

July 28, 1969



The Honorable Daniel J. Evans
Governor of Washington
Olympia, Washington

Dear Dan:

This is an attempt to reply to the comment-- "While this obviously doesn't apply yet, this letter is going to all boards of trustees. Any idea you have would be welcome."--that you penned on the bottom of your letter of May 6 concerning student members on boards of trustees of state colleges.

Since becoming trustees of The Evergreen State College two years ago, we have been deluged with reading matter concerning every aspect of colleges. Without students, alumni, and faculty, we have perhaps been better able to be objective. No group of trustees has had more reasons to keep open minds on everything.

Certainly we need the students' point of view. We need to know what is relevant in their thinking. We need to know why they are dissatisfied to the point of rioting. We need to know why there is student criticism of faculties, administration, and trustees. But, will putting a student on a board of trustees give us this information and will it enable us to make the changes that should be made?

Boards have traditionally operated as overseers, not involved in actual operation, particularly in faculty and student matters. The writings on higher education abound in expressions of this, perhaps a most typical one being from the AAUP statement on government of colleges and universities (AAUP Bulletin, December, 1966, page 377):

"Since the membership of the board may embrace both individual and collective competence of recognized weight, its advice or help may be sought through established channels by other components of the academic community. The governing board of an institution of higher education, while maintaining the general overview, entrusts the conduct of administrative officers, the president and the deans, and the conduct of teaching and research to the faculty. The board should undertake appropriate self-limitation."

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There's no need to maintain tradition for its own sake, but the fact is that, generally speaking, colleges and universities with the strongest faculties and the ablest administrations have **existed** together with a board composed of able, experienced people who have a strong view of public interest, combined with a view of how all the complex workings of higher education affect that public interest. The American **system** of lay overseeing boards has generally worked well, keeping colleges free of undue harassment but yet reasonably responsible to the greater public interest. Exceptions reflect poor appointments or, in the case of private **colleges** (and a **situation** far more difficult to correct) the failure of the board to police its own quality.

But to say that boards have generally worked well is not to claim that there is not **great** room for improvement. Whether appointing students and faculty to boards will ensure improvement is questionable. It will bring special interests in, and a further drawback **will** become apparent as we explore the question. First with regard to students:

We have participated in two student panel discussions. In the first instance, four students of the University of Puget Sound made a panel presentation to that school's trustees. Recently, six **students** were on a panel appearing before the joint meeting of the trustees of our state **colleges**. In neither **instance** was there any strong logical demand that students should be appointed to boards of trustees. As we understood these students, their primary concern involved their inability to be heard. They have come to the conclusion that they want to be able to present their cases to the top governing authority. They feel that in "going through channels" they have gotten nowhere. They seem to have two plans in their minds which, if implemented, would conflict with each other. On one hand they seem to want pure democracy where the students from a "**grassroots**" approach could settle their own problems. On the other hand, they talk about being able to by-pass student government, faculty government, the administration, and getting to the trustees if the **trustees** represent the top authority. This would, in effect, make a dictatorship out of the trustees or whatever authority turned out to be the top authority, which in turn would certainly destroy any semblance of democracy that now exists. We came away from the last student panel discussion with a rather discouraged feeling that our students need to go back to their history **books**. As it applies to the governance of a university, they seem to have no understanding or appreciation of our republican representative type of government. They are not willing to elect students to governing positions and give them full authority to represent them. On the other hand, we do not think that any number of them are willing to accept the proposals being made by the Students for Democratic Action which in part appear in the attached copies of pages from the book written for or by SOS.

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Putting one **student** on a board of trustees could hardly satisfy a majority of the students in the school. It is pretty **obvious** that one student can at best **represent** only a very small minority. Whatever **decisions** he might have the power or opportunity to make would likely be criticized by other minority groups and probably a substantial majority of the students.

Second: We must take faculty into account, for if students were appointed to the board, faculty would not sit still for a minute. A principal drawback with boards has perhaps been that administration has had its policies reviewed to the exclusion of faculty and students' policies, but if the latter were "represented" on boards, administrative staff would inevitably follow also.

The climate would be perfect for backscratching, leading to the inertia typical of faculty senates and student governments. The tendency to dwell on matters dear to special interest groups would probably be **irresistible**. The further drawback, and the one which worries us most deeply, is that, if boards of trustees became concerned with the operating detail **arising** from interest group pressure, they would no longer serve their function as citizen boards of review, keeping the long-term interest of the public in mind. When the public no longer trusted boards, close state central control would follow. And close central control would be a step backward, in our opinion.

Constantly before us are your comments . . . (our need for a) "flexible and sophisticated instrument" . . . (as opposed to the) "vast and immobile establishment." We believe you further suggested the need to "unshackle our educational thinking from traditional patterns." Then Senator Sandison remarked, "It was not the intent of the Legislature that this would be just another four-year college; . . . (the college could be) a unique opportunity to meet the needs of the students today and the future because the planning would not be bound by any rigid structure or tradition as are the existing **colleges**, nor by any overall central authority as is the case in many states."

When our appointment **was** confirmed by the Senate, we were asked whether our plans for our school contemplated new approaches to the establishment and operation of a four-year college. We replied strongly in the affirmative to the question, and stated that **some** might criticize **us** because we will not be following tradition. The Senate committee assured us that on this we had its full support. The committee also asked us how we felt about a coordinating authority for higher education in our state. We expressed, as our personal opinion, strong opposition

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to a controlling authority such as exists in California and several other states" Members of the committee expressed approval of our thinking on central control.

Through their boards of trustees, state universities and colleges **must** be answerable to the public but they should not be errand boys for bureaucrats or politicians. If our state does not have the courage and wisdom to maintain colleges and universities that are responsible yet independent and critical, then we feel that perhaps our free society is in deep trouble.

In summary, we think a strong input to a strong representative board is what higher public education needs and not a weakening of the board by turning it into an operating council, which would happen if students and faculty are added. We do not believe that taxpayers will trust local operating councils as boards of review. They logically would suggest that we take the next step which would be, "Let's do away with the self-serving boards and have one central board."

We take it as our duty to make sure we get strong input--from students, faculty and administration. To this end, we are thinking seriously about establishing an internal governing council representing equally all members of the Evergreen community. And we're going to try to make sure that decisions affecting people get made as closely as possible to where those people are, and with their real involvement.

Our failure to reply more promptly to your May 6 comment was caused by our inability to readily write this letter to you. A great deal of thought and concern has gone into it. We hope that you may find some use for our thoughts on this very disturbing question.

Sincerely,

A. E. Saunders, trustee
The Evergreen State College

AES:ps

cc: Dr. Charles J. McCann, President
The Evergreen State College
Olympia, Washington