

Interview with William Snyder  
Interviewer: Unknown  
1972

**A:** ...And at that time I was on the Ways and Means Committee as a freshman and was studying all the financial data of all the schools. And it appeared, at least from a financial standpoint, that probably Purdue or Indiana University would be the two most likely from a financial standpoint, and a financial commitment, to do the job here in Evansville. After we got into it a little bit, we finally succeeded in getting the bill through; there seemed to be some reluctance for either one of them to come in here without some statement of policy from Evansville College at that time. And Indiana State wasn't of that theory. They were willing and available and were ready and wanting to. go approach was made to them through the community by com— muni ty leaders, and they readily accepted and immediately then the groups here began to put money together and purchased the land on the West Side, which T think was a very fine thing. I think that's a beautiful setting, and this is the reason, I think, that between the two of them there was a change.

**Q:** Well, first of all, we want to ask what obstacles had to be overcome in the General Assembly in introducing legislation for establishing public higher education in Evansville.

**A:** ...Well, when you do anything of this magnitude, certainly you try and do a background data to find out if there was really a need. And prior to going to the Assembly, I had been quite actively involved in various aspects of political work and legislation and certainly as T began to study the school problems, it became quite obvious that something needed to be done for Evansville, and I thought we were a community in size that it could be clone. And so, as I began to talk about it, though, I found out that normally what you would expect to anticipate, I ran into a lot of public sentiment for Evansville College, which had been here for some time. And people were rather reluctant to say, you know, I think you should go ahead or not. So, I studied the number of students in the area, the number of students that were leaving the area, the financial aspects of Evansville College versus the state schools and finally concluded in my own mind at least that there was a need, and so then I wrote a bill. I had the law makers help me write a bill, the attorneys, and the first obstacle T ran into was to get someone to co-sponsor that bill with me. And being a freshman legislator, I did have the advantage of being to the State House many, many times while the legislature was in session, so I persuaded one of the fellows who was from Evansville, who was Representative Toon, at that time to go on the bill with me to cosponsor it. And we proceeded to get the bill into the open. One of the other strenuous things that you overcome then in a community the size of Evansville where you have only had one school, then you find the difficult job of conditioning the public that there really is a need; and we had that obstacle because certainly those who were in opposition to the bill at that time, which think you could normally say you would expect to happen, was Evansville College. They began to organize the groups and the Chamber of Commerce and many other groups at that time came up to discuss with me the bill. But we felt we were right, and I think time has proven that we were right. But I think since then those people have changed their minds, and I think they now see not only the necessity for the school, but I think they see the economic value of it because it has a tremendous impact on the community. So those were some of the things we had to overcome.

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**Q:** Was there any opposition from the larger universities? Pressure put on by the Legislature about your coming to Evansville.

**A:** I really couldn't say there weren't any in opposition to it. I think there was some, very, very much of a doubting standpoint, realizing you take the schools at that time and the unique position as I found myself as a freshman legislator of being on the Ways and Means Committee and was in fact the sub chairman of all finances at that time. Here you have a freshman legislator studying the economic conditions, and you have the large schools like the University of Indiana at that time coming in for large sums of money for operation. They were wanting to establish a new library at that time. You have Purdue with its large facilities, all striving to get money to continue their operations and to do the expansion. So, you don't find them with the open arms that you would think or anticipate because they can see a further demand or drain on their expenditures, not only to maintain the existing facilities but to go out and plan the new ones, so we did not find real open arms in either of those areas. And if you read the original bill, you will find out that we did charge the University of Indiana and Purdue to try and establish this, but I would say that they accepted it with much reluctance.

**Q:** What was the feeling among the Evansville people, well, first of all let's go to this question. How did you feel, what need did you see, and what needs did you want to meet with public higher education in Evansville?

**A:** All right. You begin to look at the number of students. You would have to at that time look back and see the number of people with what we might say in the metropolitan Evansville area, that were leaving the community, students who were going out-of-town to let's say Bloomington, Wisconsin, other schools, to pursue their education. And you have to first ask yourself, why were they leaving the community? Was it economics or was it because they could not get the things, they so desired in Evansville? And so, I think it is two prong. One, I believe there was some that would fall into the category of financial because even with having to pay the additional living quarters of moving out-of-town, many of them found it was still cheaper than trying to go to Evansville College. Secondly, I think there was not the curriculum that some of them desired or even the expanding of the college activities in itself were lacking, and so it was my opinion at that time that there needed to be additional opportunities provided the students, I think, a choice more than anything, and I think this in itself was enough for to pursue, to go on with pursuing of the school.

**Q:** And in 1965, this was the first time any legislation had been passed to start public higher education in Evansville?

**A:** Yes, it was the first time it would pass but not the first time it had been tried, and I did not know this. You go, I might say in the form of a lobbyist, which I had done for some time for taxes and other property items that we were working on, and then too, you get on the inside so to speak and there are many things that you miss because you have just a short period of time in a session, and you are following thousands of bills and thousands of activities. So, I missed the fact that there had been bills proposed before, but they would never get out of committee. After I got into this, a very dear friend here in the community came to me, which was Bob Flynn, who is the political writer as you gentlemen probably have met Mr. Flynn or at least know of him, Mr. Flynn who does the political writing came to me and he said "Are you really serious or is this a joke?" And I said, "No, I am very serious about it." And

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he said, "If you are really serious about this, I will help you, but do you know that there have been bills tried in the past and failed?" So, I checked into it, and there had been bills, and due to influences and pressures, those bills had died, or they had never got started. So, this was not the first time. But it was the first time anyone has been successful in getting a bill of it passed on the floor.

**Q:** Was it just the right time in '65 or what about it?

**A:** Well, I think there is, you have to at least have a determination when you go there. And once you make up your mind what bills you are going to carry, and if you do your planning and hard work proper, I think you can get it done. And one of the things that we did immediately upon discovering that this wasn't a most popular approach to take, I then set up through the radio, not through the TV, at least, but through the radio, and a phone-in system. I came back on weekends. I then sent out a whole series of programs, questionnaires, and then through Flynn I had my phone numbers published at the House. I had additional lines put in; we manned them to try and get public opinion in the community as to, were we within our rights or weren't we. And we did not expect the results. We couldn't man the phones, they were overcome. We couldn't even handle the phone calls. Then I held an open forum meeting in the community. I believe that was held at the courthouse. I think so at that time. I know it was at the Courthouse, and hundreds of people. And then an interesting thing, our now mayor, I think, conducted some meetings. (It is in those notes; I am not sure where we might find it...He conducted; he was then an attorney. He conducted a meeting, and I am not sure which group, but all groups then were contacted, and we began to get a feeling as to what the community really wanted, and by that, I think, were able to go ahead and work the bill through.

**Q:** At those public meetings the people were against this?

**A:** Yes, we found some people who were opposed. I think, in anything that you do, you are never, find total agreement but, yes, if my memory serves me correct, there were about four or five people who were against it. Outwardly spoken against it. Now there were groups who were...and I think rightly so...were greatly concerned about what would happen to the university (University of Evansville) at that time. There were comments made that they would fall into financial problems because the students would be leaving to go to the other school; there would be a drain of the students off. And I think on the contrary that has not happened. I think the whole thing is contrary to that because they have advanced...they have built. They have expanded, and I think it has been good for them. I think it has been good for the total community, because if my memory serves me correct, and you might have to correct me, they have updated their curriculum. I think they have added things to their programming that has made them more readily available to the community, as a whole. I think they have added many new programs since this college came into being.

**Q:** Just one question : one of the big questions now is separation. When this whole thing started, when the discussions were underway in 1965, was there any discussion about how long it might take before separation was considered?

**A:** Well, I quoted some figures, and I couldn't find them, and I will be very truthful, I haven't had time to go through that book this morning. I quoted some figures as to what I thought the attendance would be at this college on a year-to-year basis, and I believe I said (I was trying to find these figures). So now

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from memory, in 1975 it was my opinion at that time we would have 3,000 students on campus. And that was based on the number of people that were leaving the community, the anticipated growth in the community, the industrial growth that we anticipated. And we felt that as soon as...this was discussed a little bit...as soon as we felt that it had reached a size that it should be separated. And I tell you I have been reading and Dr. Rice has been sending me the material which I have asked him to send me, and I am all for the separation. Now I don't know if other people are or not. So, I am speaking out here and maybe other people are not, but I do feel that there needs to be an independence. The community is large enough to support it. I think it is needed, and I firmly believe that we can expect nothing but just spectacular growth at this school. Your layout is going to dictate it, the demands are going to require it, so why not separation? I will ask it in that fashion, why not?

**Q:** You think it is forthcoming in four or five years?

**A:** Yes, I think, I tell you as I said before, in getting anything through it requires a lot of hard work, diligence, and faith that what you are doing is correct, and I would say to pursue separation will require the same diligent efforts. Basically, because you send a group of people, you elect them and under our processes of government, many, many times too, a new group, who are going up there every four years, and you have no background of where you can update these people. You are always trying to update them to the future, and you have very little time to give them the background as to the reasons for the school, so you have to work hard at it. You have to contact many groups and you have to have a good story to tell to the people. And you have to pursue it diligently, and if you do that, I think the school will be separated because you are influencing people, who are dealing with a multitude of problems at the State House, and you just have to get the story to them. Now I have been reading with interest Dr. Kessler's comments, and others comments about study groups and etcetera. Those are important, and I am sure the study groups are necessary, but we can study a subject to death, you know. But I don't think that is really required. I think, action speaks much louder, and I think just looking at the campus if I may say so, in its very beginning stages now, is evidence to me of the fact and separation, I think, is a must.

**Q:** Do you know, have there been any economic impact studies done by the Chamber of Commerce or somebody about the University and its success in the community?

**A:** Not that I am aware of at this time. And boy, I wish I could remember the figures, but did know per student what that impact was in Bloomington and others at that time, and I have to apologize to you that I haven't had a chance to read this book. It seems like to me that impact was something like \$1,200 to \$1,500 per student within the community. I am talking all the services, your cleaning, your food, and I imagine, today that that would be a low figure, and I would hope that someone would consider the impact. Because as industry, or as a fellow who is from industry and has spent all of his life in the industry side, certainly I...when we were thinking of the school, that was foremost important in my mind as we went along...the impact it would have on the community from an economic standpoint because growth in a community just had to happen. So, I would hope that maybe someone has looked at that because it is tremendous. A lot more than I think we really realize. Because most of us, when we come here as students, they buy clothes, cars and automobiles and gas. Oh yes, there are so many things. You know, you look at Purdue and I have been most critical of Purdue and

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Indiana, only from a standpoint of size. You get so large, and there is nothing wrong with bigness. A lot of people criticize it, but in a city the size of Bloomington or Lafayette, I said, "100k, there is room for additional schools' growth. Let's don't put all that growth in that community, where you know size in itself then becomes the factor that causes it to come crashing down on the community's ears so to speak. Let's divide it, and one of my strong arguments was : look, southern Indiana can support a school, it can be self— supporting, and that is what you are asking is can it be self—supporting. And that is what you are asking, and I say it could be and my criticism has been that we continue to put money in something that already by its own weight is almost unbearable. Let's spend it someplace else. Now Purdue has one up here that they have located. Now I will try and get my bearings; I believe it is on 421 and where the toll road, the Indiana toll road crosses. They have an extension there, I believe.

**Q:** Calumet?

**A:** No, it is not Calumet. I would say it is this side of Michigan City about 9-12 miles. It is on the junction of 421 and the under-pass of the toll road, the Indiana toll road, and I don't think it has the potential of growth at all that Evansville has. And I go by there and see this campus, and I see this one, and there is just no resemblance. You see there is a couple of things I think that just has all the advantages in the world. You take the community a size where 160,000 thousand, I guess it just depends on whose census you are listening to, but you have coming into this community good air service. I think eventually with Highway 41 and the 62, you are going to have transportation. This is one problem, I think, we have to get resolved. Evansville yet does not have the egress and ingress in and out of the community that I think it needs to have, but it is getting there. But it has all the potentials...you have the beautiful river; you have a beautiful setting out there. You at least have fine roads getting out there from the West Side; you have fine land. It is rolling hills; it is laid out beautifully. It is landscaped wonderfully. I think you have everything going for you, and the population is here. When you take the metropolitan area, there is a large growth of people you can pull from, and students; and I don't know what, I'll ask this question what is the population of the school out there right now?

**Q:** 2,600.

**A:** All right! Who as I said one time, whoever has in his lifetime an opportunity to go there and bring a school into creation, you know? You can go up and work on taxes anytime. Those are going to be with us until death, so you have a lot of accomplishments in life, and my secretary evidently thought it was a nice thing. And I didn't realize she had kept the file until she retired. She told me when I wanted it; I could have it. so, excuse me, go ahead.

**Q:** I was just wondering in the early talks like the public talks you had at the Courthouse and things like that, were there people in from say communities like Mt. Vernon, Boonville, Princeton, some of these outlying areas. Did they share at all in discussing the potential or opposing or anything?

**A:** There were, I wouldn't say, there were people who came to those meetings. I received letters from people out of those communities, because of the area, Legislators who were going back home and who would be questioned about certain things that might involve them. And from these communities I did get several letters, but not the degree that you probably would think that you should get. The public is a peculiar thing. You may take an issue, and if you would read through this book, you can take an issue

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such as college and you can stir up this community pretty good about it. Because at that time with only one school, you were bound, you just couldn't fail to get a lot of what shall I say comments. Yet, people from the surrounding communities, because not affected directly, it is very, very difficult to get a feeling for them. You have to be a legislator to understand it. You can sit up there and you can be talking about millions of dollars of taxes, and the papers will be full of it, and you may get one or two letters from the whole state saying to you, you know, you ought to do this or that. And you sit up there in awe, wondering why in God's name people aren't concerned more about it. So, to answer your question, very few except the letter of comment that would come from Princeton. I remember that I had two or three because they were sending people out of this community, and these who were specifically involved let me know that they would certainly appreciate a college in Evansville where they could drive back and forth, see, that is something that a lot of people have missed. Now they can't drive to Bloomington from this surrounding area and I had a map laid out, but you take Princeton, Boonville, well, people can drive back and forth; we are very mobile. And I will bet that is what is going on. I don't even know.

**Q:** Oh yes, Mt. Vernon, New Harmony...

**A:** Okay. Areas that see, that there are hard to realize the potential of it until you are in, but you will get comments from them but not to the degree that you and I who could be vitally interested in it would think it would have. But in Evansville proper, I can tell you we had plenty.

**Q:** I think you just had to set back and...

**A:** Well, I think it was a subject that because of the involvement of several organizations, you got to realize you have one college in the community. And so, what do they do when they pull their Board together? They try to get all the prominent citizens in the community on that Board. You or anyone else would do it. It is normal. So, when you talk about a second one, you are just not touching the University of Evansville or Evansville College, but you are touching the whole community's involvement and so it was hard for them to understand that there could be. And I am not critical of it. I think it is human nature. If you or I, my security is threatened, we are pretty well going to rise up in arms. Let's face it.

**Q:** With all those alumni sitting around...

**A:** Well, it is an interesting thing. I believe Flynn, and I believe there was one other lady who did a story. I only have one son, at that time, and he was attending Anderson College. And one of the comments that was thrown at me was, "if you are so hot, at placing a school locally, we are assuming that your son is going to attend it." Well, that is a loaded question, coming from way out in left field, you know. You can sense it, so you have to be very honest and frank and answer. But as I am sure you young people know, Anderson College is a church supported school, and my family has belonged and is involved with the church and I am on the Board there and so I very frankly said, "no." And at least the first year I am dedicated to sending, him, the first year, and then he will have I think as a sophomore; he is old enough at that time to make up his own mind, and so help me, he finished the first year and came right out of the school, and would you believe, where he went? Evansville College. I got a lot of ribbing over this. He did, though, and it was his own decision. It wasn't anything...

**Q:** Sounds good to me. I would vote for it.