

Regents: A silent majority of six?



Greenberg



Elliott



Horman



Baun



Schwartzkopf



Adkins

'Regents balance many interests'

by CAROL ANDERSON
Nebraskan Staff Writer

The thing to remember about the Regents is that they are elected. They are laymen, not educational experts. And they must depend on the administration for most of their information about the university and for the implementation of their policies.

According to state statute, "The Regents shall have power to enact laws for the government of the University; to elect a chancellor; to prescribe the duties of all the professors and officers, and to fix the compensation."

Since each Regent represents about 250,000 people, he "has an absolute obligation to take into account the interests of parents and taxpayers who have a vital interest in the University," according to Joseph Soshnik, president of Lincoln campuses.

The Regents must balance the interests of the students and the taxpayers when these interests differ,

not supported by them."

Although the Regents have "delegated literally the bulk of decision-making," according to Soshnik, parents hold them responsible for policies such as women's hours and keys.

"There are an awful lot of people who don't have enough courage to stand up to their kids (and) who would rather climb on the Regents' backs," the president explained. That's why the Regents will "always consider coed visitation."

"The Regents are satisfied, and so am I, that the kind of dorm structure we have doesn't lend itself to coed visitation. We've gone to open lounges, IDA hours and open houses. So we don't have monastic surroundings," Soshnik said.

Because the Regents have no independent staff of their own, they must depend on the chancellor and his staff to tell them what the University needs.

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—President Soshnik

Soshnik said. To say they favor one group over the other is "unrealistic," he continued.

"Absolute consistency is not the greatest of virtues," the president added.

Soshnik said it would be "inconsistent to ask the taxpayer to pay a big part of the University's bill but deny the public any say in its decisions. The only way to get the people out of it is to have an institution

thinks this lack of staff "limits their perspective because they aren't autonomous. They must rely completely on the administration for all their information." Miss Theisen described the relationship between the Regents and the administration as "really strong."

She said she knows most of the Regents well and says she is impressed by the earnest desire of most of the members to work toward betterment

of the University. The Regents also work conscientiously for the electorate, "perhaps more than some of us think they should from a student viewpoint," Miss Theisen said.

"In most instances the Regents are receptive to student wants," the ASUN vice president said. "We didn't have to ask for student involvement in choosing a chancellor. Most universities envy us our student majority on the Council on Student Life."

The former chairman of the faculty liaison committee to the Regents admitted that "to some degree decision-making takes place in the informal meetings. But as a practical man I know that public decision making can only go so far," said Neale Copple, director of the School of Journalism.

"There's not a lot of discussion among them (Regents) at public meetings," Copple continued. But the votes that count — the ones that have their names on them — are all taken in public. As a journalist, he added "it concerns me that there isn't more public discussion from all public bodies."

The Regents must rely on the administration, according to Copple, "and I think they're getting good information. They don't have to swallow everything they get. They can demand information and they ask penetrating questions."

Referring to the merger with former Omaha University, Copple commented, "We're evolving a new system, and everybody including the Regents are reassessing their positions."

Miss Theisen said the Council on Student Life is an example of the necessity to stretch the Regents authority since the merger.

"They can't be concerned with so many details on each campus now," she predicted.

Former acting chancellor Merk Hobson said there is no indication that the University's expansion will lead to the Regents delegating more responsibilities, although the business operation has expanded.

One result of the merger has been the formation of rules about appearing before the Regents' meetings, said Hobson, vice chancellor for academic affairs.

"Since the operation is now more complex," Hobson said, persons must request permission to appear before the board 10 days before the meeting. The request must go through administration channels and be placed on the Regents' agenda by the chancellor.

The chancellor rarely precludes such a request, Hobson said, although he may try to solve the problem without going to the Regents.

Defending the board's informal meetings, Hobson said, "We're asking a group of laymen who aren't paid a cent to make policy decisions for a very large and complex organization. So they should be able to carry on fact finding informally before action is taken in public meetings."

"They don't always have a solid front," Hobson said. "On a number of student issues they have disagreed in public meetings. But when they have all the facts, the Regents tend toward agreement," he added.

The board "can delegate authority, but they can't delegate responsibility," Hobson said. CSL and the Faculty Senate have received some of this authority.

CSL can legislate in all matters affecting student life outside the classroom, and Faculty Senate has jurisdiction over matters affecting more than one college. The decisions of both bodies are subject to Regent review.

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