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REFLECTIONS ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS STUDIED IN TERMS OF THEIR MUTUAL CLIMATE. THREE ASPECTS OF THIS CLIMATE ARE DISCUSSED--(1) THE NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPED THROUGH LEGISLATION, (2) THE ADAPTATIONS MADE BY INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING TO GOVERNMENTAL ASSISTANCE AND THE MULTIPLYING OBLIGATIONS WHICH THIS ASSISTANCE CREATES AND SUPPORTS, AND (3) THE DISPOSITION OF THE SPECIALIZED SOCIETY TO THINK OF SPECIFIC AGENCIES DELIVERING EQUALLY SPECIFIC SERVICES. SUBSTANTIAL PORTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY ENTERPRISE ARE FOUND TO HAVE BEEN MORE RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS OF CLIENTS THAN TO TENETS OF SCHOLARLY PRACTICE. FIVE KEY ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE GOVERNMENT ARE SUGGESTED--(1) CATEGORICAL VERSUS INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT, (2) MEASUREMENT OF THE REWARDS OF GRANTSMANSHIP AGAINST THE PURPOSES OF SCHOLARSHIP, (3) THE LONG-RUN EFFECTS OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT ON THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES, (4) THE UNIVERSITY-GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIP, AND (5) THE MEANING OF PUBLIC SERVICE. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "AGB REPORTS," VOLUME 10, NUMBER 1, SEPTEMBER, 1967. (HW)

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Reflections on the Federal Government and Higher Education

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Reflections on the Federal Government and Higher Education

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It is good to see the open discussion about the relationship of the university to the Federal government. In some ways, the climate for this discussion is more vital than the options which flow from it. Three aspects of this climate sharpen our questions about how much innovation and endurance will come from government, and how much skill colleges and universities will have in sponsoring a systematic review of their labors at home and abroad.

The first aspect refers to a wholly new partnership between higher education and the Federal government developed over three years from legislation without precedent in our history: the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963; the amendments of 1964 to the National Defense Education Act; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the National Foundation for the Arts and the Humanities; the Higher Education Act of 1965; the International Education Act of 1966; and other more specialized statutes.

These new laws are of such moment – and the new relationship between institutions and the Federal government created by them so intricate – that both parties must welcome every opportunity to extend an understanding not only of educational needs and priorities, but also of those principles which lie sometimes implicitly below the activity of daily practice. The principles seem rather straightforward:

First, that all American youth capable of profiting from it shall have a higher education.

Second, that colleges and universities should have the support and encouragement of the Federal government in serving the community of which they are a part.

Third, that excellence in higher education is of vital importance to the American future.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, that higher education must remain free of governmental control.

These interdependent principles express the aspirations of both the academic community and government centers. They permit as principles what would seem the broadest of latitude in institutional discretion and distinctiveness. However, in contradistinction, they have fallen upon our institutions as elements which not only help them but also define the multiple obligations which our institutions of higher learning have taken on for themselves. These multiple obligations are at the heart of the current anxiety about the purposes of the college and university. In consequence, we have become worried over the relaxation of the sinews which integrate academic life. We are not sure that we can find ways to bring those sinews back to full strength. And we are puzzled by the absence of those who would support the university for what it alone may do rather than for what services it may render to satisfy special need.

As clear as the national purposes seem, the statutory provisions of supporting legislation yield subsidiary aims which the Congress has not always permitted the institutions to define. Federal assistance has been categorical and selective. It is contended that the strengthening of colleges and universities has consequently been uneven and, by implication, inadequate. The American Council on Education recently exclaimed: "Many institutions with a potential for making major contributions to educating young people, to advancing knowledge, and to providing essential services have virtually been bypassed. Even in strong universities imbalances have been created." The Council recommends "that the next major step forward in the Federal effort to strengthen higher education be in support of institutions as institutions. For unless additional financial resources are made available, the quality of higher education in this country cannot be improved; in fact, it cannot be sustained."

It is fair to point out that there is no single architect of the categorical support which describes so much of the relationship

between modern institutions of higher learning and government. The people in general underscore their requests in specific terms. Educators themselves will protect the subjects of their loyalty by definitions of the narrowest meaning. The greatest suspicion in the community of scholars is held not uncommonly by the scholar himself. The political process responds more quickly to the specific claim than to a general one. The game of administrative bifurcation is made possible by a human preference for the specific. In short, all of us contribute to the splintering of general interests into specific interests.

From this massive process of defining general aims into categorical practice has come an acute dissatisfaction on the part of almost everyone. We want to roll things back the other way. And that is one highly significant aspect of the context of institutional-government relationships today.

The second aspect of the contemporary climate of these relationships refers to the whimsical accommodations made by institutions of higher learning to assistance from the government and the multiplying obligations which the assistance supports as well as provokes. The changing functions of the university, for example, have induced internal conflict over the aims of university education. Generally speaking, the conflict involves two groups in the university. One group represents the historic idea of the university as a detached center of reflection and social criticism, protected from public harassment by special rights and privileges of an intellectual elite. The other group consists of the representatives and constituents of the various institutes, bureaus, and centers, all of whom respond more directly to public needs. One group, preferring social disengagement, sees the primary role of the university as the preparation of future leaders and basic research. The activists view the university as a development organization for social change.

On balance, the university tends inexorably toward social activism and an enlarged constituency: public services, the education of adults, research and development geared to community problems, continuing education, together with, but less subordinated to, resident instruction and research. In the bargain, the inner logic of the university becomes elusive. We have become doers, instrumentalists if you will – thinking up, paying for, and doing project work. With instrumentalists at the head of the column, and few integrative people in the ranks, it is sometimes difficult to see the

structure of the university through the encrustation of new centers, bureaus, and institutes. Sponsorship grows elusive: teaching is tied to local interests, research to national support, and public service to both.

Meanwhile, over a time span of some twenty years, the growth in knowledge and vast shifts in ways of using it have forced education upward in the national scale of values. Indeed, education is high upon the agenda of four out of five national policy conferences. Businessmen expect education to open a vast new market for their products, while they look to educational institutions to replenish their enterprises with new managers, scientists, technologists, salesmen, and skilled workers. The executive and legislative branches of state and the Federal governments expect higher education to serve as a repository of talent that can be contracted to solve domestic problems and to push forward the tasks of international development. Beneath such multiplying claims, more clearly recognized with each passing day, are some of the basic concepts of a technological society:

- The relation of human ability to economic growth is now expressed in every theory of social and economic development.

- Modern problems become general and interdependent; the solutions grow specific and discrete. The enigma of reconciliation illumines the institution of higher learning as perhaps the only group capable of whole views of ends and means.

- Complex aggregations of people and capital rest upon local patterns of economic and political life which were formed in more bucolic times. The modernization of public affairs veers to the university, more neutral to matters of temporal politics and with more access to information.

- Intellectual resources are increasingly mobile, with net migrations to those centers of gravity which are more and more formed about our centers of higher education. For example, in more than a few states, the universities have become the only centers able to attract and hold expert talent and intellectual substance.

Such overlays of national and international need upon the whimsical responses of the academy suggest together that, first, the means of communication and interpretation between the society and

the institutions are underdeveloped, and, second, a rising self-consciousness of higher education reveals how little the system as a whole is able to engender inventiveness and to create distinctiveness within particular institutions. Hence, we engage the paradox of encouraging others, such as the developing countries, to think of education in systemic terms, without knowing how to do it ourselves. Such revelations, then, form the second aspect of the contemporary relationships between higher education and government.

I turn now to the third aspect of the present climate pertinent to the topic. It is formed from the others. It refers to the strong disposition of the specialized society to think of specific agencies delivering equally specific services. The product of one agency is the necessary resource of another. The *quid pro quo* of this linkage defines the notion of the agency as a fundamental element of organization and elevates the importance of the client in the transactions. One may speak of the agency motif as among the dominant themes of American life. The university has been attracted to it, an observation of much less importance than the question of whether it will be engulfed by it.

It has become trite to point out that loyalty to one's discipline has replaced loyalty to a given community of scholars. The development of the spirit of science, including the social sciences, has been advanced by such specialized communication and sharing among scholars. But one must speculate about the institution left behind in this shift of loyalty.

With weakening institutional ties, together with the growing weight of the agency motif, the number of scholars who work midway between the university and the world of the client has risen sharply. They are understandably seeking the best of both worlds. Through the university they receive tenure and enjoy academic freedom; the client offers variety and perhaps deference and career advancement. The reputation gained on the outside is the shadow of the reputation enjoyed at home. The university itself is at the mercy of that reputation, for good or ill. A fundamental difficulty is that the university and the scholar are bound by tenets of scholarly practice, namely, the rule of evidence. The products of scholarship, in the tradition of the university, are not classified; they are subject to the review and criticism of the community of scholars. It is debatable whether the scholar should enjoy the privileges of

the community of scholars when he pursues work which is not subject to their review.

In sum, the climate of discussions about university-government relationships today has been charged by those disclosures which seem to reveal that substantial portions of the university enterprise have been more responsive to needs of clients than to the tenets of scholarly practice.

The question is what this means for the future relationships between the universities and the government. At this moment in our history, I believe there is much wisdom in exploring a wide range of possibilities and little wisdom in believing that we now have any formula for the most appropriate role of the university in its relationship with the government. There are several key issues to be discussed and resolved. I should like to conclude by sharing with you a few that occur to me.

The first issue involves the question of categorical or institutional support. The government has shown explicit faith in the individual scholar and in the ability of institutions to pursue specific projects. We have yet to see an identical faith expressed for general support of institutions. I believe it imperative that we come to view the colleges and universities as a national resource of competence that must be developed in the national interest. This calls for plans of development by universities, general and dependable support by the government, and most important, a national development plan for higher education which would have the support of both the universities and the government. I believe it is not asking too much that the national community of scholars be able to agree on a plan of development for higher education permitting differentiation among institutions. It is indeed strange that we reject laissez faire as a principle in economic planning but honor it so deeply as a development principle for higher education. Such a plan need not stifle pluralism; indeed, it should encourage it, for it would permit institutions to acquire distinctive goals and methods. There is far less pluralism in higher education than the community of scholars is willing to admit. If this were not so, there would be far less imitation in higher education and much more respect for variety.

Second, the universities must measure the rewards of grantsmanship against the purposes of scholarship. They cannot expect their clients to do so. At the same time, I am aware that it is much

simpler to speechify about scholarly and non-scholarly work than it is to balance the pressing claims for institutional prestige against long-term scientific and intellectual advancement. Perhaps the fundamental unit of measurement is whether the institution itself is willing to commit its own resources to a given project or program. Providing overhead and indirect cost support with project grants tends to reinforce the agency motif of the university. It would be far better for the institution to decide the range of its commitments to scholarship, order itself accordingly, and be willing to refuse promises of support which are alien to its purposes. The criterion should be that the project or grant support will strengthen the long-range educational purposes of the institution.

Third, it is imperative that we attempt to foresee the long-term consequences of government support through the various categories. It is one thing for the nation to anticipate manpower shortages in various fields; it is another to let the bottom fall out of those fields with limited legislative and manpower appeal. Both the universities and the government must beware the unintended consequences of categorical support which throws the academic community out of balance. This issue is both geographical and disciplinary. Research and institutional development programs should be supported in a manner which widens the geographic distribution of advanced education of quality, and balances support for the social sciences and humanities with support to the physical sciences and the professions.

A fourth issue remaining to be resolved in the university-government relationship is also a financial one. The recent Federal legislation has helped to ease the pain of the colleges in construction costs and of the student in tuition and subsistence costs. The fact remains, however, that we have only begun to meet the needs of the colleges or the students. State legislatures, for the most part, have failed to respond to these needs. At present, there is little reason to expect that adequate support for higher education will come from state governments. It is likely also, with the realities of rising costs, that tuition rates will continue to increase, thus moving us farther and farther away from the goal of making higher education available to all students who can benefit from it. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of American youth are being denied these opportunities because they cannot afford to attend college or because they have been conditioned by poverty to assume that they cannot afford it. It is a tragic loss to their

individual growth and to the economic and social advancement of the nation. There are those who believe that the best plan of Federal support is through direct payments to the colleges and universities; there are those who would prefer expanded loan programs to students to be repaid over a lifetime of income tax credits; and there are those who would encourage greater activity by private investors. In the resolution of these various proposals, we must study carefully the long-term consequences to the colleges and the students.

A fifth and final issue is the meaning we give to public service. We grandly proclaim a threefold mission of the university which includes public service. Frequently, however, public service is one part of the mission which is considered to be not quite legitimate within the university. On the other hand, there is a tendency for those in the direct public service to denigrate the service features of those who teach and conduct research. One wonders whether the government should mediate this quarrel. It is obvious to anyone that there are elements of service in teaching and research. The only difference between these functions and the service agencies is that the audiences are different. Sometimes, however, there are traditionalists who would give us a small intellectual elite, and there are activists who would burn down the house of intellect to rid us of intellectual arrogance. But the university is not a scientific service center for the community, and it is not, and never has been, an ivory tower. At its best, the university is a public servant in the highest sense; at its worst, it is irrelevant to man's needs – now or forever. In short, universities must discover ways to understand their own social functions, and to appreciate the value of the services performed by each member of the community of scholars.

I close quickly by expressing the hope that these discussions will continue. It is more than a pious hope. The university is not given to clandestine purposes, nor is it comfortable as the agent of someone else's grand design. There is more at stake for the university than the gain or loss of today's clients. Many of us share the nagging fear that the university, as it comes to resemble an agency, will forfeit its right and ability to perform a higher service for society, and for clients yet unborn.