

## **The Visitors-9/95**

### **Beginning:**

Go over the Good News  
Then turn to the threats...

### **Politics, politics, politics**

Federal politics  
State politics  
Regent politics

### **General political climate**

Serious fragmentation, polarization  
Rapid change  
Higher education is largely an afterthought  
...but we can be trampled by elephants  
Special interests dominate the political agenda

### **Federal level**

Research university at risk  
30% - 40% reduction in civilian R&D  
Extraordinary "political correctness"  
Global change  
Applied R&D (industrial policy)  
Yet, protecting pork  
Space station  
Note: Ironically enough, we see exactly  
the same thing at the state level with  
the dismantling of the Strategic Fund  
Michigan is systematically dismantling  
its capacity to prepare for the future...  
Slashing of federal financial aid programs  
Elimination of direct student loan program  
2% "tax" on institutions  
Cost shifting to universities (indirect cost recovery)  
Health care "reform"

### **State level**

State support continues to deteriorate  
 hasn't kept pace with CPI for 7 years...18% loss  
...dropped to 11% of total budget, 20% of G&E budget  
Recent disintegration of spirit of cooperation  
 west vs east  
 crossed line and began to attack institutions  
 (actually lobbying on the floor to prevent dollars  
flowing)  
 measuring progress not in absolute but relative terms  
...holding others down is as important as  
increasing one's own support  
Attacks on UM  
 efforts to reduce nonresident enrollments  
 efforts to control tuition  
(tax credit...)

- attacks on affirmative action
- Sunshine laws
  - Open Meetings Act
  - Freedom of Information Act
- Poor legislation, poor bench ==> most intrusive in nation
- Have paralyzed efforts to appoint presidents
  - hasn't been a successful search in 5 years
  - five universities currently led by interim presidents
  - impossible to conduct external searches

## Regents

Regents reflect polarization of partisan political environment

UM Example:

- Loss of continuity □ only two incumbents left (Baker, Varner), and these are likely to disappear in 1996
    - every two years the Board chemistry will change dramatically
  - Lack of experience
    - little understand of University (...and frequently little interest)
    - ultra sensitive to press
    - "perk-itis"
    - obsession with intercollegiate athletics (...football...)
  - Great divisions on board
    - politically Currently 4 labor-left Democrats, and 4 Republicans (3 right wing)
    - generation division
    - lack of trust
    - inability to select leadership...8 different Regents (only governing Board in higher education without a chair...)
  - Board views itself as an elected legislative body rather than a group of trustees...their job is to "find and publicize flaws in University" rather than support the institution
  - Many view themselves as representing special interest constituencies who elected them rather than providing stewardship for past generations and protecting the University for future generations
  - Partisan politics dominate most issues considered by the Board
    - apply political tests to all leadership appointments
    - apply political tests to academic program approval
    - apply political tests to policies
  - Currently nobody on Board with leadership capacity
    - and nobody capable of rising to statesman level
- Great difficulty in getting distinguished people to run for Regent
- contentiousness of political process
  - litmus tests...Christian right and Labor
  - OMA, FIOA exposure makes it very distasteful
  - an old adage: If being a Regent is the most important thing in a person's life, they are not qualified for the position...

- neither party takes Regent nominations seriously
- Ironically, appointed boards for 4-year colleges...GVSC, CMU, Oakland...are far stronger than the elected boards of “constitutional” universities

Surveys of deans and EOs

- greatest threat faced by University is its own Board

Note:

This is also the conclusion of the majority of higher education associations, presidents, and board members

The greatest threat to public higher education in America today is the alarming deterioration in the quality of governing boards.

Knight Commission...

### **Some questions:**

1. What should our “contract” with the state be?  
What should they get for paying 10% of the bill?
2. How important is the autonomy of the University?  
How do we protect and sustain this?
3. What should our political strategy within Michigan be?  
Should we shift from a “national” to a “state” university to earn a bigger share of a declining pie?  
(Remember, our surveys of public leaders has indicated quite clearly that Michigan only has the capacity and the will to support “EMU” level institutions...)
4. How should we relate to other institutions within the state?  
Should we continue our strategy of cooperation...  
seeking state support for the system?  
Or should we launch an offensive strategy to favor UM  
at the expense of other institutions.
5. How do we deal with the sunshine laws which threaten to strangle the University...and clearly prevent the selection of quality leadership?
6. How do we improve the quality of the Board of Regents?  
Is there anything we can do to improve the quality of nominations?  
Is there anything we can do to stabilize the behavior of the Board,  
to make it accountable to the University and those it serves?

### **Bottom Line**

University is in tremendous shape

Provost search example: UM is position to lead higher ed

Yet...greatest threat is the political environment in which we find ourselves...