

March 29, 1972

DEAR TRUSTEES:

On January 27, 1972 I wrote you this:

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"One matter that I've brought up on at least three occasions, and every time I do the trustees change the subject: A proposal for terms for the presidency at Evergreen. I hope they'll work out such a policy and announce it before the inauguration. The president, of course, serves at the trustees' pleasure and I therefore suggest only a maximum incumbency, with a clear break, a term-end, in the middle so that there is a readily graspable occasion to throw a rascal out. In the case of the first president, the trustees will need to decide when his term will have begun, when he was named or when Evergreen opened. One thing in this connection I'd plead for: If a man were still here when his maximum time came (and he presumably was still in good graces with the community) that the trustees give him the option of staying at Evergreen in another capacity, particularly as a member of the faculty. I would consider it a gross injustice to be deprived of teaching here after I'd helped build the place. But each individual case should always be up to the trustees. Some men, maybe even me, they just might not want, for the good of the college, to have around after a while. I'm simply asking for the option to be kept open. A related issue should also be settled before the inauguration: Trustees, with the rest of the community, should establish a policy for selecting new presidents, in case of maximum term reached, death, firing, or quitting. A pre-arranged procedure will save the college much strain."

Herb has been the only one to respond, and this is what he had to say:

"In the short duration of my trusteeship I don't intend to be a part of limiting the term on the rule of the president, as you request.

China's system seems to work well; evaluation throughout the ranks, but Mao seems to have decided that he's the only capable RED BOOK writer, and doesn't intend to turn over the bakery after a few runs at the oven. I prefer a strong president. One who speaks for the board and the college, rather than one who will shortly terminate his services and all the troops know it."

I agree with Herb that strong presidents are needed. In certain contexts, however, some adjustments to the usual pattern of an indefinite length

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presidency might even improve the president's leverage on the organization and the organization's leverage on him as well. I think that, for most colleges or universities, but especially the way we're doing things at Evergreen, terms for the president would make the presidency stronger. I think that for these reasons: (1) If we can make our governance scheme work and hold, Evergreen has an unusually strongly positioned administration, that is to say: It's openly conceded where the decision-making lies. Administrators have great latitude in the means by which they can arrive at decisions. This means that things can get done, but unless there is a very clear understanding that people can get at administration--from the president all the way down--this state of affairs isn't going to last very long. We'll find people chipping away at it constantly in order to match a dug-in administration with dug-in power blocks elsewhere. (2) I will not be able to insist upon evaluation of administration, which is absolutely essential (if we don't do that, we'll never have adequate evaluation of faculty), if the president, too, is not subject to evaluation, and with teeth in it. I don't think there's any way to do that unless there are clear ends to terms and people have a wide-open choice as to whether they want to go for another term with a guy or not. (3) After about ten years a man has done about all he can in a job like this. He might be able to run a holding operation pretty well after that, but ten years is as long as anybody's upswing, maybe longer. A good time to test how strong the upswing is at that five-year point. I'm not trying to set it, but that's a reasonable time--it could be six, for example; but two terms of six runs twelve years--that's a long time. That's the absolute maximum, in my view. (4) I think it's human nature that, knowing there's a time limit, a person is going to try to do more within that time limit. (5) I don't think the lame-duck principle would hold. I would act like president until the last minute I was in the job. If anybody didn't the trustees should see to it that he didn't last a minute longer in the job.

Therefore, I earnestly request that the trustees establish a term for the presidency at Evergreen, with the clear understanding that it does not alter in any way the principle of the president serving at the trustees' pleasure, but yet establishing a very clear time for evaluation with plenty of teeth in it at the end of the first term, and an expected maximum for time in service--no more than two terms. Second, I request that you make your decision known before or at the inauguration.

Sincerely,

Charles J. McCann  
President