley.

Newsom: Yes, sir.

JSP: Do you feel that the sentiment shared by some of the people here at Central State is echoed in the black community about a lack of organized programs to feed students into the school of medicine?

Newsom: I don't quite understand the question. Maybe I've got the question, I don't know. Yeah, I don't quite understand it.

JSP: Do you feel that the black community feels that there should be more programs, more organized programs to feed students, black students into Wright State?

Newsom: Oh yeah. I think they feel that way. I think they feel that more money should be spent by, um, people of means in Dayton, um, to help the black students in high school and in college. Uh, you think of the vast amount of money that is circulated in the city of Dayton by industry and I could name some of the people who've given vast sums of money to Wright State, but have given nothing, little or nothing, to Central State. We got a little help after the tornado. But to give help, to help us produce qualified students for medical school, we've gotten nothing almost. And I don't think that the power-structure of Dayton has been as concerned, and I wouldn't expect it to be as concerned, as it is about the community of Dayton or of Wright State, or University of Dayton or Sinclair. But I would expect them to be more conscious of the need for blacks in many, many areas, because it also helps America. And it helps Dayton. Uh, but I don't think that they are that sensitive.

JSP: Do you feel that there will be programs here developing at Central State that will be able to be either adopted by Wright State or developed in conjunction with Wright State?

Newsom: I don't think that Central is going to spend a whole lot of time on development of a few students for medical school. I think that Central is primarily concerned about developing a larger number of students for the world of work, where they can go to work immediately. Uh, to postpone making a living as long as you have to do medical school is

gonna take a whole, a different attitude toward that. And, uh, a different source of money. Um, but I'm moving off the scene soon, and the new president may have an all the other different opinion, or a different point of view or the way to go. I'm concerned about more people getting into the mainstream of American life than about a few getting into medical school. And let me be very honest with you: I think that, um, medicine produces a lot of individuals with funds, but I haven't found that those individuals are very altruistic.

JSP: Do you feel that there are some (coughs) mass oriented programs such as biological sciences programs, physiology, that could be oriented towards large numbers of students here at Central State that could be developed by the medical school?

Newsom: No, I don't.

JSP: Why not?

Newsom: Because I, uh, I don't think that we have the large number of students interested in medicine. Uh, I think we have a larger number of students interested in health, but, um, medicine is a kind of field, it appears to me, to be one in which parents must build in to their children. And few very poor families, and there's so many of them that are black, would, they, it's almost like an impossible goal. And for the most part they are concerned about trying to develop youngsters who will go into business, which is not too expensive, into education, which is not too expensive, or into teaching at the college level, not too expensive. But there, you don't find a lot of money for a lot of students in medicine, or in dentistry. And I'm being realistic to the point that I don't think you- I think you spend far more money trying to get five to ten doctors than you would in getting 200 to 300 graduates in business, or in some of the other sciences. That's my personal point of view and I'm sure that, uh, many educators differ on that.

JSP: A lot of the interest in having Central State involved was sparked by the board of trustees here.

Newsom: Yes.

JSP: Do you feel that interest has been carried over into the current board of trustees?

Newsom: Not as much. I think that the present board of trustees, um, is occupied with trying to keep a school alive, trying to satisfy the needs of 2500 students and 500 staff people. And the amount of energy that would be spent on the very small numbers, at the point of- it's too much, the point of diminishing returns. It's just too much. Uh, however, I think Dr. Casey is really concerned but he's going off the board this year. Uh, he's concerned, uh, and uh, Dr. Thomas is concerned, uh, I'm concerned, but, uh, I can only give so much energy. And uh, I don't think that same amount of energy's been transferred. We hadn't had a report from the medical school in over a year. When Beljan was there at least we would get reports on the number of students, the number of black students, a number from Central State, a number from other schools that were going to the university, I mean going to the medical school. Uh, we haven't—Pope, Pope, I don't

know if Pope is still over there, but we would get reports from the admission counselor. But we don't get any reports anymore.

JSP: Why do you think that is?

Newsom: Lack of interest.

JSP: On the part of Wright State?

Newsom: Of Wright State and Central. I think it's been a question of, of when, um, Beljan left, um, or, was having his troubles. Uh, Wright State was having a whole lot of trouble. And uh, Central was not that important. They never had the medical school, and they're working toward, they, there's no real need.

JSP: How would you characterize the interaction of Dr. Beljan with Central State?

Newsom: Oh, I thought Beljan was absolutely... very cordial, hardworking, concerned about getting students in the medical school, but also a realist knowing that we had to do a lot of other things to get more students ready. And Beljan and I talked about this many times, we just had to do a better job in chemistry, a better job in biology, a better job in English, a better job in these other areas. And, we had to get a larger number, it's just like you're gonna... you know, you plant fifty seeds, you don't expect only fifty, you don't expect fifty plants. You may expect twenty plants to grow. So we have to plant at least a hundred I think students for medicine in order to get 20 to 25 because you're asking for an awful lot of rigorous study, and commitment, devotion to study, determination. Medicine is tough, and you got to have the real committed persons. And maybe I don't think we have as many as there are. I know we don't. But Beljan was concerned and was trying to help us create more.

JSP: Were there any other individuals at Wright State who had the same amount of concern as Dr. Beljan?

Newsom: Well, there was, I think there were one or two others. I don't know their names offhand. But I think that one or two others. I know that Allen Pope was working over there was very much concerned. We had all kinds of complaints that our students did not fill out their applications correctly and that they didn't, uh, take the time to be meticulous about them as they should have. And, um, the cultural view from which I guess they were developed, uh, did not permit them to be the shining light, but several of them as individuals were really beautiful. But you're dealing with a, you're dealing with a minority. And you've got to have a very comfortable environment and sensitive people on the other side. And uh, really must work together to do it.

JSP: How many students approximately have gone from Central State to the Wright State School of Medicine?

Newsom: I think about twelve.

JSP: Are they—

Newsom: Now there is a way to get the exact number, but, uh...

JSP: Are there still students now who are, uh, evincing interest about going to Wright State?

Newsom: Oh, sure. Yeah. Yeah, a number of students are interested in medicine, and want to go to Wright State, and I wish that Wright State, I know that they've... I mean Affirmative Action and all that, and the Bakke case and others, where white students, they're denied in order to let black students in, or Mexicans or others. Uh, I actually believe that the nation owes a certain number of slots or a certain opportunity to minorities. And that there is, that there should be some compensation for the years of trial and handicap and all that. So, I'm one who believes Wright State ought to reserve a number of spots for black students. And I know a lot of people disagree with that position but that's been my position since I was big enough to know. I still believe it.

JSP: Are there any—

Newsom: Now I don't believe there should be, now let me say it, I don't think that they should be incompetent. I just think that if you have them and they're competent and you have ninety of the majority and ten of the minority, I think you ought to have spots for 'em. I think the nation, the state, and the cities owe it. They have to have health, too.

JSP: Wright State has developed some outreach programs in West Dayton. Do you feel there could be more of them?

Newsom: Well, I really don't know what they're doing. I would have, um, my instinct now of course would be yes, but I'm answering it rather generally. Because I don't think you can have too many. But, uh, and maybe you can, but I know that if you have a large number maybe we'll get some minorities in those programs and the more you get in there the better the chances are that you'll get some other minorities involved. I guess that logic should flow (laughs).

JSP: The relationship between the board of trustees on both sides, you characterized earlier that as, you haven't heard from Wright State in basically a year.

Newsom: That's true.

JSP: Do you feel that should be strengthened by the new dean?

Newsom: Yes. Well, I think that if the new dean is sensitive to the need, or the early commitment made that they should try to, um, exhibit or show that they really mean it. I think an effort should be made on the part of the leadership, that we want what we can do about getting more black students in the medical school. And we want to work with you

at Central to see what can be done. And let us sit together, talk about it, work it out, and see if we can get more students over there.

JSP: Have you had any meetings with Dean Sawyer?

Newsom: No, I haven't.

JSP: Uh, were there any Central State people involved in his search, in his hiring as Dean?

Newsom: Yes.

JSP: Do you know who those people were?

Newsom: I think Dr.—either Dr. Thomas or Dr. Hazel was involved.

JSP: Is that David Hazel?

Newsom: Yes. I was not. I met him, but I never was not really directly involved in it. Nor were other members of the board of trustees, I don't think, now, maybe Dr. Casey was. But there's been so little communication with reference to the medical school that I really don't know, but I'm admitting that.

JSP: Are there any individuals here at Central State that you feel could shed some more light on Central State's involvement with-

Newsom: Let me name these people and I think they could be of some benefit to you. Dr. Arthur Thomas who is our Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dean David Hazel, College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. L. Shelbert Smith, Chemistry, Dr. Melvin Johnson, Biology, chairman of the Biology department, and Dr. Willy Washington who was working with, on a special program. Those are the five people I think who could be of some, who have had some dealings and know what is happening. I turned it over to Dr. Thomas when he came aboard. I had to devote myself to trying to keep other parts of this institution alive and kicking.

JSP: Well thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me, I really appreciate this. You've shed a lot of light on a relatively dark area that I've had. And I'll follow up the contacts here and, if I have any more questions, I'll get ahold of you.

Newsom: Ok.

JSP: Thank you very, very much.

Newsom: You are certainly welcome, sir.