

Transcript For Joe Rodriguez interview, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 12:35 PM

*How do you think the schools are doing in light of recent events like the war and the cut days?*

J.R: Like the war in Iraq?

Yes.

Well, there have been a number of really neat opportunities for social studies teachers to provide a forum and opportunities for students to engage in really meaningful discussions about the war in Iraq, the pros and cons of the war, and most importantly the issues relating to the United States role in providing leadership in the world. I think that has gone very well. The cut days have been more of a problem for students in the school, the loss of instructional time while some students may feel that, that is a good thing, I think the majority of our students realizes that really impacts them with shortened instruction over the course of some very critical courses. So I am very, very sorry that we ended up reducing those days. However the question we had was whether or not we should continue to provide the quality programs for as long as we could, and that's basically where we landed.

*So when it comes down to cut days, did you have to choose between cutting teachers or cutting programs, where would you fall on that? Would you rather cut teachers or programs?*

That is the reason we went to days for this year. It wasn't until the January election that we knew exactly how much less revenue we were getting from the state and that election cost a loss of about 3.2 million dollars for our district and if that election had passed we would have just reduced the 5 days we had reduced at that point, but because of that and the December shortfall, we reduced an additional 12 days. The problem is if you try to cut staff, which is like cutting programs, you're really in a situation where you have to cut twice the amount of staff halfway through the school year to gain the dollars that you need, and then it is exceedingly disruptive to schools. So we did a simulation in October where we eliminated all the library media specialist, all the librarians, in the school district, and when we eliminated them, we saw that the domino effect was that it effected 65 classrooms because of how people bump other people, so halfway through the year, kids in 65 of our classrooms would have had a different teacher. And I could not see doing that. So I decided to work with our board on the fact we would reduce days. It's interesting I'm just putting together our budget message for this next year, which doesn't look real good, but one of the things looking at last years budget message, there's a paragraph in that where I said specifically that we would need...the only recourse for this year once we operate is to reduce days, and that's what we ended up having to do. Not the best choice, but the best choice of all the possible more negative choices.

*If Measure 28 had passed in January do see that would have been solved for only this year, or would it have helped with next year?*

It would have helped us this year because we wouldn't have reduced any more days than the 5. It still would have meant a very tight school year with funds and ending the year very close to zero in revenue dollars. But it would not have impacted next year. Next year is another problem, and that is the state, again does not have the resources, as a matter of fact the resources that they are proposing, are about the same amount of

resources that we had in 99'-00'. So there is a huge discrepancy between what we need to be doing, with increased costs, more students, more schools, and the fact that we don't have the revenue coming in, except from years ago.

*How do you think the news that Liberty was for sure going to open effected budget planning committees, and building committees?*

Well, I think the opening of Liberty in the long run is in the school districts best interests right now. Obviously there will be discussions with "why open it? Why not wait?" but I think that it didn't impact the schools that much. So I guess from the question the answer is really is that the impact on opening Liberty is that is going to mean that we are spending dollars on opening that school. But long run it's in the best interest of the school district to do that.

*How do you see the waiver vote effecting the school district by large?*

Well, I am really pleased that all four of our high schools next year voted to be on a block schedule. They're all different, and certainly Century has been the one that has been at the forefront of providing additional opportunities for students in a blocking of time, which I truly believe is in the best interest of the student learning long run and I think that the only issue that's there is unfortunately, we are doing this at a time where we are also slightly increasing class size. So I am worried about our principals being able to build master schedules that can accommodate some small size classes and there are always some small size classes. Century and Glencoe are still going to be in pretty good shape because of the large enrollment that they'll have because the seniors will still be here. So that gives you some more wiggle room. But I am worried about the smaller schools, like Liberty and even Hilhi on being able to offer classes where maybe only twenty kids sign up for it. Well you have got to make a decision that is a hard decision. Do you offer that class? Where do you push class size up to thirty-five? So those are the issues that I am really worry about. The fact that we are increasing class size, k-12, has me very concerned long run. It's very negative.

*So you always liked the block scheduling that Century had?*

I think that there are many different block schedules. The one that Century is using is one that has worked well for Century. I really believe that having more opportunities for students to take more courses over the four years is very good for kids. I also think that larger blocks of time are the best way for high school students to learn. Where you have time in class to not only, absorb whatever information that the teacher wants you to absorb, but then you have a chance to practice it and then you have a chance to review it. And a 50-minute or a 45-minute period is not long enough to do what is really required. I don't know what the correct length is, of a class; I don't know whether 70 or 90 minutes is the best. But I know that 45 or 50 minutes is not. I don't believe that it is appropriate and I am really pleased that our four high schools are going forward with the block schedule. And certainly Century has been wonderful because of the fact that this school has done it for a number of years now.

*Some of our legislatures in Oregon are trying to get rid of the CIM and CAM. How do you feel about the effects on Century, getting rid of the CIM and CAM and how do you think the controversy this year affected us?*

I personally believe that the Cam is a well suited for high schools. It provides for the ability to do the kind of career related experience for student, it provides a focus of study for students, it provides for a smaller community of learning within the CAM areas. So if you are interested in television production here at Century you got a great opportunity to do some neat work in that arena. Both Hilhi and Liberty have involved in some new programs, finance and travel and tourism, I really think that is a focus for students to then suddenly start thinking as a junior or senior "Where am I going to be in the next five to ten years?" And so I am completely convinced that the CAM is wonderful. The CIM on the other hand has left a lot to be desired. It's not required, a lot of students don't give a root, because there is no reason to do it. So either it has to become real or it doesn't. And the only thing that really has me concerned is that there has been a slight mania to do testing for testing's sake. And I am very concerned about that, to evaluate a student on growth over time, in other words, how well you have done over the last four years and in a standardized test, whatever it be, I think is wonderful. It is data you can use; it's data your teachers can use, to help you perform better in reading and math. But the testing environment that we have right now with CIM is that is still built around comparing this year's third graders to last year's third graders. And that has invalid data. It's meaningless data. Two different groups of kids are being tested, and then to compare those groups is not appropriate. I value testing and I value a CIM program that has meaning and reality. I am very worried though over the fact that none of the schools in our district or even the in the state have done a very good job of addressing the issue of mathematics. Our test results and most of the test results in the state in mathematics are very poor and we have to address that. There is something not right. Either the test is too difficult at eighth or tenth grade or we are not doing as good a job in getting students to work through and really apply the knowledge that they have. So I am really concerned about that.

*Bush's has this new plan "No Child Left Behind" Now how do you see that affecting Century and maybe even HSD as a whole.*

I think that is going to be a few years before it effect Century. As a school district it is going to start affecting us. We have eight schools that qualify for funding through No Child Left Behind, eight elementary schools they're our lowest socio-economic schools. And they are all are going to be effect, more so in the next two years. I am very worried about No Child Left Behind, for three reasons. One: Is that the funding from the federal government isn't there. It's very minimal. And without the funding we are not going to be able to implement the quality programs we need. Secondly: Its being completely mandated from a perspective that's counter productive to public schools. And thirdly it is done in isolation. In other words it's done kind of over here as a program to work with low-income schools. When in effect we have worked really hard for example, in reading and literacy, too have a k-12 textbook adoption, all of our teachers trained, and really focused as a school district in that area. And now we are getting overlaid on that some mandates that really is not a cohesive program that is designed for the lower schools. And some of the schools are performing very well by the way; David Hill is a good example. David Hill does very, very well. I do believe that we're going to see in two years that No

Child Left Behind legislation is going to be significantly modified. There is going to be a huge uprising in this country in public schools against because it is very unmanageable and it's not funded.

*In response for the lack of funding that has not been provided by the government, student groups like SAFFE have popped up. What do you think of student groups themselves and their means to the end?*

I was very, very impressed, that unsolicited group of students surfaced, that group of students have really done a good job of trying to engage other students in other schools. I am very impressed and pleased and somewhat surprised. I think there has been a level of apathy on the part of students and I think that we as adults, and I think that it is good that we never did try to influence students to become more involved. When it's spontaneous like this and it is driven by student it's much more powerful. When I go down to the state legislature or when our teachers go down to the state legislature, they see us as pigs at the trough. They see us as being down there for more money. When kids go down and parents go down and they talk about "We don't have these programs anymore" and I think Ian Atkins at Glencoe put it very, very well, "I had all these programs, I had all these experiences what about the next kids who are coming along? They won't have it. And I don't think that's fair." That's a different message. Legislatures really do listen. And so I think that is much more powerful from that perspective.

*So do you think that the rally that we had here in April was a big success for what it was?*

I think it was a great indication of the fact that there are wonderful things that are happening in our schools. And it is really through kids and their ability to demonstrate, whether through performances or activities. What was it? Century's dance team finishing with a trophy this year in the OSAA competition. Those are the little things that breed in street and core in the school. Those are the things that build a power on the part of teachers, feeling that they have been successful, because look at the kids. So I think from a conceptual viewpoint that it was great. I think it was late in the year, the turn out was a little smaller than I think we all had hoped for. But those that were here thoroughly enjoyed it. I know I am putting together a letter to the Argus, that I hope to send Wednesday morning, where I talk about the fact that I am really sorry that we had to reduce days but oh by the way, here are some things that happened in the school year because kids and students and parents and staff members have continued to work really hard on student success. And I think we see that across the board.

*How did you feel when a lot of angry parents had called in and stated asking for you to resign? I know that they had asked you to resign once before.*

That was a long time ago. That was in '96 when we did the boundaries for this school and I was the one who was responsible for doing the boundaries. And there were a group of parents meeting at Brown who were pretty angry at the boundaries so they weren't happy with me. So one of the parents made that comment. I think that one of the dilemmas that we had is that is important to find what the cause of the problem is and obviously I become real symbolic and natural person to say maybe it's his fault. I wish that I could that is was. I mean it would be a lot easier for me to be able to say we screwed up and the 15 million dollars that we didn't get from the state is my fault and

that I should resign or you should fire me or do something. But that's not the case and I knew that the situation was getting worse back in two stages. One was a long time ago in October of 2001 and then again this August. Where this August it was pretty obvious to me that the state would not have funds to give us for this next year and that building the budget would be a horrendous project and task. I decide at that point that we need to work knowing that it was going to be difficult to put the best quality budget together that we could, knowing that there was going to be criticism. My job is, I am a very easy target, and I don't have a problem with that. As long as people are willing to think through the issues to find out what the real issues are and the causes are. If you know what the cause of the problem is, you can better craft a solution. Now I think most of our folks, parents, kids, staff, understand that the issue is a state resource issue. And that the solution to the state resource issue is not my resignation. But other actions would need to occur. So I am hopeful that we are going to see that.

*Do you think our school was justified in changing our JagFest theme from USO to Austin Powers because of the war in Iraq?*

I am unfamiliar with that.

*Do you think that century has an apathy towards the school itself and spirit and support for sports?*

You know that I have watched this school for the past years. New schools always take a while to really build up to have the success that becomes the rallying points. I think that Phil Barnekoff and Dawn Montgomery have both done a wonderful job to build that into the school. I think that from everything I've been able to see the dilemma has been that a lot of the school spirit has come through the efforts of the athletic programs. When I look at the fact that Century still hasn't had the same successes that Glencoe and Hilhi has had. We're going to see the same thing happen for Liberty. Liberty is going to be five to ten years away from having any true successes to be able to say, "Oh boy this is our niche and were going to move on that." From an academic viewpoint this school has done very well. We have a number of very fine programs here. Wonderful teachers who have done a wonderful job in building great programs here. Your class in AP History is just absolutely one of the shining examples of what goes on in the school. The kind of feed back that we have had from the projects that Mrs. Duyckink has had kids do. Keith Allen's programs with the television programs. The music programs in this school... the drama programs have experienced great success. I think that the school has developed some niches over time. The school will continue to grow in that way. The first few years of the school are always difficult because there is no history, no background. I know that Barnekoff when he started the school that was one of his goals, to try to build some sense of community. I think it's here. I really do.

*What is one of the positive things to come out of Century this year?*

The drama program in particular. The awards that were given. I haven't heard yet but there was a jazz band that apparently went and competed in a competition. Great music and drama programs. Absolutely fantastic. I think that the girls Dance Team coming home with the first OSAA trophy is wonderful. That's a step in the right direction. I believe that the overall school community in art, in particular, has been very positive.

The art fair that you folks put on here is just wonderful. And those would be the highlights for me. I have to admit Kids from Keith Allen's class have come out and interviewed me have all done a remarkable job. You are doing a remarkable job right now in asking me questions. I tend to think there is... Knowledge to me is not something that is a paper and pen issue. Knowledge is application and demonstrated skill. And it's the experience that most the Century teachers try to have the students do is what you are doing right now. You need to take what's there and translate it into an application.

*How have you seen the morale among the staff and student this past year with the cut days etc?*

On a scale of one to ten, it's probably been a -3. Across the district, I think that most people... The morale in our district is very low right now. And surprising ling last June I met with my administrative team and the first thing that we put down as a goal was morale. We knew back then that it was going to be difficult and got even worse as the year wore on. And I'll be the first to admit that the challenge we have going into next year is to somehow rebuild those bridges and feelings with kids, teachers, staff and parents. I think that there has been a sense that we have been beat up a lot. And every one is feeling pretty beat up.

*How does this school year compare to others that you've witnessed?*

This has been my most depressing school year ever, personally. Very unrewarding, very unfulfilled. I'm watching programs in our district that I was either directly or indirectly involved in getting started. I have been in the district since 1978 as a junior high Principal, and many other experiences. I am just disheartened by the fact that the year has been so difficult and the lack of resources. You know that the reason that all of us went into the business is to see good things happen for kids. And when we don't have the resources and they are pulling away and changing the delivery systems in a way that hurts programs and systems, its not been fun. The only light that I see at the end of the tunnel is that by going through this kind of entrenchment I am hopeful that as we slowly build back and add back that we will put in place those mechanisms that will let us make really smart decisions for the future. One of the reasons that we are in the difficulty that we are in right now is that we have always looked at solving problems when we had money by spending it on more people. Maybe that is not the answer. 80% of our budget right now is people cost. And that's huge compared to other organizations, absolutely huge. And is there a different way of delivering the things that we are doing? Should we be using more technology to deliver some of our programs to students? Is there a different way to provide for learning experiences in high schoolers, be it perhaps larger lecture areas for some subjects and break out sections that are much smaller? Symposiums, that sort of collegiate model. I think that we need to be doing things differently, And maybe the opportunity to do that? The year has been very, very difficult. I know that for everyone that no one feels fulfilled at this point. At least as far as I can tell.

*Do you agree with Kulongowski's plan of not raising general income taxes, trying to get the people voting to start their own initiatives, so as to throw a positive light on government?*

I think that his is apolitical strategy, and I appreciate that. It could be very successful, if it doesn't take five years. If it is something that can happen in a year or two then the governor is doing the exact right thing, and have the mass of voters and people in the state say we need a sales tax, that reduced property taxes and reduces income taxes. However if that ground swell doesn't appear in the near future then we need to do something. It was a republican governor back in the early 80's who did do a surcharge on income tax that brought us out of a very difficult economic time. I think that Gov. Kulongowski can't have his cake and eat it to. At some point he's going to have to bite the bullet and make a decision, and I think that they are going to do things that are more modest than more of a reform/. But from a political viewpoint, he's right. You need to have the folks out there, the voters, be willing to do that. There is a recent poll that is just out right now that put I think a yes vote on a sales tax by 40%. It's a poll its not exact, but it's in the right direction. We need to do some thing that changes what we are doing.

*Do you feel that the extra one billion that Kulongowski has to cut from his budget is going to greatly effect HSD and Century High School?*

The budget that we are building for next year is based on an estimate right now of 4.8 billion for k-12 schools for the next two years. I think that it is a reasonable number. I believe that it is going to be there on paper when the legislation finishes. So I feel good about doing that. Will the money next year, the decline we saw this year repeat itself next year? I'm worried about that. I really am. And if it does then we need to have a strategy, and I think we do. Not reducing days but using the accrual process that we were able to use taking money out of 2004-2005. Because once we start the school year next year, like we did this year if the revenue in September is down again, and December again and there is no back flow from the state then we're really going to be in a world of hurt. Cutting staff midway through the year is not going to work. We can't do that. It's too disruptive.