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When You're Fiftieth, Shouldn't You Try Harder?

Students think so. Now if they can only get through to their belt-tightening elders

Education never wants for friends. Its supporters are legion, and if it has any detractors, they are thunderously silent. Politicians reserve their most glittering generalities for educational excellence, and every political platform has a plank pledging allegiance to schools, colleges, and universities. The trouble is that some of this commendable commitment turns out to be more theoretical than actual. Far too often there's a spectacular abyss between the rhetoric and the reality.

Such is the case in Oklahoma. The state has failed to keep up not only with the nation but with neighboring states in tax support of common schools and higher education. Though there have been increased appropriations, like a winded runner in a long distance race, Oklahoma is falling behind at a time when the pace is quickening.

In higher education Oklahoma is bringing up the rear. Every state appropriates more per student. Teaching loads are above the national average, while faculty salary levels are below the national and regional averages.

Despite a situation which calls for greatly increased public support, Gov. Dewey Bartlett has called for the state to "tighten its belt." During the gubernatorial campaign he said that the state didn't need new taxes and that he would fight against them. He has. His proposed budget will leave Oklahoma still lagging behind in education. An increase of only \$.88 million has been marked for higher education.

"The governor's budget for higher education is not inadequate. It is tragic. It is not a belt-tightening diet. It is starvation." Ron Shotts paused and the reporters wrote. Shotts is a senior at the University of Oklahoma

and chairman of the speakers bureau of the Student Lobby for Higher Education. He was also starting tailback for the football team, and three days before he had played for Oklahoma against Tennessee in the Orange Bowl. Today he had arrived with the team from Miami and had gone directly to the Capitol with other leaders of the lobby to leave with the governor a statement disapproving of his projected appropriations for higher education. With Shotts were Bob Vincent, state director of the lobby and a graduate student at OU; Mac Sudduth, an OU senior who heads the campus chapter in Norman, and Leonard Court, the lobby coordinator at OSU. The four had met briefly with the governor and were now holding a press conference in the Capitol's press room.

"We will fight for new revenue," continued Shotts. "We will fight for the governor's signature. We will fight to override a veto if it comes. And if we lose, we will go to the people with an initiative petition.

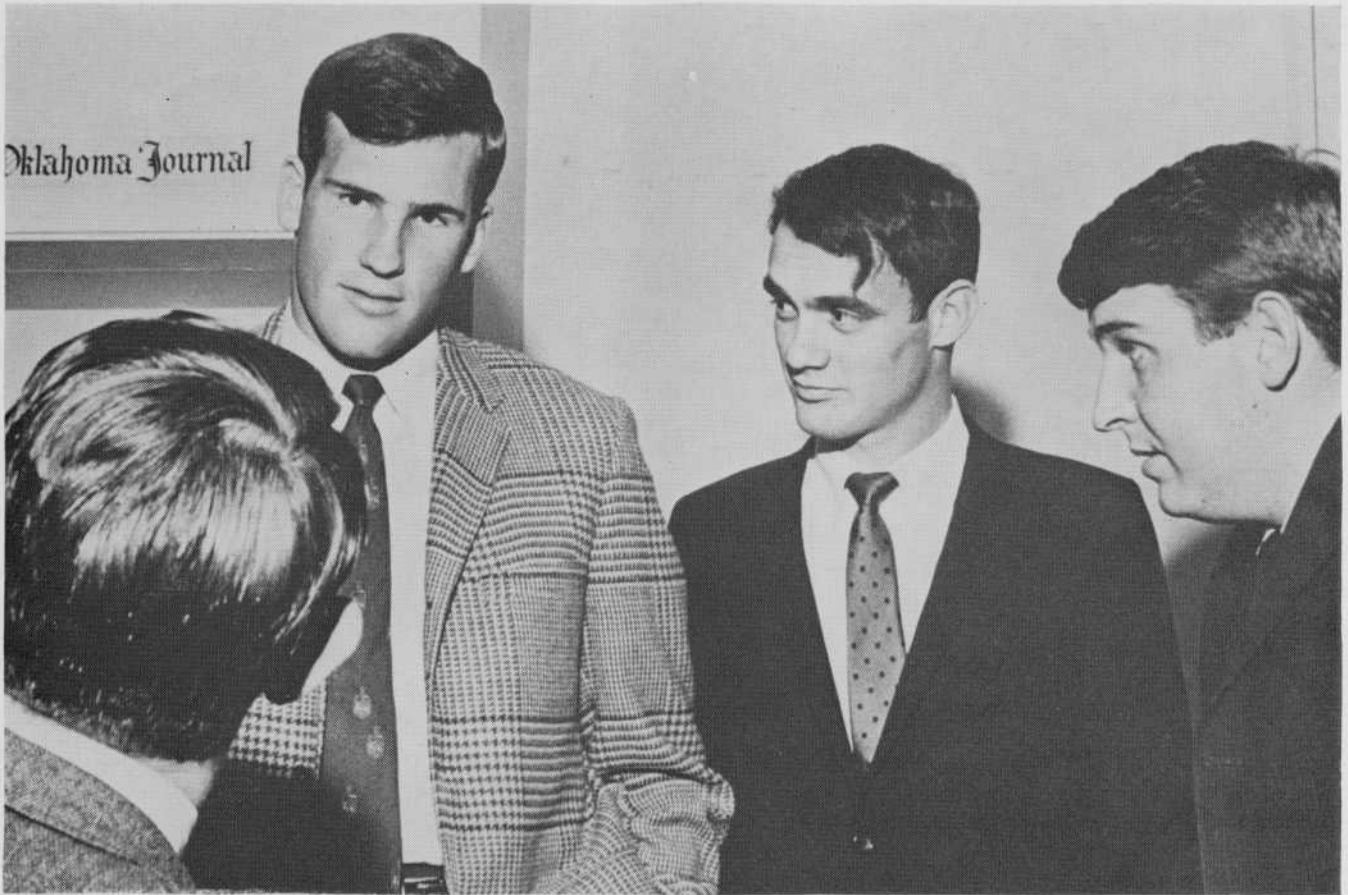
"If that fails, make no mistake that we, the young people, will continue to leave the state for better opportunity as most merit scholars have done, as 50 percent of our college graduates did last year, and as 70 percent of the graduates will by 1970. Perhaps soon there will not be any of us left to fight."

Shotts spoke for the Student Lobby for Higher Education, and the lobby in turn speaks for a significant portion of the students of the state, those who are actively concerned about where Oklahoma is going, educationally and economically. They want to stay in the state, and they believe that it is essential for educational support to be increased drastically if Oklahoma is to grow enough economi-

cally to provide the necessary opportunities for them to remain.

The lobby was organized at OU in the winter of 1966 by a group of students who desired to make known to the state legislature their interest in increased appropriations to education. Several thousand names were collected on a petition which was taken to legislative leaders and the governor, then Henry Bellmon, in Oklahoma City. The petition failed to impress the legislature sufficiently for it to increase its support substantially, and the lobby leaders, who watched and waited with growing disenchantment, decided to use another means.

Vincent, sitting in the small lobby office at OU, room 222 in the Student Union, starkly furnished with two desks, two chairs, boxes of stickers and pamphlets, and with a picture poster of the 1967-68 legislature attached to one wall, recalled recently for a visitor that decision, which launched the organization as the earlier petition had failed to do. "A group of about 20 of us got together one night in late March. The governor and the legislature, it was obvious, were not going to do anything significant about education. The issue was getting hotter and hotter on the campus; the students were becoming more and more concerned and upset. We felt a need to call attention to this to the people of the state. We decided on the 'study-in.' It evolved from a number of alternatives. We asked what we could do with limited finances but a lot of interest. We felt it would be effective to meet in a large group at the Capitol and voice our concern. We debated among ourselves for another week about whether we could bring it off without its degenerating into a kind of vocal an-



After a meeting at the Capitol Ron Shotts (left), Mac Sudduth (center), and Bob Vincent talk with newsmen. (Oklahoma Journal photo)

archy. Finally, we took a gamble and said, 'Let's do it.'

The study-in (Sooner Magazine, May 1967) brought about 3,000 students, most of them from OU and OSU, to the steps of the Capitol, and it came off well. For one thing the students saw what they were up against. The legislators talked a good game but they seemed to expect someone else to do the job. Senate president pro tem Clem McSpadden said people ought to elect "a man who will have the intestinal fortitude to lead the charge, the revolt needed to raise money Oklahoma needs to go forward in education." The lobby later asked, "How about that leadership, senator?"

The governor talked as if things were in fine shape, and the increase in state appropriations fell far short of the amount needed to bring Oklahoma to a sound competitive level with surrounding states. The lobby left school for the summer after resolving to renew the fight in the fall.

The lobby now has a representative group on every campus in the state. It has an executive committee with

representatives from the various schools, and it has a budget of its own. Through some 8,000 student memberships (50 cents each), appropriations from campus organizations, and gifts from private individuals and businesses, the lobby has raised about \$12,000, and it hopes to have raised \$18,000 by the end of the spring term. Most of the money—about 60 percent, says Vincent—has come from student sources, and most of it goes to the dissemination of information and promotion. None of the students connected with the lobby receive any money for their efforts.

Though the lobby membership includes all student strata, the leadership and most of the male constituents reflect all that's desirable in young men, as far as the values conservative oldfolks hold. Their hair, though generally longer than the average Jaycee's, is short and regularly clipped, they wear ties and jackets, and they want to work within the system, not change it. They are more New Center than New Left, and a lot of them will be the Jaycees of tomorrow. But they are decisive about their commitment

to education, and this commitment cuts party lines to pieces. For instance, Shotts, who earlier was giving the Republican governor's program hell, is a Republican.

The most ambitious lobby effort so far has been its recommendations for higher education which appear at the end of this article. This report details what the lobby wants to see done organizationally with the state's colleges and universities in the future and suggests sources of revenue for increased appropriations today.

"This is no more than a statement of concern by a group of students," says Vincent, "for the direction Oklahoma is taking generally, not just in higher education but in its willingness to progress as a state. It's a blueprint. We're saying that we need more industry in the state so there will be more jobs and that we see education as the basic building block.

"We've had favorable editorials from the metropolitan newspapers and from most of the others about the report. The legislators are genuinely interested in seeing the situation improved. They have lacked in the past

one important ingredient in their concern, however, and that has been the necessary leadership."

The lobby's recommendations propose additional revenue from increased taxes, which flies into the face of Bartlett's inflexible stand. Vincent says, "As long as there are a few politicians willing to be enough demagogues to say that we can progress without new revenue, we're going to have problems. Most politicians run quite honestly and openly. It only takes a few in key positions to make the situation difficult for the people to understand what's needed. For instance, in the last election both candidates for governor would not approve new taxes and said we could keep up without them. This is simply not true and they know it is not true. We could streamline our state government—all its services—and we still couldn't cut off enough fat to do anything significant for all the needs.

"We need tax reforms and tax increases. People say students are presumptuous in proposing tax increases since they don't pay taxes. That's an unfortunate and inaccurate way to look at it. Students pay all the taxes in the state except the property tax. Many of them pay income tax, and

all pay the sales tax. Taxes on auto tags and all the other various taxes are paid by students. On top of that the college student is the best taxpayer when he graduates and takes a job. His income is higher and consequently the revenue he returns in taxes is greater. We've recommended increases where it will hit us hardest—in the income tax—and we're willing to pay it.

"We need an increase in appropriations of about \$23 million this year to bring universities' salary levels up to the Big Eight conference average, to add 200 professors to the system to meet the most critical needs, and to make available an additional \$2 million for research, which will make our universities competitive with surrounding states."

In addition to suggestions for added money, the report also proposes reorganization of the system's boards of regents, consolidation of certain graduate areas of study, and a study of schools which are operating at high levels of "inefficiency" with the possibility of changing their function or closing them. Some four or five of the smallest schools are mentioned.

Says Vincent, "It will take a long time to enact some of our recommen-

dations. Parts will be difficult to implement. What we're most interested in, the crucial thing, is the financial part of the report. Our reorganization proposals we consider just a matter of foresight. They may merit sensational press but they're not our major interest. Money is. That's what this state needs now."

The lobby faces some problems. One is the transitional aspect of its leadership. In a few years all the leaders of today are gone. Vincent is not worried by this, however, he says. Others will come along.

Another problem is to be taken seriously. The lobby could gain needed respect from their elders if it could demonstrate political clout. If it could successfully direct public opinion so that an elected official feared for his political life if he failed to support education in the recommended manner, then it would be a lobby to be reckoned with.

It would be a lot simpler if all the many friends and supporters of education would put their money where their mouths are. Talk is cheap. Good education is expensive, and states which want to remain in the thick of a race pay the price.

PAUL GALLOWAY

The Lobby's Recommendations

In compiling these recommendations, one thought has been foremost—how can we, the young people of this state, find a way for more of us to seek our future with the growth and progress of Oklahoma? What follows is an effort to offer solutions which are tied to the expansion of our economy. We compliment the people of this state for wanting the best for their children and the past support they have given in providing it. It has been very difficult to find twentieth century solutions within the context of our present system, both management and fiscal. It has been even more difficult to please special interests, both political and institutional. For that reason, we offer this program to all the people of this state, saying in honesty that this is an idea which will produce hope for all of us, hope that Oklahoma will at last take that important step toward fuller economic participation in this growing society.

Problems

Higher education in Oklahoma faces the following problems:

1. A 50 percent increase in enrollment has been projected from 1964 to 1975.
2. Seven boards of regents exist for 18 colleges, producing, among other things, 50 percent more teachers than the state can absorb.

3. Faculty salaries in Oklahoma public institutions compare poorly, both regionally and nationally.

	U.S. Ave.	Reg. Ave.	Oklahoma
University	\$10,582	\$10,233	\$9,392
4-year College	9,138	8,510	7,995
2-year College	8,629	7,490	6,822

4. Over 50 percent of our college graduates leave the state for lack of employment opportunities.
5. In 1957, Oklahoma ranked 38th among the states in dollars appropriated per student. By 1965, we had fallen to 49th. Because of increased efforts in Tennessee, *Oklahoma now ranks 50th in the nation in expenditures per student.* This lack of support

STATE AND LOCAL TAXES PAID PER CAPITA

Year	U.S. Ave.	Okla.	Dif.	Okla's Rank
1953	\$132.07	\$132.37	+ .30	25
1957	169.22	153.53	-15.69	29
1958	175.34	161.18	-14.16	30
1959	183.59	168.63	-14.96	32
1960	200.67	177.07	-23.60	34
1961	209.20	181.15	-28.05	33

Source: *Governmental Finances*