

Backlog

THE ALUMNI ARE WILLING TO HELP
THEY'RE JUST WAITING TO BE ASKED

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A COUPLE of weeks ago I climbed into my aging automobile and set the course for Kansas where a brother of mine was graduating from high school. It was a long, hot trip, and I kept my mind busy with a variety of subjects—air conditioning, Alpine ski trips, ice cold lemonade, the amount of Oklahoma sunshine which the human body can safely absorb—things like that. I also devoted a few thoughtful miles to the current political campaign as represented by the posters lining the highway.

Most of the men whose faces were obscuring my view of the landscape have promised just about everything a voter could ask for, and I have no particular reason to doubt their sincerity. They are all for higher education and mental health and good roads and progress, and who can be opposed to higher education and mental health and good roads and progress? A few of them differ on the means to achieve these goals, and I assume this should be the basis for the voter's choice. But even electing the man with the best program is no guarantee that the candidate, once in office, will be able to deliver.

When an election is over, a state official is still only one man—whether he be governor, senator or representative. He is subject to many pressures in making his decisions; unfortunately one of the least of these is the opinions of his constituents. The individual voter who will decide the political future of this official is largely silent between trips to the polls. Yet failure to carry out the unstated will of the people can turn a man out of office at the next election.

So state officials must rely mainly on their personal convictions—and the support indicated by the special interest lobbies. We hear a lot about these lobbies, and we also hear that higher education doesn't have one. This is not entirely true. Properly identified and activated, higher education has one of the most effective lobbies of them all. It exists where lobbies can count the most—in the home town of every elected official. It exists wherever there are alumni of the state's institutions of higher learning—and that's almost everywhere. This lobby can be just as powerful as these alumni want it to be.

A surprising number of O.U. alumni throughout the state have recognized this need for home town support between elections and are only waiting for someone to tell them what to do. They think in terms

of a debt they owe the University, as the answers to this month's Conversation Piece question indicate. Many of them are ready to pay off this debt with interest—and it won't cost them a penny.

But if any such debt exists, it is a mutual one. A strong case can be made for what the University owes the alumni. For one thing, it owes them the information they need to decide for themselves whether their alma mater is worth their time and effort. Then the University owes them the opportunity to help when and where their help is needed.

The university that ignores this reservoir of support either doesn't recognize it, need it or want it. None of these conditions holds true for the University of Oklahoma.

● Many persons who follow closely the internal operations of the University have taken this spring's resignation of several able faculty members as evidence of the faculty "crisis" we are facing and as a warning of dire things to come. Actually it would have been much more surprising if O.U. had not lost a few of these men.

Faculty raiding has become the national pastime among our educational institutions. To be ignored is to be insulted. But much more significant than the few we lost to higher bidders is the larger number of talented professors who have elected to remain at the University to the ride out the current problems for another year.

The departing professors are a big loss, to be sure; a few of them will be extremely difficult to replace. But young men with promising futures will always be moving on to more money and greater opportunities. They wouldn't be bright young men if they didn't. We will continue to lose a few each year; so will Harvard. Our main concern in the meantime should be to provide for those who have kept faith with the University by staying on. We can't keep these professors waiting too long—they are bright young men too.

● The next issue of the *Sooner Magazine* will bring you a glimpse of O.U.'s first Alumni Institute, held in the Center for Continuing Education on May 26. This educational program (on the European Common Market and the Emerging Nations of Africa) marks a departure from the traditional activities offered Sooner alumni and the beginning of a closer identification of the alumni with the University's ventures into adult education. —CJR