
PROLOGUE

Some Cures Ease the Pain and Kill the Patient



Just imagine the shock with which the faculty, staff and students of the University of Oklahoma read the following 1933 legislative news report:

"Senator H. P. Daugherty of Chelsea proposed March 7 that the University of Oklahoma be closed for a period of two years, in order that the common schools might be saved. Mr. Daugherty would declare an educational holiday for the university, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College and two teachers colleges . . . 'The state faces the most critical period in its history,' Senator Daugherty stated. 'The budget lacks millions of being balanced. The income tax will fall far short and other sources of revenue will provide little. We are faced with the necessity of abandoning either our common schools for the limited period or closing the university. I think, that under present conditions, there is nothing for us to do but to sacrifice the university.'"

That would have been some sacrifice, even in the depths of the Depression when the suggestion was made. Senator Daugherty was perfectly serious, however, although he was quick to assert that he held "no animosity toward the university," indeed he had defended the institution on other occasions — which only proves that even your friends can do you in when faced with hard decisions.

Hard decision time is here again for state government, and the search is on for the quick fix solution which will please everyone — which means of course, protecting jobs and salaries

and pet projects and patronage and all the state institutions which are the economic backbones of so many small Oklahoma communities. Unfortunately there is no such quick fix; someone is going to get hurt. The question is who and how much.

Can Oklahoma afford to take the long-term benefit approach? Can we afford not to? Can we prevent this sort of crisis funding from reoccurring year after year? Can we fulfill our present obligations without mortgaging the future of our children?

The solutions which are being offered for the state's fiscal dilemma all revolve around economic development, notably that buzzword of the 1980s, high-technology. (See "To Inherit the Future" on Page 9.) And what is going to attract these sophisticated industries to Oklahoma? Not our welfare programs, nor our correctional institutions, not even smoother roads and wider bridges. The attraction will be the quality of our educational institutions.

This would seem to be a time for officials throughout Oklahoma's system of higher education to speak up, to make the case for preserving at least the major portion of the hard-won gains of the past few years. Apparently such public pronouncements are considered impolite or ungrateful at the majority of our sister institutions, for the only voices you are likely to hear will come from the University of Oklahoma.

It is the OU president, the OU faculty senate and the OU student congress who take the initiative and take the heat. William S. Banowsky is not the first OU president to dis-

cover this truth. The University of Oklahoma usually stands alone.

There is a lot more public sentiment for quality education among the people of Oklahoma than we are being led to believe, and the men and women in the legislature need to hear it. They are the ones who ultimately must put their names and their political futures on the line when the hard decisions are made.

No one is suggesting that the thousands of needy Oklahomans served by the Department of Human Services be abandoned, or that we operate inhumane prisons, or that our highways and bridges be allowed to crumble. Nor does higher education have any right to expect immunity from the cutbacks that must be made if Oklahoma is to survive this period of economic crisis. Higher education shared the prosperity and now must share the shortfall.

All areas of the University of Oklahoma are involved in trimming the budget. Hiring, travel and non-essential purchases are frozen; departments are streamlining their curricula, cutting back on some classes, eliminating others. Each cutback hurts someone, of course, but the University which emerges could be a leaner, more efficient institution. But when proposed cuts go beyond the fat and into the muscle and bone of higher education, we must speak up.

Undoubtedly, Senator Daugherty's plan would have eased greatly the state's financial burden in 1933. It is unlikely, however, that the University of Oklahoma could have survived the cure.

— CAROL J. BURR