

**Oral Memoirs**

**of**

**Mark Lemons**

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Clinton M. Thompson  
May 10, 2017

Development of the Tulsa Medical College:  
An Oral History Project

Schusterman Library  
University of Oklahoma – Tulsa  
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## **Interview History**

The recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) were processed at the Schusterman Library, University of Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: Clinton M. Thompson

Videographer: Alyssa Peterson

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## **Collection/Project Detail**

The Development of the Tulsa Medical College Project was conducted by the Schusterman Library at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa from January 2016 to June 2018. The project focused on the development of the Tulsa Medical College, which later became the OU-TU School of Community Medicine. The project consisted of 28 interviews with former and current employees of the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa.

Mark Lemons worked in the finance department of both the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City and the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. He served many roles, ending his career as Vice President for Administrative Affairs.

Clinton M. Thompson was the first Director of the Tulsa Medical College Library and went on to become the Director of the Robert M. Bird Health Sciences Library at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

Alyssa Peterson was a Medical Librarian at the Schusterman Library.

Jeffrey Wilson was a Graduate Assistant at the Schusterman Library.

Hope Harder was a Library Tech at the Schusterman Library.

Mark Lemons  
Oral History Memoir  
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Clinton M. Thompson  
May 10, 2017  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Also present: Mike Lapolla and Leeland Alexander

Development of the Tulsa Medical College: An Oral History Project

THOMPSON: Today is May 10, 2017. Would you like to introduce yourself?

LEMONS: Yes. My name is Mark Lemons. You said education next?

THOMPSON: Do your education. Right.

LEMONS: Okay. I graduated from Central State University. I took courses on the Norman Campus to, so I'd have a degree in accounting. I went to work at the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus in 1968, June 1968. I worked there until ten years later, ten and a half years later, at which time I transferred to the OU Health Sciences Center as comptroller. I served as comptroller for a number of years and eventually I served as assistant vice president and as vice president for administrative affairs. Now let me back up one second. When I transferred to the Oklahoma City Campus, I transferred to, as director of internal audits. I was director of internal audits and then became comptroller at the Health Sciences Center, and then assistant vice president and then vice president for administrative affairs.

THOMPSON: So, you spent fourteen years at OU's auditing?

LEMONS: No.

THOMPSON: Oh.

LEMONS: Ten years at Norman Campus, about eleven years actually, and when I transferred that included the Health Science Center.

THOMPSON: Oh, okay.

LEMONS: Okay. Because when I originally was hired at Norman, it was as an auditor.

THOMPSON: All right. So, your remembrances of Tulsa out of the Office of Administration and Finance in those early years in the middle seventies coming into the early eighties?

LEMONS: Yes.

THOMPSON: You have any recollections?

LEMONS: I do. Tulsa was looked on as a stepchild, as most people knew. It was always wanting something, more money. I don't think anybody really understood what they [were] doing up here; I mean, the intent. And I think as a whole, the administration, and this is in the seventies, late seventies, early eighties, again a campus that wanted to grow, but they did not have the support, I think in the legislature and possibly on the Norman Campus. The Health Science Center was a little concerned about this campus north. And as far as funding, that's always been an issue. I'm sure it still is, but there was never a line item budget back when I was there for Tulsa. Each year [we] had to break it out and decide based on the appropriations what would go to Tulsa. Some years good and maybe some years not so good.

THOMPSON: Any specific problems or issues that you remember during those first ten years up here?

LEMONS: Funding, funding, funding. You know, that was also the years that we went through furloughs up at the Health Science Center Campus. There were a number of months that anybody that was paid on a monthly basis took two or three days off without pay; and that applied here and, as far as I know, the Norman Campus as well. But, you know, when Tulsa was trying to get going in large part it was on a need to know basis. It was somewhat secretive, at least on that end. The intent was to move from the administration to get as much support as you could, legislative support, quietly, and move forward.

THOMPSON: Now you're talking about the funding, in your mind, because you were right in the midst of all of that, in your mind did Tulsa really drain money from the Oklahoma City Campus? Was that just an illusion? Because it had to be funded because it had been mandated by the legislature to have a Tulsa Campus.

LEMONS: I think, you know, in some respects it was a reduction of funds available for allocation on the Health Science Center. I mean, there was no doubt. Now, did it affect the Health Science Center? I don't think so. I mean, it did in some ways, but it wasn't material. It was insignificant, for the most part—. There was always discussion, budget meetings. Leeland would come down and the dean, whoever that might be at that point, and we'd talk about the

budgets and their allocations. Was it fair? You know, you can make it look the way you want basically.

THOMPSON: Probably the same for every dean at the Health Sciences Center.

LEMONS: Somewhat. You know, and as you know, Marty, as the Practice Plan picked up, the less state appropriations were given them. I mean, the better, the greater that the College of Medicine did, it was only natural that some of that would be pulled to the colleges that did not have a plan. And that was the way it worked. It did especially with the College of Medicine because they were the big revenue generators. So.

THOMPSON: People that you remember during that period of time that were from Tulsa? Or people that you remember that were at the Health Sciences Center that did a lot of work with the people in Tulsa?

LEMONS: Basically it was Gary Smith, David Walters, Bill Thurman, of course, Dr. Halverstadt. Those were the four that I was most aware of.

THOMPSON: That were active—

LEMONS: Active, yes.

THOMPSON: —one way or the other?

LEMONS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Any comments about any of those people? Good, bad, or indifferent? Excluding the room.

LEMONS: Excluding Leeland. No, you've interviewed Dr. Thurman, you know. A great guy. A mover, a shaker. And he would get things done.

THOMPSON: While we're there—people on the Oklahoma City Campus during that period of time that stood out in your mind that you interacted with or that you worked with?

LEMONS: Well, Dr. Thurman, of course, was provost in the middle of that. I mean, that's when it really kicked off. I think David Walters was on his staff for a while. Actually, he was on Dr.—the provost that moved to Washington?

THOMPSON: Stein.

LEMONS: No, Stein was, he went to San Antonio.

THOMPSON: Oh, not Stein. I said Stein.

ALEXANDER: Clayton Rich.

THOMPSON: Clayton Rich.

LEMONS: Clayton Rich, yes.

THOMPSON: I apologize, sir. I apologize.

LEMONS: Clayton was somewhat of a supporter, but not a big supporter. Jay Stein was, he didn't understand the Tulsa Campus. He was not a big fan of the operations up here. And fortunately he was only there a couple years and left.

THOMPSON: Are there deans on the Oklahoma City Campus that you remember working with that you thought did good work on the Oklahoma City Campus as far as their colleges were concerned?

LEMONS: Well, I would have to say all of them. But I would say, you know, nursing program was one that they were wanting to institute up here, and I don't know, I think that was before Dean Fornay—was that her name?

THOMPSON: Um-hm.

LEMONS: Really before her time, the initiation of it.

THOMPSON: Dean Smith, I think, was then.

LEMONS: Carol Sullivan was very supportive of this. And Alisa Lee, I don't know how involved she was, I mean, she would have had to have been to have the programs. But let's see. Medicine. Dentistry was never here. So, I guess that would be it.

THOMPSON: Deans in the College of Medicine that you interacted with that stand out in your mind? Or don't stand out in your mind? If you don't mention them they obviously don't.

LEMONS: I think the first that I worked with was Doug Voth, which was okay. Jerry Vannatta was a great guy. I think he was pro-Tulsa. He was very supportive and very bright guy, and I enjoyed working with him. Dr. Ferretti, of course, was good.

THOMPSON: Probably you were at the Health Sciences Center almost the entire time the Ferrettis were on campus. Because I think they came in the seventies.

LEMONS: And I, it was about '78 when I came to the Health Science Center. '79.

THOMPSON: So, like many of us, grew up with him as a faculty member, and along with his wife. So, you know.

LEMONS: As a side story—can I tell a side story?

THOMPSON: Sure, that's what we've got you here for.

LEMONS: We were, Dr. Ferretti and I were at a meeting and—I think it was Phoenix—and he said, “Would you and your wife like to go on a tour of the area?” And I said, “I don't know. Let me talk to my wife.” Well, we ended up not going. So, you know, no. And then about a week later Dr. Ferretti came over and said, “I need \$50,000 to complete this research.” And I didn't know Dr. Ferretti that well. He was still a researcher. And I said no. And then two weeks later he became provost. (laughter) But we had a very good relationship. But I did question my judgment a couple, more than once.

THOMPSON: Oh, that's an interesting story.

LEMONS: He was a very easy person to work with, for. Not demanding. So. I used to call him boss, and he said, “Don't call me boss.” And I said, “But you're my boss.” And he said, “No, I'm your friend.” And I said, “Okay.”

THOMPSON: Other people at the Health Sciences Center that you worked with through the years? Anything that you—let's start with one. Anything you'd like to say about Gary?

LEMONS: You said friends.

THOMPSON: Oh, okay. (laughter) I'm sorry.

LEMONS: I was saving Gary.

THOMPSON: Oh, okay.

LEMONS: Gary. Well, we went to work the same day on the Norman Campus. Same year, same day. Our birthday's same day. Except he is older than I am. One year exactly. But anyways, we



worked very closely together over the years and very good friends, just, you know, I couldn't ask for a better friend.

THOMPSON: So you basically grew up together then?

LEMONS: We did.

THOMPSON: In the Health Sciences Center and the University itself.

LEMONS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Others that stand out?

LEMONS: On that campus?

THOMPSON: On the Oklahoma City Campus, yeah.

LEMONS: Well, stand out in the sense of supporting the Tulsa campus or being a part of the—

THOMPSON: Or just part of the University at the Health Sciences Center.

LEMONS: Paul Colvalt was, he was budget director and a very good friend and was with the University about thirty years when he retired. There was a number of people, but—

THOMPSON: And we talked at lunch today about Burr.

LEMONS: Burr Milsap.

THOMPSON: Who was there for a couple of different stints—

LEMONS: He was.

THOMPSON: —in a variety of jobs for you all over there.

LEMONS: And he did a very good job. He and Terry Hinson were the assistant vice presidents when I left. And I guess Terry is still that way, I don't know.

ALEXANDER: I think she is.

LEMONS: But both of them did a very good job. Very good.

THOMPSON: Another person that we talked about today is Marsha Bennet.

LEMONS: Marsha was, she transferred up from the Norman Campus after Dr. Horton left, I think. Went to work for——which provost did she? Rich? I think it's Clayton. Yes. I never knew her feelings about the Tulsa Campus. She was pretty close, pretty tight. But—

THOMPSON: Now, did you know her on the Norman Campus?

LEMONS: No.

THOMPSON: No. You'd already left the Norman Campus and come to the Health Sciences Center when she arrived?

LEMONS: Yes.

THOMPSON: Okay.

LEMONS: But she was certainly a good University employee.

THOMPSON: Any of the other deans that stand out in your mind?

LEMONS: Well, Dr. Stratton in Dentistry was exceptional, I thought, as a person and as a dean. I think he was the one that brought in, put that college on a computer, on a system for his billing and tracking. And he enjoyed doing it and he was good at it. Other deans that stand out? You know, I liked all of them.

THOMPSON: I don't think there was anybody who didn't like you, so I would think that you probably didn't dislike anyone as well, so.

LEMONS: That one day that we met on parking, I never felt that way. (laughter) That was a difficult time.

THOMPSON: Oh there were, you know, faculty are interesting. Universities are interesting. But I think universities create a different environment for the people that work for them.

LEMONS: Yeah.

THOMPSON: And I think that probably both here and in Oklahoma City, you know, Gary and you, at least in my experience in talking to colleagues, made it about as easy as it could be. I mean, I knew library directors that could not get anything from their administration and finance

offices, and I never felt that way. Didn't always get what I asked for, but I never felt like it was a place I couldn't go and have a reasonable discussion about something and leave and go on about my business knowing that I got a fair shake, so.

LEMONS: You know, Leeland was always supportive of the Health Science Center Campus and, of course, this campus, but he and I always had a very good working relationship and personal relationship, so. Mike, he was some vague person out there that I would hear once and a while.

LAPOLLA: I was working full time. You guys were going to lunch. (laughter) And doing all that.

LEMONS: Mike was the brains is what I was told, in terms of being able to do, take information and computations and put it together and make it make sense.

LAPOLLA: They never made sense to Clayton Rich.

LEMONS: Sometimes you have to consider the source.

LAPOLLA: Mark, when you were brought on board at the Health Sciences Center— that was maybe '78 you said?

LEMONS: Yes.

LAPOLLA: And things were pretty much roller coaster; everybody is trying to find their footing with this branch campus up here. What did Gary or others brief you about in terms of this campus?

LEMONS: Very little other than it was, you know, and I'm not sure at that point in time—the campus up here consisted of what, Leeland, in '78?

ALEXANDER: In '78 we were just moved into the building at 21<sup>st</sup> and Broken Arrow.

LAPOLLA: Yeah, office building.

ALEXANDER: Office building. We were small.

LEMONS: And so it was, you know, not a whole lot said. I was trying to think when Gary went to the Health Science Center that was under Dr. Zalin, I believe. And Dr. Zalin was the provost. And he brought Gary up. And I don't know at that point what their involvement was because in

large part I was still at the Norman Campus. I was a year behind the time Gary came up to the time I came up.

ALEXANDER: Now did Gary bring you up, Mark?

LEMONS: Yes.

ALEXANDER: That's what I thought.

LEMONS: Yes.

LAPOLLA: So if you came, if you went to the Health Science Center Campus, and this campus wasn't that big of a deal in terms of issues, probably a couple years later as the money needs started to grow and competition for the dollars started, it probably escalated into something.

LEMONS: It did.

LAPOLLA: Recall some of those meetings or stories or—?

LEMONS: I think that Dr. Thurman was always supportive. And when he was provost he did what he felt like he could in terms of financing that and keeping things moving. It was always the discussion in the meetings, you know, do we want to give this to Tulsa? I mean, and frankly I would, overall they were short changed. I don't think there was any doubt. They were looked on, I think, like the Health Science Center Campus was by Norman Campus. You had the main campus and you had that campus up there, you know.

LAPOLLA: Well it wasn't a very well-kept secret, you know.

LEMONS: No. No, it wasn't. The main campus was—

LAPOLLA: You're at the end of the food chain, starting in Norman.

LEMONS: That's right. So, you know, to answer your question, we did have lots of meetings. Some of them with Tulsa people and some of them just the provost.

LAPOLLA: You know we had similar conflicts on the Tulsa Campus. We had faculty that were really pissed off that any amount of ENG appropriated dollars went to a salary in the clinic. You know, they felt that was their money, you know, for the department. It didn't belong to some librarian or clinic administrator or anybody else. So, yeah, we had the similar back and forth.

LEMONS: You know, and from an accounting issue, that was always an issue because it raised the question, “Should ENG funds support clinical practice? And how do you separate if you have a building here that’s used for both? How do you allocate the cost to the clinics?” And when we did the indirect cost study for the University that was always an issue. And it was, you know, a guesstimate at best. When you have a classroom that you use for clinic or a building used for clinic and for classroom support, you’ve got the instructor doing both. It’s difficult.

LAPOLLA: You know, Mark, when I went over to OSU, their way of dealing with that is to make believe it didn’t exist. That it was just easy, you know. For example, I would say, “What’s your overhead rate for your practice plan?” “What’s an overhead rate?” “Well, it’s kind of like, you know, you’re a ranch hand.” “I don’t deal with that stuff.” That was in the back pocket, you know.

LEMONS: When we had the federal auditors came in, they always looked at the amount of allocated expense to the practice plan, and we could never support, you know, in terms of exact amounts. It was—nor could they. They looked at it numerous times and they could not determine if it was a reasonable amount or a guess. And it was somewhere in between.

THOMPSON: Were there any—well, I guess through your entire career with the University—were there ever really any real hot issues that stirred up a lot of excitement? Either the PPP plan or paying for buildings or clinics on the Oklahoma City Campus or—.

LEMONS: You know, at the Regents meeting the Practice Plan was always a point of discussion. Fortunately Dr. Halverstadt was there to defend most anything that happened. And Dr. Vannatta was good at it. But I don’t know as far as hot issues, you know, if you go back far enough when the practice plan was, all the plans were outside the University. Each department had its own plan. They had their own outside account. And they reported to their dean and they determined basically what level of support they wanted to provide to the University. And that was, trying to think, that was brought into the University in about, was it ’73, ’74, in that area. I don’t—.

ALEXANDER: Had to be early ’73 because when we started in ’74 they had had a couple of years’ experience already under the plan.

LAPOLLA: We were talking about at lunch, they brought in Janet Key. I think she ran the Practice Plan. Yeah, about ’73, ’74. The blood started spilling.

ALEXANDER: Because we used the same Practice Plan when we started up here—

LAPOLLA: ’75, ’76.

ALEXANDER: —that had been approved by the Regents. And that was just after a couple of years of really front page articles written about the private accounts.

LAPOLLA: Is it true those guys had offshore accounts?

LEMONS: I don't know. I always felt like all the money they generated was not put in the plan. Now, I don't know what—

ALEXANDER: They clearly had accounts other than the University of Oklahoma.

LAPOLLA: I knew they had private accounts. I just didn't know if they had off-shore.

ALEXANDER: But they had departments, Mike, that had money and they had departments that were negative, and that's what the banks started—

LAPOLLA: We had Surgery and Pediatrics.

LEMONS: You know one of the other issues with the plan was that of paying travel expenses. The plan was used to paying whatever they wanted, stay wherever they wanted. And then when they were pulled into the University, the University had per diem and they had certain hotels you had to stay at if you were in, you know, Chicago or wherever it was. And if the room that they rented was more than what state allowed, then—

ALEXANDER: They had to write it off.

LEMONS: —write it off.

ALEXANDER: That didn't go well.

LEMONS: No, that was a topic. And you could see why.

THOMPSON: I think most medical schools had those issues during that time period, from the seventies to the nineties. All of them were going through this same. I still remember first few years down at the Health Sciences Center and being in a meeting, or a committee meeting of some sort, you know, the words that came out of a faculty member from another college's mouth would be, "Those guys in the College of Medicine are getting paid three times for seeing a patient once."

LEMONS: Yeah, compensation was—

THOMPSON: Whether that was true or not true, it was the perception.

LEMONS: I think the perception was as a state employee should they make a half a million a year. I mean, if you just looked at it from that point. And the truth is, they generated most of that themselves, so. But if you looked at an earnings report from the capitol, you didn't see that. You saw what they received. And that's been an on-going issue, and again I think that's where I think Dr. Halverstadt helped a great deal. He could take care of that.

THOMPSON: Yeah, I think—. I don't think I realized that until I interviewed him.

LEMONS: Yes.

THOMPSON: How important he really was and how supportive. You know, and I always, after interviewing him I wondered if that was because he really didn't have a bone in the dogfight about Tulsa, and looked at it differently than faculty who were in a specific department at the Health Sciences Center that, you know, their perception and what they felt like was going on. Yeah.

ALEXANDER: I think that he saw the state of Oklahoma as the state of Oklahoma—

THOMPSON: A broader picture.

ALEXANDER: —not Oklahoma City being that's it.

THOMPSON: Yeah.

ALEXANDER: He saw the state bigger.

LEMONS: Overall, I think the practice plan were the larger issues in terms of expenditures, compensation, just in general. There was always an issue, I mean, something coming up. Somebody would raise the issue. And as you know, it's hard to defend to the public out there a physician making a half a million or a million through a state funded payroll. And I don't know if that's still the issue or one of them, if that ever comes up, but it did, it certainly did then.

ALEXANDER: The average person walking the streets didn't understand when they said Mike Lapolla made a million dollars last year, none of them understood that part of that was state and part of that was PPP, I mean, professional money that he earned. They never really understood that. All they knew was he just made a million dollars.

THOMPSON: Well, the other thing I always said, and had to say it many times to staff, is that staff never knew how much their personal physicians made. They didn't know whether they took home \$125,000, they took home \$250,000. They knew what they made when they paid their bill, but they had no idea, whereas people who work for the state, and they have their financials opened up to everybody because it's public information. Those kinds of figures—I mean, I don't think that most faculty were making more or less, I'll put it that way, than the general population physicians in the community, especially in Oklahoma City where you had pretty large facilities like Mercy and Integris drawing people in at the caliber that they were drawing in. Zootie wasn't making \$125,000 at Integris, I can guarantee you.

LAPOLLA: Those community docs never accepted the fact that the faculty physicians did an honest day's work. You know that.

THOMPSON: No, but, but—

LAPOLLA: They were over there just sucking, you know, this and that. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

THOMPSON: What faculty member ever, no matter whether you're a doc or—

LAPOLLA: It was here in Tulsa. It was toxic here.

THOMPSON: And that's the town gown comment that you'll hear. And you'll hear that at every medical school. Other things that you would like to say or comment on? You've got an opportunity.

LEMONS: I don't, I don't know of anything else other than the University was a good place, a good place to work. I enjoyed working with students, seeing them come in and go through the process. And not a bad retirement system either. Now, Leeland, you know, I keep saying when he retires I'm going to have to get a wheelbarrow and take his money to the bank every month.

ALEXANDER: You forget how many grandkids I have.

THOMPSON: You think he may exceed the wire transfer amount, huh?

Anybody else have any questions? Any other comments? Well, we appreciate you coming in to do this.

ALEXANDER: One comment I'll make.

THOMPSON: Go ahead.



ALEXANDER: Without the help of Mark and the help of Gary Smith, we would not be here today as a campus.

THOMPSON: No.

ALEXANDER: They put their careers in jeopardy at times by being supportive of our campus, helping our campus, seeing that we got a fair shake financially, which we did. Now, did we always get all the money we wanted? No. Do we get all the money we want today? No. That will never change, that will never change. But, between Gary Smith, who we interviewed before Mark, and Mark, the two of them at the Health Sciences Center. Because all the functions of the College of Medicine ran through the Health Sciences Center. Everything we did processed through the Health Sciences Center. For an example, the practice plan, we used the same practice plan that they had adopted over there, and that just kept us from having to go through Regents' approval every time. We just used what was already in place. But without their support we would not be here today. So, thank you.

LEMONS: Very welcome. I appreciate coming up. I mean, I enjoyed seeing. Marty, I haven't seen you for long while. Mike—

LAPOLLA: Eighties.

LEMONS: Leeland, it's been quite a few years since I saw you. So, it was good for me, too.

THOMPSON: Well, as I told you, three people talked about at the retirement luncheon every year: you, Gary, Carl Lee. I don't know that I would like for you to be in the company of Carl Lee, but the other two of you definitely meant a lot to a lot of people, not only here, but at the Health Sciences Center.

LEMONS: I appreciate you saying that and hearing that, it's good. Like I said, the University, I think, was a great place to work. When I got out of school, when I finished at Central State, my business degree is basically what I had, and went to work there at OU. It was good to me from then on. And that's when I went back and got equivalent to the accounting, thirty plus hours of accounting.

ALEXANDER: Thirty-three hours.

LEMONS: So, it was good. I—

ALEXANDER: Did you graduate a year or two years after Gary?

LEMONS: One.

ALEXANDER: One. You graduated a year after him? Same university though. Both of you graduated from Central.

LEMONS: Oh, I guess I think he graduated two years before I did. I had to work my way through.

THOMPSON: I think it's interesting—I thought that when Gary was talking—that two of maybe the most influential financial people at the University of Oklahoma over the forty years that I was associated with the University both got degrees at Central State University.

ALEXANDER: In business.

THOMPSON: In business. Rather than a business degree at OU.

ALEXANDER: Right.

THOMPSON: Yeah. I thought that when Gary was talking about that this morning. That's very interesting.

ALEXANDER: Well, and at the same time they were in school, another guy graduated from there by the name of Larry Williams. Graduated from there, came up to OSU, worked for the comptroller up there while he got his master's degree and his PhD, and then he went on to become president of Southeastern and then Northeastern for many, many years. He came out of that same deal

LAPOLLA: Oh, Larry. Yeah, sure.

LEMONS: He was director of personnel, started at originally I was thinking.

ALEXANDER: That might be correct, yeah. He joined the accounting office. He had finished his bachelor's and he had started on his master's. And also at that same time, Carlos Johnson, who was in Oklahoma City then, a CPA, and taught accounting, got his PhD, came out of that group. So there were several of them came out of there.

LEMONS: Is that an OSU pitch?

ALEXANDER: No, just a comment.

LAPOLLA: Alyssa, you're in charge of these guys. Thank you.

PETERSON: Thank you.

THOMPSON: Well, we appreciate it. Thank you very much, sir.

LEMONS: You're quite welcome.

*End of interview.*