

First Days of the Interim

An almost audible sigh went up in some quarters when Dr. Pete Kyle McCarter walked out of the provost's office and into the president's office.

A man who started with the University as vice president under George Cross, who remained with the University under J. Herbert Hollomon, McCarter has the aura of stability and gentility. He is held in high esteem by the faculty and is well liked by the employees. The students hardly know him, and if he has any weaknesses they lie in that area.

McCarter faces a difficult period. An interim presidency is a difficult spot to fill. In a September address to the faculty he pinpointed the problem:

During the past few weeks I have been giving a great deal of thought and I have been seeking a great deal of advice from a great many people on what an acting president, who is a lame duck by definition, can do to keep the University from going lame also, especially when no one can tell him how much time he has to do anything in.

This is a real problem not only for McCarter but for the entire University. While it can be assumed that the search committee appointed in September will not come up with the perfect candidate tomorrow, no one knows how long it will really be. It could be next month or it could be a year from now. In the meantime the University cannot afford simply to mark time. There must be progress because too little change complicates the task for the new president as easily as would too much change. For McCarter the path ahead is a narrow one. On change:

. . . Let me say that the sudden resignation of a president, and especially of a president who was enormously fertile in ideas and plans and projects, should not mean and must not be allowed to mean that all those ideas and projects are thereby immediately cancelled . . .

During the past two years all of us here at the University have winnowed much good grain, and some of it is grain we might not have known we had if Dr. Hollomon had not caused us to believe we did. Now that we know about it, we should be able to encourage ourselves to keep up our good labor.

At the same time we may expect some change of pace, especially in the development of new things. There are at least two reasons. One of those is that I am not very good at improvising and taking plunges. A number of years ago I was told by a Regent (I think he was a friend) that I was too cautious. He did not mean that as a compliment, and I did not take it as one. I decided it was a little too late to do anything about it, and I didn't . . .

If you find me a little slow, therefore, in agreeing to spend much money before it is fixed in the budget or in jumping in with something novel . . . you'll just have to say something profane about my make up and try to be philosophical about it.

Yet the new must be tried, and if it stands the trial, change has to occur. That

brings me to my second reason, and that is my view that sound change comes primarily from where the work goes on and is a result of deliberate and healthy and sometimes painful growth. If that sounds too conservative to some of you, I am sorry.

While McCarter's remarks in the general faculty meeting were, of course, directed specifically to the faculty, they are finding application to all segments of the University community, both on and off the campus.

What McCarter is asking is that he not be prejudged on appearances, that everyone work hard for the betterment of the University, and that so far as is possible progress should continue without radically altering the established processes.

Those who expected McCarter to do something drastic relative to students get this response:

Almost everywhere I find myself these days someone who is thirsting for new knowledge asks me what the students are going to do **this** year. A few months ago I could discuss that question freely and as knowledgeably as anybody. Now I can't because I've found that if I'm foolish enough to say something, there's always somebody around who's foolish enough to listen . . .

I've been asked what I intend to announce as policies of my own with respect to student disturbances. My answer is that I don't have any policies, but the University does. These policies are found in the Student Guide; they are found in the state laws. They are established and clearly stated policies. So, I have been asked whether I have any strategies, and my answer to that is that the question is not very intelligent . . .

I have great confidence in the elected student leadership. The student leaders that I have known in the past and the student leaders that we have now have typically exhibited sincerity, sense of responsibility, interest in the welfare of the University, with of course prime interest in student welfare. That has been true in the past; it is true now, and there is no reason to think it will not continue.

McCarter's address to the faculty was a strong statement of direction. It left no doubt as to the kind of interim presidency McCarter intends to have. In the meeting he announced the appointment of Dr. Carl Riggs, vice president for graduate studies, as acting provost and Dr. Ed Crim, assistant graduate dean, as acting graduate dean to replace Riggs. He announced he was appointing a committee to seek a successor to operations vice president Verne C. Kennedy Jr., who left the University at the end of September. He announced the selection of Dr. Tom Broce to take the presidential assistant's post left vacant by the resignation of Dr. Gordon Christenson. He established a new University Community Council made up of the president of the student body, the chairman of the student congress, the president of the Faculty Senate, the chief of campus security, and the chairman and vice chairman of the Employee Executive Council. The Univers-

ity Community Council, working under vice president David A. Burr, will serve as a coordinating body in matters pertaining to the entire campus.

McCarter addressed himself to the internal workings of the University—to the sundry committees, councils, budget procedures. He wants to get them formalized, reorganized if necessary, and working smoothly.

He called for a positive, affirmative effort to recruit qualified people from minority races not only as students but as faculty members and employees.

He asked the faculty to begin working hard on building closer liaison with the Medical Center in Oklahoma City.

But most of all McCarter called for unity of purpose:

This is the University of Oklahoma. It is my earnest conviction that this institution occupies a place in the regard of the citizenry of this state that no other institution occupies. This is not to say that everybody is proud of us or that everybody even likes us. But I think a very considerable number of very important people are proud of us, and many of those who are not exactly proud of us do at least wish us well.

There are many who disapprove of us. They have various reasons. Some have reasons of conviction. Some have reasons of personal disappointment of one kind or another. Some have specious reasons. Some have slanderous reasons . . . and some people have no reasons at all that they can express. They just don't like us. But on balance I think we have in the state around us a very large reservoir of good will. That is a commodity that we can't get too much of.

For our own good as professional people and especially for the good of the University I am sorry to have to tell you that in the view of a great many people who are watching us the University now stands in disarray. I ask you to consider earnestly and thoughtfully the degree to which this may be true . . .

We all agree, I suppose, that a university is a place that is not afraid of dissent and is not afraid of disagreement. But, please, let us not confuse dissent with dissension, and let us not confuse disagreement with divisiveness and petty carping.

I am afraid we have been guilty of some of that kind of confusion. We have been tearing our own fabric. We have been wounding ourselves, and we have lesions to attend to. Fortunately, they are the kind of lesions, I think, that can be quickly healed. I ask you to do a very simple thing. Let's get back together . . .

. . . The regents appointed a search committee to help them select a new president. There will be a lot of discussion on what kind of person he—I think I have to say he or she—ought to be, and there will be a lot of argument over credentials and qualifications. Then we will get to the stage of rumors as to

who has the inside track, and most of that will be based on more conviction than knowledge. But before we get into all that, I want to get you to think about another question that closely concerns all of us: Once this person is found, what makes you think he will take the job? After all, being a university president is not a very attractive line of work these days. Of all the vacant presidencies, what makes this one all that attractive? Fortunately, we may have time to make it more attractive than it is now. We need to zero in on the whole University—the faculty, students, administration, alumni—all of them. We need some big good abstractions—things like stability, unity, harmony . . . So I make a very personal plea to you. Please, for Pete's sake, do it.

And they probably will because McCarter is the kind of man who is easy to do things for. For weeks people have been dropping in to offer him their help, sending him notes offering their help, saying "He's such a nice man" with the unspoken tone of "I want to help him." And now he has asked for that help.

In the midst of all this the search is beginning. The committee is a mixed bag of seven faculty members, four students, two alumni plus an alternate, and one non-faculty employee.

At the initial meeting of the committee each group of representatives was asked to come up with a list of requisites for a new president. These are to be combined into a word picture of the person being sought by the committee.

Faculty members met for a week in small groups offering suggestions to committee members. Students filled out forms printed in "The Oklahoma Daily." The alumni and the employees sent out survey forms. That word picture was drawn up this month. Waiting for committee consideration is a huge stack of nominations from people not on the committee. They are responses to a letter sent by regents chairman H. K. Calvert asking people to nominate potential candidates for committee study. It is a massive task. The committee must secure credentials for the most likely prospects, interview them, determine whether they are available for serious consideration. And then they must narrow the list to three or four or five names and submit them to the Board of Regents.

The regents have stated they will not consider a candidate not nominated by the search committee. When that list of three or four or five candidates comes to the regents, they will make the final determination. Should they turn down all those nominees, or should the nominees turn them down, the process must begin again.

There are something like 300 presidential vacancies at colleges and universities in this country. Somehow the search committee and the Board of Regents must find a person who meets the qualities in that word picture and who thinks the University of Oklahoma is a better place to be than any of those other 300 or so places.

It won't be easy, but then no one expected it to be.

Members of the Presidential Search Committee are

Faculty: Mildred M. Andrews, music; Dr. Darrel G. Harden, aerospace and mechanical engineering; Dr. William H. Keown, management; Dr. George Henderson, human relations and education; Daniel G. Gibbens, law; Dr. Cluff E. Hopla, zoology; Dr. Sherril D. Christian, chemistry; Dr. G. Rainey Williams, surgery.

Students: Albert Black, Houston, Texas, senior; James H. Lazalier, Muskogee graduate student; Henry Steven Manning, Pontiac, Michigan, senior, and Teresa Pitts, Ardmore junior.

Alumni: John F. Y. Stambaugh, Tulsa, and J. W. McLean, Oklahoma City, with William F. Martin, Bartlesville, as alternate.

Employees: Cullas A. Webb, University Press.