

Jessica Laing: This is Jessica Laing and Vanessa Warkentin interviewing Carolyn Ortman on May 16, 2003

Jessica Laing: What is your background regarding the School District and what has been your involvement or role with Century during the school year?

Carolyn Ortman: I have been a school board member on the unified school district for six years and I was an elementary Hillsboro Elementary board member prior to that for five years. So that's my official capacity with the school district. My unofficial capacity is I co-chair citizens for schools which is the parent and community support group that supports schools in the Hillsboro public schools. My involvement with Century has been, well as a Board member, you know over seeing the various programs, policies, schedules that all of the schools have. And most recently we had, we held our Citizens for Schools Rally at Century High School, where Century was the host school for all the schools in the district.

Vanessa Warkentin: And can you explain exactly what the rally was?

Carolyn Ortman: I have a very firm belief that all students have the opportunity to be successful and many of our students are being incredibly successful and experiencing great academic strides, great honors and great achievements everyday in each of our schools. And the rally was an opportunity to say that in the midst of all of the budget crisis in the state in the midst of all the problems that we are facing there are still very good things happening and we need to honor those successes. If all we ever talk about is the negative that is what we will concentrate on. So the rally was a way to bring state policy makers, to bring local policy makers, to bring parents and students together to say 'look at the great things that are happening in each and every one of our schools.

Jessica Laing: In general, how does this year with the school district compare with others you've experienced?

Carolyn Ortman: Are you comparing, you want me to compare the year, how does this year compare with other years? Okay. This year has been a year like no other. Last May 2002, the budget committee made some very difficult decisions and cut over \$10 million dollars from the budget that has a direct impact on both staff and students in this district. In addition to that, we have cut 17 days, to balance the budget. The state, so far, and it's May 16 has given us \$15 million dollars less this year than what they told us they were going to. And the recent revenue forecast, that was just released this week, has a whole, about three times bigger than what they predicted again. So I don't think that we're done seeing cuts. Our district will be, because as you know, next Friday is the last day of school for us. It's been a year filled with a lot of turmoil, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of anxious feelings and not one that I have to ever go through again.

Vanessa Warkentin: How would you describe morale among administration this year?

Carolyn Ortman: Administration or staff? Okay. Administration I believe feels very pressed there's a feeling that if you didn't have administration that all of our problems would be taken care of because there would be more money. And the percentage of money that goes to administration is incredibly small. If we got rid of all our administrators, that wouldn't solve the problem. Their morale is, they're looking, trying to stay positive. They're trying to look for the good things that are happening and trying to provide good things. Staff I think it goes high and low and it depends on the individual. But as a whole I don't think anybody's morale is very good. From the superintendent to the board to everybody. We, I mean, I'm not sure it's morale, but we all are depressed about what's happening. We're all searching for the right answers. I don't think that they feel very good right now.

Jessica Laing: Who are some key people that really made a difference in the school district this year and what have they done?

Carolyn Ortman: Some of the things that have been done this year, I'm guessing by the tone of the question you're looking for positive things? But sometimes it's negative things too. I think that, that's a really hard question. There are a lot of people who have done, key people who have done things this year. We have an individual at the district office who is responsible to over see all of the contract talks for the District. That's Mike Furr. That's a thankless job. He's been involved in teacher contract talks with a whole team of people. Now he's involved in classified contract talks. So it would be all your custodians, your bus drivers, secretaries, that kind of thing. That's a pretty hard job in the midst of not having any money with which to bargain with. So I think that he's done an outstanding job of trying to be equitable. I think that the teacher's union has made some pretty heavy hits against administration and against the board about some of the decisions that we've made. They would consider those in key and positive and I would say that those haven't always been key and positive. But they have been a big part of this year. I think that, we have somebody in our district named Steve Callaway, who is the director of communications and it's been his responsibility to try and communicate all of this mess that's been happening. That's a pretty tough job. He's the one that gets to field all the phone calls. I think that's pretty hard. And I would like to say that some of the Board members have been working pretty hard behind the scenes trying to get more money for schools. That's not a very public thing but trying to chore up and provide more opportunities with more money.

Vanessa Warkentin: What do you think that Century is known for in the community of Hillsboro?

Carolyn Ortman: A technology school. I think it's known for being the biggest in the state. So there for the biggest in terms of population. It's known for it's very crowded classrooms and hallways. I hear that a lot. I even asked one of our senators if the Century hallway would be declared a road so that we could get transportation money because your hallways are unbelievable at passing time. It's known for having a little bit more enthusiasm at graduations than maybe some people would like to see. It's a little bit

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boisterous and we've had a few people got, get hit with some of the balls that have been thrown during the Century graduation. So I'm not sure that's a great tradition, but you own it. And I think that you have been really known for a new level of high schools in the state. There's you know, you're TV program, that gets talked about a lot. Just some of the inventive and the unique things that happen here.

Jessica Laing: How did you come up cutting 17 days as a solution with the budget crisis?

Carolyn Ortman: That was a really hard decision. Last year as I had said before, when we began to look at the budget picture and we knew we had to cut. And we cut just about \$10 million dollars. And there was a decision that was made, I wasn't in favor of the decision, but once it passes then it's my responsibility to support it. I felt like we should have cut another \$5 million on top of that. It would have been a really hard thing to do at that time, but \$5 million dollars would have restored 11 approximately 11 to 12 days, if it would have been pure into the classroom dollars. And the reason I felt uncomfortable with only making the \$10 million in cuts was because we were having these slides in each quarter's economic forecast from the state and it didn't appear that things were turning around. So why would we bank on that? And as we all know now it hasn't turned around. It has gotten worse faster than most people thought it would and even faster than I thought it would. So the decision was made once we got into funding when we'd started getting the information basically by November that the money was not going to be there. The Board had a big decision to make, do we take and lay off a bunch of staff in November or December or at the semester or the trimester whichever each school was on? And we looked at; we actually did a run of what that would look like. Every students schedule in every school in this district would be changed. Teachers would no longer be at the same school because once you lay off one teacher if somebody else wants that position then they get moved from one school to the next to cover. And so staff would change buildings, you know students would change classes, students would change teachers that they don't even know. And that seems like a pretty excessive hit in the middle of a school year. We could have cut sports and activities but that's less than a \$3 million dollar line item for every sport and activity in this whole district. So \$3 million dollars was not going to resolve the problems. And I am firm believer that all of those kinds if things are the things that help students connect to their schools and their communities and to the process of learning. So there was just two solutions: cut days or cut staff. And mid-year I don't think that's a very positive solution.

Vanessa Warkentin: What do you think has been and will be the impact of the national coverage that Hillsboro Schools have received this year?

Carolyn Ortman: Well I am going to choose to assume that it will be positive. I'm going to choose to believe, and work to believe, not just believe it, but work to make it be a way to let people know the extent of the problem. This is not just a Hillsboro problem, this is a state problem. And I'm hoping and you know, lobbying for the fact that our policy makers in Salem to do what it is they need to do. And they'll recognize that not only schools but all kinds of essential services in this state are being affected in ways that affect our very

core of living. So I'm hoping that it will have the same cattalos that it had in Portland and that is their community i.e. their business leaders, their city and their county came together and said 'we have to come up with a solution' and I'm hoping either our county leaders will step up and help be part of the solution not just wait for somebody else to solve it.

Jessica Laing: If you could change anything about this year, what would it be?

Carolyn Ortman: I would have cut more money in last years budget so that we wouldn't have had to cut so many school days. This, and I think that, I haven't heard you ask it yet and I'll just bring it up, but I know there's been a great deal of discussion about the ULP, the Unfair Labor Practice. And this school is a little bit more isolated from that because your teachers did vote to do a waiver and so you have had a consistent schedule. That is not a decision that I would have changed, I might have done it a little differently, but I still believe that all students deserve multiple opportunities to experience a lot of different classes and a lot of different activities.

Vanessa Warkentin: So do you think that Century made that right choice in waiving the [schedule]?

Carolyn Ortman: Yes I do. And the reason I think that is your staff feels very strongly about the model that they had. That provided not only more opportunities for you as students, but also provided less classes at one time. I think there's some value in that, that you don't have eight subjects at one time to study every night for. And are there problems with it? Yeah, there's problems with every schedule. But I believe that when your staff can buy into it so intensely and when the Century students are familiar with it, you've all been on it for a long time, change from one year to the next and then back again would be very difficult. So I think that they made a very good decision and I applaud them for that. That was not an easy decision and I recognize that but I, I think they made a very good decision not only for them as staff but for you as students.

Jessica Laing: What were your feelings when measure 28 didn't pass?

Carolyn Ortman: One of the things that I stay involved with is I do a lot of lobbying in Salem on behalf of the Hillsboro School District, and I do that as a volunteer and I don't get paid for that. And so I stay in pretty close touch to the legislative process and what's happening. All of the polls from the day that it came out of Salem as measure that was going to be on the ballot, as soon as the legislature started talking badly about it, none of the polls indicated that it would pass. I was very sad that it didn't, but I wasn't surprised, I didn't expect it to pass. I believe that there is a feeling in the state if you send your money to Salem you don't know what's going to happen to it and it's really one of those very few ways that people in the state have a way to say 'wait a minute we don't like what's going on'. None of that money was dedicated to schools, none of it was dedicated to any specific program. And I, I have some feelings on how our local community might have voted if the money would have been kept here, but it wasn't. So I'm not surprised.

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Vanessa Warkentin: How have the budget issues affected you directly?

Carolyn Ortman: I'm not sleeping well. I still have a child in the Hillsboro School District. And so her days are being cut, just like everybody else. Personally I feel a great gill of anxiety about the fact that when we vote to cut days that we are voting to take pay out of all of our staff's personal lives and their budgets and their families. And I understand what that means. I'm not insulated from that. That happens in my own household as well. My husband is not employed by the School District, but we've had the same kinds of things happen in our own personal budget and I understand what that means. And I understand what it means to a single parent who depends on all the money and so there's been a great deal of soul searching of is there any other way that we can do this? Is there any other way that we can find money to keep these programs and keep them whole? Is there any other way that my own child won't be affected? And I would never keep a program just because she likes it, I mean her things that she likes are getting cut just like everybody else. And so we're impacted in that we need to provide additional opportunities of learning for her this summer so that she doesn't get behind. In all ways the everybody else feels it, I just, I'm there too. But I had to help make that decision, and that was a pretty hard decision. I get hammered a little but in the grocery store from people who want to know why. From people who say that decision was not a good decision, that we didn't make it with good information. But the reality is that, we've had hours and hours, we've had more meetings this year than I can remember in a long time, and we have had so much, the board has requested so much in paperwork, and budget information and program information so that we could really look and make sure that we were doing what it is that we needed to do and make the right decisions.

Jessica Laing: Have you ever regretted the decision in any way?

Carolyn Ortman: I regretted that we had to make it. Being a Board member requires a responsibility that sometimes is difficult. I have a responsibility legally to make sure that this District is not in the red at the end of every fiscal year and our fiscal year ends on June 30th. That means that I have to have one dollar more than what I spent in the bank. And this year it didn't look, we aren't getting it. We aren't getting at least, at least \$15 million dollars that was committed to us. It's like your dad not getting you know, a third of their pay check. You have to make some hard decisions. And somewhere we had to balance that budget. So what I have regretted, I have regretted that we had to do it, but my fiscal responsibilities said I had to do something. Every school district in this state is doing something their cutting days, their cutting teachers or their using up all of their reserve money, all of them. The problem with Hillsboro, with our high growth that we have had, we've been using our reserve money for the last two years. We didn't have any extras to cushion us to return the \$15 million dollars this year.

Vanessa Warkentin: What re your feelings on the cut back of programs and/or classes?

Carolyn Ortman: Are you talking about proposed for next year? Well they stink! The, the cutbacks that have been proposed, I'm going to have some personal opinions about things that shouldn't be cut. I don't want to see class size go up. I don't want to see us lose activities. I don't want to see us lose academics and sports. I don't want to see us lose really good quality staff. But at some point, if you're going to get less money, and the amount of money that is being proposed, which I don't even know if they have enough money to give us that much, is less than what we got in 1999. You know that's a pretty harsh reality when you think about it. So I don't like the cutbacks, but I do think that where we can minimize cuts so that they aren't felt, we've done all of those things such as we've cut our maintenance, at some point we're going to have to do maintenance, at some point you can't just not do it. But if we can use it to get through, that's a good place, and at some point, it almost feels like, instead of making every program become very luke warm that we need to get rid of a whole program and really spend good quality time and money on the things that are left. So my big hit if we only have academics and we don't have athletics and activities, there's too much research that says that students who are involved in athletics, in band, choir some of those other kinds of activities, leadership programs where you have to perform and present, similar to what you guys are having to do today, you have to step up to the plate and you can't just keep practicing, you are actually putting forth the work that you've done, that will help you in a number of ways. You become better students, you get better grades, you're connected, you tend to look at your community in a little different view, you do more community service. Students such as that tend to go on and look for other opportunities in life i.e. college, trade schools, those kinds of things. They don't give up as easily. There is incredible value in maintaining those programs. So I believe very strongly that we have to have very strong and very effective programs to help build those core classes.

Jessica Laing: In your opinion who has been affected the worse buy the problems that have occurred this year?

Carolyn Ortman: The students. You have 17 days less of class and it's not totally 17 days less of class because some of those come out of teacher days. You have teachers who are stressed, you have classified employees who are stressed, you have administration who is trying to figure out what is going on you have parents who are worried about your education, you have a community who worry, I'm sure that many seniors are concerned you know what are the colleges going to say about my shortened school year, what's you know this and that? And education is all about one thing, it's about providing that opportunity for students and all of these other people have a role. But it's all about the students. And so the fact that is affects you the worse is probably, makes sense, but it's the hardest to deal with, because you don't get to be sophomores juniors and seniors again, hopefully. Hopefully you don't want to do that again, but so you get part of your year cut that shouldn't have had to been cut.

Vanessa Warkentin: So there's been rumors, I've heard rumors that there is going to be extra school days next year, is that going to happen?

Carolyn Ortman: If the state gave us a whole lot of money. The Board is trying, the Board and the budget committee is trying to keep the same number of days, not as this year but as last year. So there is a move, extra as compared to this year, but not extra as compared to a traditional year.

Jessica Laing: What kind of precedent do you think this school year will set for future years?

Carolyn Ortman: In two ways. One is, hopefully we will look back and, in this district, we will say, we're going to have to get past this year, but and say these are the things that worked, these are the things that didn't work and begin to learn from those situations. If you go through something and it's awful and you don't learn anything from it, it's even worse, than learning from it and helping to make sure you don't repeat those same mistakes or the same situations again. So I think that is will help us to sit down and have better communication. And I'm hoping that at the state level precedent that we never want to get to the point where we allow students in the state, medically fragile people in the state and as the list goes on, to go through what it was that we went through at this time in 2003.

Vanessa Warkentin: How have the relationships or will the relationships the school board and the staff change?

Carolyn Ortman: I, well, I can only answer that from my perspective. I believe that all of the parties are going to have to set aside some of the differences and, and that includes the School Board. But all the parties are going to have to set aside some of their differences and some of the things that have frustrated us all this year. And we're going to have to come up with an agenda of those things that we believe to be the essential and the core and we are going to have to visit about them in very frank and own open ways. And we're going to have to be honest about what we ultimately believe is the best. Having a difference of opinion is no a bad thing, it's what you do with it that's important. Do you use it to divide? Or do you use it as a source of information to expand your own thinking and to help you to be able to come up with solutions that everybody can mutually buy into, even if you can't buy into the whole of it, you can buy into it in concept and is part. And I think that's the value. I'm thinking that there's going to have to be a lot of setting aside of past hurts and past situations if we really truly believe that students deserve the kind of education that we all say that they do.

Jessica Laing: How does Century differ from other schools?

Carolyn Ortman: You have a staff that has been able to come together and be a very cohesive staff. And from a Board member perspective that's an incredibly valuable thing that I hope that students here really, at some point can appreciate. You have this schedule that nobody else has, where students have more opportunities for classes. You have the newest school in the District in terms of high school. You have a lot of technology available to you, that some of the other students in this District don't have. There's some

things you don't have available to you that others do. But you know when you think about the in health of the world and the options that are available there, you've had some really dynamic opportunities here. The other thing that makes you different is, your still creating your identity in terms of athletics and that's going to be fractured this year when a number of your students move on to Liberty, and your teams will have you redefine, your classes will have to redefine. But I guess I am just add how you are similar is that you're students who have a really bright future if you choose to take it. And you have a staff that's here and very willing and incredibly capable that's willing to help you go above and beyond. Your teacher in this class, she's not just phenomenal, but she is so incredibly respected in the nation for her learning and teaching styles and what she offers. I think of your CHOMP program, your band program, and the incredible dedication of staff who have made that possibility to expand your program. Your Century band came for the Oregon School Board's Conference and performed and received incredible review because of the commitment from the staff done to every student is evident. And so you're different. But you're not so different. You're kids in the 21st century and you're trying to figure out your place and you have staff who are willing to help you try and find it.

Vanessa Warkentin: I think that we have covered everything, do you feel that there's anything that we haven't asked or you would like to say anything else?

Carolyn Ortman: I just feel incredibly honored that I got called to be part of your Century project. This is one of those really unique things that sets Century aside in a very public way. And I would just want to say from my board position that, there are seven people who even though not everybody understands our decision and doesn't understand why we vote the way we do on everything or doesn't always agree that, I would just tell you that we do this because we are incredibly committed to education for the students of Hillsboro. I do know Board members do not receive a paycheck for what we do. We are elected to volunteer. And we do that because, for all of us it's a different reason. And I have very personal reasons as to why I ran for the Board dating back to the education I received as a child and the opportunity to give back. But I would just share with you that even in the midst of all the iciness everybody in this state, students included, have an opportunity to do one of two things: to throw your hands up in despair and say this is no going to work, see I told to nod body cares. Or it's an opportunity to say here is an opportunity for me to get in and be involved. And there are many people who say, 'but my one little voice doesn't matter, it won't be heard' and that's not true. And I liken it to a penny, a penny is one cent, and you see many of them on the ground all the time. And I would contend that a penny picked up, reinforces it's value. And a penny picked up and added together has a lot more value. And when people go and communicate in a very proactive , very honest and positive way, one person after another that continues to say the same message has value. And pretty soon you aren't a penny any more, you become nickel or a dime or a quarter. But I would just, I would encourage students, and I would encourage everybody in our community that their feelings do matter and that they do have a voice and they can use it. And the should use it for things that they have passion about and they should not throw their hands up in despair because that's the thing that will really hurt the most having the discussions and disagreeing isn't the thing that will

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hurt the most. So I encourage you two, especially to be very proactive in whatever you choose to do next year. I know you're a junior, are you a junior too? That you don't just take classes and then go home, but the you really look at what are, what is your role in this community at school, what is your role in your community of Hillsboro. And begin to be proactive, begin to think about where you can effect change. And then go for it. Thank you.

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