The events commemorating the Governmental Accounting Standards Board’s (GASB) 25th anniversary in June featured a roundtable discussion with all but two of the surviving former members of GASB and all seven of the current members, including all three GASB chairmen. The discussion was moderated by David R. Bean, CPA, director of research and technical activities for GASB since 1990.

Although the board members come from a variety of backgrounds and geographic locations, with differing education and experience, their comments are strikingly similar. Few, if any, board members nursed a secret desire to be on GASB. To the contrary, few envisioned GASB as part of their career path. Once aboard, however, the members relished the intellectual challenges of the important topics that they deliberated and the significance of GASB’s mission and role, as well as the camaraderie and mutual respect they had with fellow members and GASB staff.

This article presents excerpts from the first question posed at the roundtable. The remainder of the roundtable can be read at www.gasb.org/roundtable/06-02-09_transcript.pdf.
A Roundtable Discussion With GASB Board Members
PAST & PRESENT

Edited by Dean Michael Mead

The opinions expressed in this edited transcript by the current and former board members are their own; official positions of GASB are established only after extensive due process and deliberation.

Bean: What made you decide that you wanted to become a GASB member (or the chairman), and what did you hope to accomplish?

Jim Antonio, Ph.D., CPA (chairman, 1984–1995): I must admit I had no real interest or awareness up until ’83. I was serving as state auditor, and other than being very active in the National State Auditors Association and NASACT [National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers], I did not pay a whole lot of attention [to the creation of GASB]. I had been an accounting professor, worked with various CPA firms, and I was quite aware of what I thought were the shortcomings in governmental accounting standards. So I had an interest in GASB from the standpoint of implementing those standards as state auditor.

I had hosted the National State Auditors Association annual meeting in Kansas City in August of ’83. I think it was at that meeting where I met Charlie Steele [FAF trustee] and Frank Greathouse [director of state audit, state of Tennessee] had raised GASB chairmanship with me. The choice was important, not just in terms of what you could do around the table in deliberations but, Who were you? Where did you come from? Who had some degree of credibility? I was nobody’s first choice, but I had a background in academia, a Ph.D., a CPA, worked for various firms. I started getting into the discussions and became enthused about the institutional challenge: Can we get this thing created? Can we make it work? Can we raise the money? Can we get the staff? I wanted to make it work, I wanted us to be independent, I wanted us to have credibility.

Tom L. Allen, CPA (member, 1994–1995; chairman, 1995–2004): Prior to being elected as state auditor, I had been director of local governments [in the Utah State Auditor’s Office], charged with the responsibility of assuring uniform accounting in all of the 700-plus local governments in Utah. It was there I realized that governmental accounting was helpful to a particular government managing its budgetary resources, but since different governments used different fund structures and definitions of available resources, it was difficult, if not impossible, to compare a government with similar governments or even compare a single government over time. As a result of this experience, I believed changes needed to be made to government reporting. At a NASACT meeting in Lexington, KY, in 1993, Chairman Antonio asked if I might be interested in serving on GASB. I
loved my job as Utah state auditor, but
I saw a chance to improve government
reporting. It was a wonderful challenge
and a wonderful opportunity.

Robert H. Attmore, CGFM, CPA (chair-
man, 2004–present): I, like my prede-
cessors, did not aspire to be a GASB
member. Actually, I will let you in
on a little secret. Tom Allen got me
at one of those meetings when it was
getting near the end of his term and
suggested this was something that I
ought to think about. The way he sold
it to me was that we needed to keep
the tradition going: “We needed a
former state auditor whose last name
starts with A.” I recall that Larry
Alwin, former state auditor of Texas,
and I would frequently say after the
annual update from the GASB chair-
man and Dave Bean, “Thank God
somebody enjoys doing that stuff!”
From my perspective as a state audi-
tor, it seemed that it was too technical
and too boring. The opening for the
new GASB chairman happened at the
right time, however: I had recently
retired from a career in state govern-
ment in New York, and as I thought
more about it I concluded I may not
be the world’s greatest technician, but
perhaps I can help with the political
aspects of getting things to work bet-
ter. So I took Tom’s advice and sub-
mitted my resume for consideration.

Bob Freeman, Ph.D., CPA, (member,
When I read over this question—Why
do you want to serve on GASB?—I
remembered that my wife Beverly
asked me the same thing [in 1990].
For one thing, it reduced our income.
I would come home exhausted [from
meetings]. Seriously, as some of you
may know, I’ve been sort of the practi-
tioner-in-hiding in the academic world.
I had a lot of experience in standards
setting from NCGA [National Council
on Governmental Accounting] days,
working on NCGA Statement 1 with
Jim Williams and others. I’m not as
academic as some academics, but I felt
like I had a good mix and, as Jim said,
the academic background and the
practical background were pluses.

Tony Mandolini, CPA, (member, 1990–
1992): I was actually involved in the
Illinois treasurer’s audit in 1955, and
later the audit of the Village of Oak
Park. KPMG had a significant practice
in governmental auditing and consult-
ing. I spent two-and-a-half years work-
ing with T. Jack Gary, CGFM, [one of
AGA’s founders] and he suggested
that I work with Waldo Mauritz in
Chicago, who was partner-in-charge
of the firm’s government practice and
a member of the AICPA Government
Committee. I assisted Waldo and
participated in the review of the 1968
GAAFR [Governmental Accounting,
Auditing, and Financial Reporting,
the “Blue Book”], and succeeded him
upon his retirement. I then served
on the AICPA committee that wrote
the first Governmental Audit Guide
and later chaired the AICPA commit-
tee that reviewed the Yellow Book. I
served for many years as a member
of the NCGA and also became very
involved in PERS [public employee
retirement systems] auditing and con-
sulting. When the opportunity came
along, I was approached to serve on
GASB and felt well prepared and was
pleased to accept.

Paul Reilly (member, 1995–2005): I
spent 28 years as a comptroller-finance
director at the local level, but serving
on the board was never on my radar
screen. That is, until 1994. I was on the
GASAC [Governmental Accounting
Standards Advisory Council] from ’91
to ’94. I think it was the last GASAC
meeting that I served on, and after din-
ner I said I was going for a walk down
by the ocean. Jim Antonio said, “I’ll join
you.” We were walking and I turned to
him and said, “Jim, how do people get
on the board? Does the FAF [Financial
Accounting Foundation, GASB’s parent
organization] go out and seek them?
Do organizations such as GFOA [Gov-
ernment Finance Officers Association]nominate or do you apply?” He asked
if I was interested, and I said I might be.
He said, “Then I urge you to apply.”
Cindy Green, Ph.D., (member 1997–2007): I was the nonaccountant, non-preparer, nonattester, the stranger: the user. I worked for a watchdog group, the Citizens Budget Commission, which monitors the finances and operations of New York City and state. I headed up the state work and in 1984, when Marty Ives joined GASB, he asked us if we would testify at GASB’s first public hearing on setting the agenda. Somehow I got picked to write that testimony. I suggested that the finances of state and local governments needed more transparency, and budgeting and accounting rules that would permit users to track, connect and compare an entity’s past finances in audited statements to its current situation and its budgeted plans for the future. Some years later, I got another call from Marty. He said GASB’s Advisory Council was looking for its first member-at-large and he asked if I’d be interested. I said, “Marty, I have a full-time job, I am a doctoral student at night, I have two small children, I sit on three other nonprofit boards. On a scale from 1 to 100, how important is it for someone like me to do this?” And he said 100. Well, if Marty says it’s 100, I’m in.

When the board was expanded by two seats, with one seat designated for a user, I thought that was exactly what GASB needed, but I never thought I would fill that seat. True, as a GASAC member I was thrilled to be involved in the process of setting national rules for all state and local governments and the work on the reporting model. I also had helped the staff a bit to prepare its first proposal to fund work on service efforts and accomplishments. Although I believed we needed standards for “money in and money out,” what I thought we also really needed was governments to report on their performance. If GASB was going to work on that, I wanted to be a part of it.

Jan Sylvis, CPA, (member, 2007–present): This is going to sound offensive, but I really don’t mean it to be. I thought, “What they need is practical, in-the-trench [experience], somebody that’s working on preparing financial statements at a state level.” What I didn’t realize is how hard it is to keep that full-time job going and be a GASB member at the same time. This weekend my son was looking over my shoulder, reading what I was reading on my computer—a draft of the Comprehensive Implementation Guide. He said, “Do you really like that stuff?” I said, “I don’t think ‘like’ is quite the right word. I feel a responsibility to it.” That kind of goes back to who I am. There are a lot of things I don’t like to do but I should do them. That’s why I became interested in it.

Bill Holder, Ph.D., CPA, (member, 2000–present): The reasons that I wanted to serve range from those that involve self-interest to perhaps a bit more altruistic. I suppose it’s rooted in my career background. I’ve been an academic for many years now and, when you start as an academic, there’s a very well-defined career path to success. The “publish or perish” model is absolutely alive and well and I think that’s a good thing. But there’s very little beyond that point, once you achieve those goals of getting promoted and granted tenure, which allows you to develop. So when this opportunity arose, I suppose on the altruistic side I was motivated by the significance of the mission, the opportunity to contribute in some minor way to the betterment of financial reporting, the functioning of our capital markets, and the functioning of our governments and the relationships with their citizens. From a self-interest perspective, at that point in my career I thought the opportunity to participate in this board would be an absolute treat. The relationships that you had a chance to develop with other board members and staff were an opportunity not to be passed up—very capable and informed individuals, with great experience, from whom I can learn, which will enrich my teaching and my professional experience.
Dick Tracy (member, 1999–2009): GASB was never in my long-term career plan. I sort of fell into this; it was not something I thought a great deal about. When I was director of audits for the city of Portland, I served for four years on the advisory committee for government auditing standards. And what I learned from that is how much positive impact standards-setters can have on the profession and the results of audits. GASB was an opportunity to influence the kinds of information people can use for accountability purposes or decision-making. I think that was the driver for me, that maybe I could work to provide information that will help people make decisions better, and could help citizens, primarily, assess and use that information.

Jim Williams, CGFM-Retired, CPA, (member, 2002–present): I wanted to be on GASB because I felt this was the culmination of a whole career in governmental accounting and auditing. My father was county auditor for Tarrant County, TX. As a student, [based on] what little I knew about governmental accounting, I thought, “Boy, there are really some opportunities for changes and improvements there.” And over the years I found that to be true. I really have enjoyed this career. Of course, in terms of any of these slots on GASB, you can only count on them coming open once every 10 years. So when it came open I really wanted to go for it.

Mike Belsky (member, 2009–present): I spent the last 15 years of a 25-year career in the municipal bond business with one of the rating agencies and felt a great deal of frustration about lack of comparability. I’ve also worked as a part-time mayor of a suburban community in Chicago, and initially I had heard about SEA in the context of the municipal bond business. Since I have gotten on the board and become active, I’m very excited about being involved with SEA. Because the way I see it, we’re simply providing a format, and the governments can pick what they need to measure. I think I would love to have an SEA report for our community. I’m very excited about that and excited that this board is very topical. We’re working on things like privatizations, bankruptcy; the board is on top of what is going on in governmental finance.

Marcia Taylor, CGFM, CPA (member, 2005–present): I didn’t pick government as a career. When I got out of college I went to work for a public accounting firm and my goal was to be the first female partner of the firm. I discovered in 1974 that women could not be assigned to corporate jobs. Corporations just were not accepting of women as auditors. So the two women in a firm of 200 got assigned to governments, nonprofits, colleges, universities and hospitals, and I fell in love with government. It had one serious advantage for me—it had nothing to do with IRS taxation. It was like nirvana. So, I quickly got appointed to the GFOA CAAFR [Committee on Accounting, Auditing, and Financial Reporting] committee, where I met people like Dave Bean and discovered the intellectual side of this whole field, which I not only found fascinating, stimulating and intellectually challenging, but thought that it was really cool stuff. When ICMA [International City/County Management Association] had an open spot for a GASAC member I thought, “What the hell, I am an assistant manager and how many assistant managers are there in ICMA with accounting degrees? Maybe I could actually do this.” I did that for four years and decided that when the next opening came up for a local slot on GASB that would be something I would apply for.

Ed Mazur, CPA (member, 1997–2007): Well, as an undergraduate mechanical engineer, it was always my dream… Actually, the mechanics of my coming on the board were sort of interesting. I was nominated by two university professors and, I suspect, my former colleagues at NASACT, where I had served as president while serving as state comptroller of Virginia. The night before my interview, I had a total crisis of confidence. I found Marty Ives’ name in a phone book, and I called him and said, “What am I doing here? I am not an accounting theoretician, I don’t deserve to be in this group,” and he calmed me down and was quite encouraging and gave me some confidence. So I went in the next day and talked to them about being a supporter of GASB and having been a state comptroller who moved financial statements from pretty pathetic to full compliance, and all of those things that I thought might be valuable. To be part of this group is the epitome of what you can possibly become in your career, to contribute to national accounting policy, to bring a new perspective, which Cindy and I as the additional sixth and seventh board members were tasked to do.

Gary Harmer, CPA, (member, 1984–1991): When I started my career, I worked for a national public accounting firm and I didn’t have any particular interest in government, but
I just seemed to get assigned to those jobs. My whole career as an auditor, as brief as it was, was in government, and then I went to work as chief financial officer of the Salt Lake City School District. I spent a lot of time in that position trying to explain to citizens and elected board members what we were doing financially, and I always had a great interest in the theory of accounting. I was a member of the NCGA, so I knew that GASB was being created and I really had no thought that I may be a member, but I was asked to interview with a member of the FAF, and lo and behold I was picked to be on the board and I loved it.

Marty Ives, CGFM-Retired, CPA, (vice-chairman, 1984–1994; director of research and technical activities, 1984–1990): I guess most men have a mid-life crisis. I had two—one in my 40s and one in my 50s. In my 40s I had been working as the New York state deputy comptroller. I had been working there for 13 years, and needed to do something more exciting. At one point I got a call to be the first deputy New York City comptroller, and I resisted for two years, which was fine because that was the [mid-1970s] fiscal crisis. At the height of the crisis, I joined them. Then after about seven years, I guess I had done what I felt I had to do. I had gotten the first audited financial statements for New York City since it was founded in 1620 and I had set up a performance auditing program.

At that point, I served on the NCGA, and GASB was about to be created, and that seemed like the place to be. I needed something exciting to do. I was drawn to GASB, so I applied for the job. After two preliminary interviews, the then-Chairman of the FAF, Bill Dougherty, invited me to Washington to be interviewed. He picks me up in a taxi to take me to dinner and starts talking about the Washington Redskins. I had been a football fan, but the only team I really knew anything about was the Washington Redskins. Bill talked about the Redskins for the full two hours. We had a wonderful conversation about the Washington Redskins, as a result of which I was hired.

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