

Elmer Bartels

Audio transcript: On being offered the position of commissioner of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Date: July 15, 2001

Interviewer: Fred Pelka

Note: Transcripts have been lightly edited; therefore there may be slight discrepancies with audio clips.

Bartels:

In the summer of '76, Fred [Fay] called me up and asked me if I would be interested in being commissioner. I didn't grow up to be commissioner of the Mass Rehab Commission. I was happy at Honeywell. I had been promoted to department head. I was making a little over \$30,000 a year at the time, and the job of commissioner paid twenty [thousand dollars], so I would have to take a pay cut to go do it. I said, "Well, I'd be willing to talk about it."

So in the summer of '76, Duncan Yagee and Webb came out to visit me at Honeywell. I can remember them sitting across my table from me, and we had a nice chat. They asked me if I would be interested in running the Rehab Commission. I said, "Well, let me think about it." Then that's when we found out what the pay was, and—I would have taken a \$10,000 pay cut to do the job. I came home and talked to Mary about it, and wheeled around my backyard, and figured out that here is an opportunity to run a state agency as the president of the company, and to continue to do things that I thought were important in disability for Massachusetts. I would have the money and the ability to do it. I would finally have control over the budget. I decided that I would try to do it, if there was any way to do it. So I approached Honeywell and asked Honeywell if there was anything they could do to help subsidize my salary. Lo and behold, they did. For the first two years as commissioner, I had a \$10,000 a year contract as a retainer and expected to do whatever work was requested. It was understood that no work would be requested because I would be running the Rehab Commission and really wouldn't have any time to do Honeywell work. So they gave me a two-year leave of absence and a two year contract. It took until December and into January, December of '76 and January of '77, to get the contract negotiated and to get the governor's office ready to swear me in in the month of January.

End of transcript