

# Students

# and their

The concept of students governing themselves is nothing new. To a limited extent it is done in thousands of public schools across the country through student councils. Those who remember the Student Senate from their years at OU hark to a day when student power simply didn't exist. Student government was an activity; it had little power; it's elections drew only a glimmer of response from the campus constituency. Today student government is big business. There are national offices in Washington, D. C., doing nothing but working in the area of student government.

At OU campus governance took on new dimensions with the adoption last year of a student constitution. That constitution abolished the Student Senate and created a new body, the Student Congress. It gave life to what had been a titular office of student body president. It established the Student Association. And, for better or worse, it gave the students some measure of control over the use of their activity fees.

From the outside looking in it may seem foolish to let students parcel out some \$180,000. But the students take their government, their court system, the dispensing of that \$180,000 very seriously. They work hard at their jobs.

To examine the question of student government Sooner magazine interviewed two government leaders, Bill Moffitt, who was elected last spring as Student Association president, and Joe Lunn, who until the October Student Congress elections was chairman of congress. Sooner asked them about student power, use of the student fees, and a host of other issues. Their answers are on the following pages.

Interviews by Val Pippis

# Governance



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## *Moffitt*

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*students  
are rational  
people*

**SOONER**— What is your concept of student government and its role in the University?

**MOFFITT** — Student government is attempting to give the students a voice in the policy processes of this institution. I think we are old enough and mature enough to take that kind of responsibility, and I doubt that any institution in 1970 or in the future will be able to function without allowing the students to participate in its governance.

It is a fallacy to believe that students are just coming to college to go to class and become good little boys and girls because they aren't boys and girls; they are men and women. They have desires and a need to express those desires. They are concerned, and they need to have a chance to do something about those concerns on the campus.

Student government, as presently constituted, provides several channels by which students can have a voice. I think, though, that there is need for greater student participation and an even greater need for understanding among the various segments of the institution. Most of all the students today and tomorrow need to be listened to. They should not be put down as being children, immature and irrational.

We come from a rational educational system. We are products of that system, so we must be rational people. I don't think students can be denied their rights on the same grounds that previously have been used—those of irrationality or unpreparedness. We are trying to be prepared, and we are not being allowed that freedom.

**SOONER**—What do you feel are the responsibilities of your office?

**MOFFITT**—My greatest responsibility in the current hard times we are having at the University has become one of representing the students and representing a policy which we have a great deal of faith in. That policy is one of student participation, and my greatest responsibility right now is maintaining that policy.

In other more quiescent years I would probably be doing other things, less ambitious things. Our office would be representing the student body in functions, preparing budgets for the Student Association or trying to get programs in student services. But there is an overriding issue of the times. The institution and the freedom of students and faculty are being threatened, and we have taken the position that it is our responsibility to protect those things.

**SOONER**—What new things is student government doing?

**MOFFITT**—We have initiated several new programs this year. We have a new Student Information Office. It is geared to give out cultural and political information, both right and left, information from the Civil Liberties Union. We are going to hire counsel for the Student Association. We are hoping to institute our grocery store, and we are working on the book store problem. We feel students have been taken advantage of by the book stores and grocery stores in Norman, and the only way to combat this is for us as a student organization to compete with these merchants and bring them down to reasonable levels.

In addition we are trying to provide an opportunity for people who have never participated in student government. We not only want to provide that opportunity but also a reason for a student to work in this particular student government. This is very important. There are many people on this campus who have good ideas but don't get the chance to voice their opinions. So we are trying to open student government up to these people and break down the traditional barriers that existed between student government and the students.

**SOONER**—How do you get along with the Student Congress?

**MOFFITT**—I think we have a good congress. I'm very proud of some of the things they have done so far. They have been a tremendous help to me in the times I have really needed it. Joe Lunn, who just left the congress chairmanship, did a superior job in organizing the group. To make things more relevant we are trying to change congress from a pass-fail body to one which initiates its own legislation and that can deal with the things we see as problems on the campus.

In the past congress has not been aware of issues coming from this office and other offices. We have now given the congress five offices in the student government area so they can be a functioning part of that government, a place where they can get really involved in all the processes.

**SOONER**—How much control do you have over the money allocated to student government?

**MOFFITT**—My function in regard to the \$183,000 is that of the executive of the Student Association. As the executive officer I must either sign, veto or pocket veto a bill concerning use of those funds.

If I feel that certain elements of that bill are not equitable, I will not sign the bill. If I don't sign the bill, it goes back to congress, and they will act on it again. My veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of congress. So I do have some control over the money, but I don't have \$183,000 to dispense as I please.

**SOONER**—Do you think being black has had any effect on your job as student body president?

**MOFFITT**—A lot more people have become aware of this office, and we have gotten quite a different composition of people here than we did last year. But I don't think that being black has made any difference in the working relationships. We have more people willing to work in student government. There are applications available for various positions, and already we have over 300 turned in. We're getting a good cross-section of people who just want to get involved. We are making a big effort to break down the friendship system whereby a student can get into office just because he has friends in student government. I don't think that is a good system. It always excludes someone who has a good idea.

I think a lot of students are now realizing that they are threatened by certain situations which have made themselves apparent in the state. The greatest thing that brought students together was the interference of the governor in the Hollomon issue. That situation united the student body rather than driving it apart. I think that some of the blatant attacks on the character of the student body have really turned off some people who may or may not have been my supporters. But I think they realize the type of job we are trying to do up here and that we are trying to do the best possible job for the students. This has done a great deal to unite the students.

**SOONER**—What is your relationship with the University president and what kind of person would you like to see in that office?

**MOFFITT**—I had a very good relationship with Hollomon. We could talk man to man. My relationship with Dr. McCarter hasn't been established yet. We know each other and we have talked more or less informally, but there has been no issue where we have been on opposite poles, so to speak. So I can't judge the relationship until we approach a point where we have something to hash out.

With Hollomon it was always a man-to-man basis with each person saying what he actually felt without fear of reprisal.

As to the future, the question is not what type of person I would like to see as president. The question is a greater one of what type person we must have to allow the University to expand itself and remain a free institution.

He has to be a very tough, sincere, feeling person. I would hope that he is not a blatant conservative nor a blatant radical. I would also hope that he is the type of person that would be willing to stick his neck out for the betterment of the institution. There is a good chance we will get this type of person. I think there is also a good chance we will get a person we don't like. It's something we'll have to be careful about.

**SOONER**—Do you think your administration can effectively deal with any kind of student disorder?

**MOFFITT**—No. That is a fallacy. We were exceedingly lucky last spring, and I think we all realize that. We can deal with most types of student disorder. There are certain types we will be able to deal with, and there are others we can't. I wouldn't be honest if I said otherwise.



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## *Lunn*

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*our system  
has real  
credibility*

**SOONER**—What were your objectives in setting up OU's student government?

**LUNN**—The government we have tried to establish at the University is one in which the students will be heard. At many other schools around the country there has been a problem in the past two or three years in that most students find the university alien to them. They can't have their views articulated; they can't express their points of view within the specific structure set down by the administration or the faculty or the board of regents.

We have tried to achieve a system in which the students can be brought into an organized structure and can articulate their ideas. Then, if a decision is made and students are involved in that decision, they will feel some responsibility for seeing that decision through.

We hope this is a more acceptable means of voicing student sentiment about issues. We don't want students to be divorced from the administration and the faculty and the rest of the University. Such a situation leaves no avenue for voicing student opinion except through protest. We want to minimize that need for protest because sometimes it leads to violence.

**SOONER**—Is there real power in student government?

**LUNN**—Student government does have real power on the campus. It is structured much as the federal government is structured. There is an executive branch headed by the student body president. There is a judicial branch responsible for trying students for violations of University regulations. In that system students are judged by their peers rather than by people who don't understand the way a student feels or the motivation he might have had for doing something. It is a much more equitable judicial system than the old J-Boards were.

Then there is the legislative branch, the Student Congress, which is headed by the congress chairman. It is the responsibility of congress to vocalize students' ideas through specific legislation. That legislation is then passed on to the student body president, and, if it is approved there, it is forwarded to the University president and then to the board of regents. It is a mechanism for tapping student opinion and bringing those ideas to the forefront. It provides a cohesiveness that sometimes is lacking at other institutions.

**SOONER**—Most alumni remember the old Student Senate. How does congress differ from that group?

**LUNN**—The structure of the Student Congress has changed dramatically. We formerly had a structure that included eleven committees. We have broken this down to five major areas.

The first deals with the relationship of congress to the student body—the student problems committee.

The second is a congressional administration committee which deals with all the problems the student congress has in functioning as a body.

The third is the university relations committee which deals with the relationship congress has with the rest of the University community—all segments that are non-student such as faculty, administration, or employees.

The fourth committee is the external affairs committee which handles problems students might have outside the University.

The ways and means committee is the fifth one. It appropriates all funds which the Student Association receives from student fees. When a student enrolls, he pays a standard student activity fee. A portion of that money is given to the student government by the board of regents and is then parceled out to the various organizations on campus.

I think the differences between the government we have through the student constitution and the one we had under the old Student Senate are obvious. The Student Senate did not have a great deal of credibility with the students and could not really represent them. I think our present system has a tremendous amount of credibility.

**SOONER**—There is a lot of discussion outside the University about the ability of students to manage such a large sum of money as it does. Would you comment on this?

**LUNN**—The student government received an increased appropriation this year of \$33,000. This brings our total to \$183,000.

I would like to make one point very early. There has been a lot of speculation about whether students are capable or qualified to handle an amount of money as large as this. This probably was the general sentiment of the state at the time the books were checked for the old student government a year ago.

We had been given \$150,000 by the regents during the first year, and the question was, had the students actually misappropriated its funds. The board of regents conducted an audit of the money. They really studied it, and they came to the realization that not a penny had been misspent by the students or by the student government. As a result the student association gained a tremendous amount of credibility. The board of regents must have been convinced since our appropriation was increased this year by \$33,000. I think that speaks very well for the student government.

The method of appropriating the money is fairly simple. At the top of the priority scale set up by the ways and means committee is money for organizations on the campus. Most students participate in one or more of these organizations, and each group needs money to carry on its projects. Money also is appropriated for the housing centers. This is a new concept started a year ago when we began electing presidents in each house and in each center. The centers use the money for all kinds of programs. For example, a center may want to bring in a speaker or have a watermelon feed or sponsor a dance. This is left up to the housing center president and the dorm presidents. But the money is there in the centers where the majority of the students live.

**SOONER**—What was your relationship with Bill Moffitt, student body president?

**LUNN**—My first responsibility, as Bill's is now, was not to the congress or to the executive branch of the student government. Rather it was to the students as a whole. This is the critical point that any student leader must realize. Students may differ in geographic origin or national politics or state politics, but they have many things in common—they want academic freedom; they want to be able to learn; they want to do their learning in an atmosphere that is relevant to society and to the problems they will face when they leave here.

I have the greatest amount of respect for Bill's integrity. We worked closely, and I think we brought the students together in the sense that they recognize that we are all in the same boat, so to speak. We all have common interests, and the only means by which

# Lunn

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we can improve the education we get in the University or improve our way of life is by sitting down and talking and trying to explain the various positions. We must not use physical violence against other human beings, and until we recognize this fact and all come together, the problems will go on.

**SOONER**—What needs to be done to push congress along and make sure it stays on issues relevant to the University and its students?

**LUNN**—Some of the problems we had with congress over the past months have been resolved because of congress' willingness to make a fairly accurate appraisal of itself. One of the primary problems with congress in the past was that it was a body that recommended action rather than initiating that action on its own. We hope the new committee structure will streamline that process. Obviously, the greater the bureaucracy, the more committees there are. With fewer committees the important issues can be dealt with more quickly. At the same time we hope congress will deal with issues which are more important and try to resolve them rather than let the problems grow beyond solving as has sometimes happened. The congressmen we have now know this has happened and are willing to work on issues before they become real problems.

I think the congressmen are much more responsive to the students than ever before. First of all there are more people with faith in student government because more people are voting in the elections than ever before. Each election has been substantially larger than the one before it. In the housing centers we have 80 and 90 per cent of the students voting. That means more people are interested in the government system and the congressional elections are going to attract more candidates. That will make hotter campaigns and make it more difficult to be elected. The old Student Senate had no meaning campus-wide. Once a person is elected to the Student Congress he knows he's responsible to a large number of people, and he is going to be more willing to work. He will be more intelligent and more capable of working with the problems that any modern university has to deal with.

**SOONER**—Are all segments of the University community represented in congress?

**LUNN**—Yes. As a matter of fact we have virtually every kind of student you could possibly have. There are different educational patterns such as arts and sciences, engineering, education, finance. There are different social groups—Greeks and independents. There are different ethnic groups—blacks, Indians, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. There are all kinds of people in Student Congress, and any way you look at it, it is very representative of the student body.

**SOONER**—What type of president would you like to see at the University?

**LUNN**—I would like to see a president who is acceptable to all the points of view on the campus. By this

I mean that there are obviously different interest groups. What would be ideal for a student probably would not be ideal for a faculty member, would probably not be ideal from the administration's point of view and would not be ideal from the regents' point of view. I think it is important for the person selected to have the support of all the varying elements on campus—the students, the employees, the administration, the faculty, the alumni, and, certainly, the board of regents. I think unanimous consent of the search committee would be beneficial in bringing in a person who is acceptable to every point of view.

**SOONER**—Do you think we will get that type of person?

**LUNN**—I have a great deal of respect for the search committee, and I think they will do their best to try to get a person of this caliber. University presidents around the country have one of the hardest jobs in the nation because the university today is in the process of change. This change has built up over many decades and is still in a state of flux, so it takes a very capable man to deal with all the problems. A president is no longer concerned just with academic affairs. He has problems of administration; he has to relate to the employees; he has to relate to the state political situation, and he must relate to the students. It takes a person of very high caliber to satisfy all these groups. I think the search committee will do its utmost to find a person who fills these requirements.

**SOONER**—Will outside pressure influence the search committee, pressure from the students or the people of the state or wherever?

**LUNN**—I don't think it will. The reason I say that is that once you're put on the search committee it's a whole different thing from sitting back and reading newspaper headlines and speculating about who you like and who you think would be a good guy to have as president of the University. Once you're on that committee you have a responsibility not only to the interest group from which you were appointed—alumni, faculty, student, employee—but also to the University. You want to find a man capable of dealing with all the problems that a modern university has to confront. You want a man who will do his job in a manner which will project progressiveness within the institution. I would hope there would be unanimity of opinion within the committee and that the overriding question is how capable the person is rather than what are his politics.

**SOONER**—Can student government as a whole move forward under a new administration?

**LUNN**—Yes. I think it will have to. The student government right now is the only alternative for both the students and the University. If the student government fails to articulate the students' views, not only here but elsewhere in the country, then the only other alternative students would have would be to turn outside the process. That connotes defeat and bitterness on the part of all people involved. We have to underscore the fact that all elements of the University and the state have to work together to resolve their differences. This has to be done within the system lest we break down into a confrontation of varying interest groups outside the system.