

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 incumbants 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
 - ...politicallyCurrently 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...