

In February, MSU President Cecil Mackey announced to the Board of Trustees his plans to leave the presidency by June of 1985. The board accepted his decision "with genuine regrets" and passed a statement that "reports and rumors to the contrary, the majority of the board now wishes to express its continued support of Cecil Mackey as President of Michigan State University."

Here, Mackey talks about his tenure at MSU, the budget crisis that forced the cutting of academic programs, the disenfranchisement of the alumni association, the presidential selection process, and his plans for the future.

QUESTION: In 1979, you were the product of a long, arduous search for the 16th president of Michigan State University. Leaks of candidate names at one point caused you to withdraw from consideration. What made you change your mind?

ANSWER: I withdrew because I thought the publicity attending the leaks was unfair to Texas Tech University where I had responsibilities as president. There was an assurance afterwards that the trustees believed they could carry out the rest of the process with confidentiality and that it would be done quickly. Michigan State is obviously a great university and the opportunity to serve as president was attractive in terms of the challenges it offered, so I was willing to proceed further after having withdrawn.

That continues to be a problem for this university and for others, and, unless there can be assurances of confidentiality, it's unlikely that any institution is going to be able to attract many of the types of people it would like to have consider the position. There is just no way, as the system works with such openness, that many people who are doing jobs where they have commitments will submit to such a process.

Q: When you were hired, the Board of Trustees spelled out problem areas within the University that needed immediate attention. What were those problems and have they been resolved?

A: There were a number of particular concerns the board had. I think we dealt effectively with the great majority of them. Others will continue to be problems for many years.

One was the need to reestablish the central direction of the institution, to affirm its commitment to academic quality. Michigan State in a sense has been poised on the edge of a significant step forward academically and, before the financial crisis that hit the state came along, it seemed the time was perhaps appropriate to make the move for which the foundation had been laid. It looked as though those opportunities with the right leadership and the right support from the board were ones the institution and its president, its board, could take advantage of; unfortunately, that changed.

There were some other immediate problems. One was the need to establish comprehensive and continuing major private fund raising. This institution had no record of sustained successful private fund raising. That meant both alumni and friends had to be organized and cultivated in a way that would provide a kind of support the University had lacked in the past.

The board was concerned about affirmative action and felt there was a need to move aggressively to implement, on a larger scale, the commitment the board felt and believed the institution must have to affirmative action. The work I had done in that field indicated to them that that would be possible with the leadership I'd bring to the president's office.

There was also the need for strong central direction for the administration of the institution, its internal processes, the operating systems, as well as the academic programs. The board was anxious to have good, strong leadership following board policy to reaffirm the commitment to excellence.

Q: Have all your actions been consistent with board policy?

A: Absolutely. There is no question about that. I am the chief executive officer of the board and my principal responsibility is to direct and oversee the operational administration of the institution consistent with board policy. I have done a great many things to increase the extent of the board's involvement in policy considerations. They have had more information, been more involved in the major issues than had been traditionally the case before I got to Michigan State.

Q: Shortly after you arrived here, the state of Michigan was plunged into an unforeseen budget crisis that caused severe financial problems for MSU. The

CBS Evening News interviewed you then as the first university president to begin the arduous task of cutting programs in response to a national trend of serious underfunding of public higher education. Was that one of the most difficult processes you've ever presided over? Has MSU emerged from financial jeopardy?

A: Certainly Michigan's financial crisis was as severe as most states in this country have experienced in contemporary times. There have been very few instances of such severe economic problems since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was a very severe situation, coming at a time when few people had expected it and when neither the state nor its institutions had planned for it.

By any standard, that would have had to have been about as difficult a time as I had ever experienced in administrative work in higher education or as any other major university in this country had experienced. It hit here earlier and it hit more severely than in most places in the United States. And having to deal with cutbacks across the University on such a broad scale was not only difficult but unpleasant. The reductions, the cutbacks, the eliminations, the dismembering of things that had been built up over long periods of time and that for the most part had good quality to them, was painful for everybody. And one of the worst aspects of it was we had all the disadvantages that accrued from recognizing the serious problem early and knowing that there was a need to take action. We were perhaps a year ahead of many of the other institutions in the state.

Q: Is it behind us?

A: Unfortunately, I think not. I believe the coming year will be a very difficult year economically, given the uncertainty of the way the Legislature may treat the revenue sources in this state. There may be several more years of extreme financial circumstances for all of higher education in Michigan.

Q: The disenfranchisement of the former alumni association approved by the Board of Trustees in December of 1981 has been widely reported but perhaps not widely understood. Why did you endorse the disbanding of that group?

A: My own feeling is the basic purpose of any alumni organization should be to support the institution with which it's affiliated. Shortly before I came to MSU, our board had taken an action authorizing the separate incorporation of the MSU Alumni Association. It took the board only a relatively short time to determine that that decision had been ill-advised. The board reached that conclusion on its own and was not able to work out arrangements after that action that it should have worked out beforehand to establish an acceptable working relationship between the separate incorporated entity and the University.

As the result of that failure and the apparent desire of some of the people who represented the leadership of that separate alumni association to be more independent than supportive of the institution, the board decided that separate incorporation was not going to be a useful long-term relationship and was unacceptable.

I thought that was a good decision because of my basic belief in what alumni organizations chartered by universities should do for the institution. If such an organization wants to be the authorized representative of the institution, of its Board of Trustees, and have the sole responsibility of speaking to the alumni and interpreting the institution and generating support, it has to take on certain responsibilities that the independent alumni association as a separate corporation was not willing to take on. It simply did not want to offer any assurance of its support for the basic direction of the University, its policies, especially

its Board of Trustees. There was no way the institution could have the alumni association as your base for any such raising, would be a major institution. The institution a future without that base.

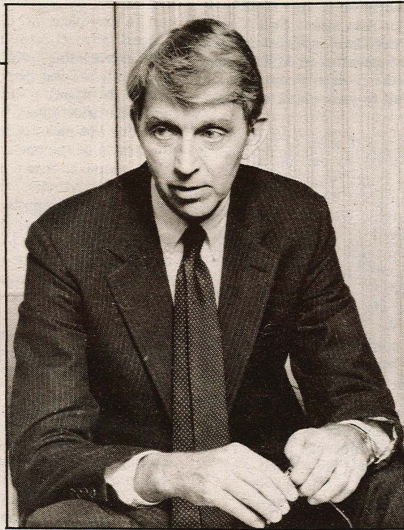
Q: There was the issue of the association was limited to minorities, and was based on your perception?

A: One need only to go to was in fact the case. The distribution of those and the staff of that nature of the program to include significant units that were not that is, it had separate organizations. There was significant effort to include significant units that were not that is, it had separate organizations. There was significant effort to include significant units that were not that is, it had separate organizations. There was significant effort to include significant units that were not that is, it had separate organizations.

Q: What does the one didn't?

A: It offers a different philosophy, a much more programs and opportunities the association's staff a commitment to the representation in the standpoint. The leadership of the organization making concerning the apparent, and certainly a wider range of our minority alumni, is programs has changed offerings both on and the summer — are all illustrative of the director) Chuck W. association in rapidly already proving to be with potential with problems of

Reflections on a president



Q: Media accounts of your resignation seemed invariably to point to a list of controversial issues, such as \$85,000 spent in renovations to Cowles House, the campus residence provided MSU presidents, and \$17,000 in improvements to the president's box in Spartan Stadium. Have these been misrepresented?

A: In both cases, I think the expenditures are ones that any reasonable person might well have expected. Cowles House is a very large facility; it's used for many public functions; the president is required to live there. There had been a long period without major renovations and some of the decisions had been deliberately delayed until the new family that would live in the house arrived. A substantial share of the expenditures were for areas that are part of the public segment of the house: remodeling of the kitchen, which is used for catering events that sometimes include several hundred people; the areas of the dining room and living room, where there is a constant flow of official guests of the University. The choice to have and maintain a residence like Cowles House is a fundamental decision of the Board of Trustees. Given that decision, the cost of periodic renovation and maintenance is certainly not out of line with what anyone would have reason to expect.

I think the way in which the matters were raised made it obvious that people were trying to create issues, particularly in light of the controversy over the alumni association.

The same with the press box — some fairly modest expenses out of the athletic department's budget. The facility is used as an integral part of the fund raising activities of the University. It's a place where major donors and potential major donors are invited frequently. I think the decision to have an environment likely to help in that fund raising rather than one that was at best neutral or perhaps negative was a sound investment.

Q: Were those budget commitments made at the same time we were cutting academic programs?

A: My family and I came here in August of '79. Most of the decisions about the renovations in Cowles House were made in the summer before we actually came to East Lansing. The decisions were made that summer and early fall, before the time of the budget crisis. The expenditures were raised as an issue subsequently, in the heat of the alumni association dispute and after the budget crisis had become an issue on campus. The commitments were made, the renovations undertaken and completed and the expenditures made long before the University's budget was the issue it became.

Q: Your record shows you were a strong and consistent advocate of affirmative action. Is that one of your highest priorities?

A: Yes. I think that's one of the most important issues that this country has to deal with — the question of how we establish the environment in which minorities and women are able to have the choices that they should have, the roles that society

needs them to play, and the economic and personal opportunities that have been traditionally available only to the majority of white males in this country. That has to be an extremely important item on the national agenda, at the state level and in organizations such as this institution. It's certainly something I feel very strongly about.

Q: Can you summarize what gains the University has made affirmative action-wise?

A: To me the most significant aspect of gains that have been made throughout virtually all the University is that we now have significant numbers of well-qualified women and minorities in positions which are of influence, with notable administrative responsibilities, where their work and their decisions will give them the training they need to enhance their own careers, to contribute to the University, to serve as role models for others and to bring the perspective they have into the mainstream of the University decision-making. That's an ingredient of success of affirmative action that's often lacking when success is measured only in numbers. I'm particularly proud of that.

We've also made gains in student enrollment, recruiting of disadvantaged and high-achieving students, support for women and minority graduate students. We've had increases in appointments of tenure system faculty and academic administrators. There are significant achievements in virtually every non-academic area, including some that have traditionally been areas where little affirmative action progress had ever been manifested. It's particularly gratifying to see the breakthroughs in these difficult areas.

Q: Perhaps the hallmark of your presidency is an insistence on a commitment to excellence for an AAU (Association of American Universities), land-grant university. What does that mean?

A: It was certainly my understanding when I came here that Michigan State's history had been one of striving to be one of the major universities of the world. In order to be an outstanding university of real quality, you have to be vitally concerned with the level of work, the nature of performance in teaching, research and public service. You have to have a pervasive concern for the quality of the student body, the quality of the faculty, the quality of work that goes on in the classroom, the laboratory, the library, and you have to have commitment to the use of support services to foster those kinds of academic endeavors.

In order to do that, you have to care about how you use resources so that you get and keep the people who represent the best in each of the fields that you work in. You have to reward the accomplishments.

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