

January 5, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

TO : The President of the University of the Virgin Islands  
Chair and members of the Board of Trustees  
The Governor of the Virgin Islands  
President and members of the Virgin Islands Legislature  
University administrative officers, faculty, student and  
alumni leaders, and friends of the University as deter-  
mined by the President

FROM : Lawrence C. Wanlass, President Emeritus

Founding presidents of universities become increasingly less relevant as time moves forward, and this is as it should be. If the president's work has been of good quality, then a university will have moved ahead, increasing its value year after year.

An occasional role remains, however, in recalling past experience and highlighting an institution's importance for those most directly involved (a university's stakeholders) and for a university's larger constituency.

One such contribution by the University of the Virgin Islands remains little known, and this leads me to recall the period centering around 1972 and the federal enactment of the highly important Higher Education Act of 1972. The account begins with the University's involvement in achieving land grant status and the four million dollar endowment in lieu of public lands which adhered to this status.

Land grant status carried with it the important agricultural research and support services now primarily in evidence on St. Croix. It also included the University of the Virgin Islands as a member of the most prestigious higher education association, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. The four million dollar endowment was equivalent to approximately 18 million in current dollars. And the

University has received multimillions in federal funding for the related agricultural programs over the last 34 years with continuation of these funds into the future.

Of even greater importance, however, was our pivotal involvement in the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1972 itself. This Act contained the much discussed Title IX, granting equal standing to women in comparison with men within universities accepting federal funding.

Title IX was the first comprehensive federal law prohibiting sex discrimination by educational institutions. It states that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance."

When people today hear about Title IX, they often relate it to women's athletic programs which have been dramatically expanded since the passage of this legislation. The expansion of these athletic programs has been controversial, explaining the public's interest. In a larger sense, however, this identification of women's athletics with Title IX has been misleading.

The major purpose of Title IX and the reason for its inclusion in the Higher Education Act was to move the country towards further advancement and enablement of women on a much broader scale, as per the above quoted text. In this respect, Title IX has proved to be a kingpin strike in fulfilling this broader goal. And granting that women may outnumber men across the world, the importance of our actions in bringing about the passage of this legislation is difficult to overestimate. More about this later.

Before recounting our involvement in the passage of Title IX, let me describe our efforts to first reopen and then to be included in the much prized and historically important land grant program of the United States government. Our actions were of special significance in the development

of the University of the Virgin Islands, and they provide an understanding and framework for our involvement with the passage of Title IX of the Higher Education Act.

Remembering that the land grant program was initiated by President Lincoln and that it led to the establishment of many of America's state universities, we were attempting to open again a very major program that had been considered closed for many years. As a small and relatively unknown institution without senators or voting congressmen, the University of the Virgin Islands faced major challenges, which we very nearly failed to overcome.

Our path ahead was to gain passage of our land grant legislation by first winning the support of a major standing committee of the House of Representatives of the United States government, to be followed by an affirmative vote in the full House, and then by the Senate's concurrence.

In the Senate we were in good shape. We had made many friends, and passage there was reasonably certain. To help our cause, we had "elected" two influential senators to be "our senators." The two senators who informally accepted were Hubert Humphrey from Minnesota and Henry "Scoop" Jackson from the state of Washington. We also had vital and early support from Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, to whom we had taken our original thinking about reopening the land grant program. He was widely respected, and his approval was a key to our efforts.

In the House of Representatives, we believed we would do well through the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. The Interior Committee was under the chairmanship of the highly regarded Wayne Aspinall, and he was supportive of our efforts. He was ready to guide our bill through his committee, which he did, and then to push our bill to a vote in the full House of Representatives. However, we were abruptly stopped in our tracks by

the assertion of the chair of the Agricultural Committee of the House that the land grant program had historically been an agricultural program and that his committee had jurisdiction.

It is necessary to remember here that turf fights are of great importance within the House of Representatives. The one thing that every committee member can agree upon is that no other committee should be allowed to encroach on their committee's turf. A battle ensued, and we had the misfortune to be on the losing end. We then reluctantly started over again with a subcommittee of the Agricultural Committee.

Without going into two or three years of detail and to summarize, we realized that the Agricultural subcommittee and the full committee were never going to report our bill out favorably. The lowest point was reached when an influential member of an Agricultural subcommittee decided that the Virgin Islands really ought to be a county of Florida, if you can believe it, and that Florida already had a land grant university.

Determined not to be denied, we regrouped. We decided to concentrate on the Education and Labor Committee of the House, chaired by Carl Perkins of Kentucky. As the most important part of this strategy, we turned to Edith Green, the congressional representative from the Portland area of Oregon.

Edith Green was already a very good friend, having given us a special place in bills already passed by Congress. She had become the senior member of the Education and Labor subcommittee on higher education. In this position she was at the center of legislation that was of importance to universities and colleges.

As this report unfolds, her role will become critical. Here, it is important to remember that she was a pioneer in the sense that very few women had achieved the status of chairing such an important subcommittee.

She believed strongly, as I do personally, in full equality for women. She was determined to be treated by her other subcommittee members, some of whom were individually very powerful, with the same respect given to the chairs of other subcommittees in the House. More about this later, as well.

Moving ahead with this recounting, our bill was well supported by all of the key people on the subcommittee. The chair of the full Education and Labor Committee, Carl Perkins, could not have been more helpful. He was strongly opposed to the leader of the Agricultural Committee. These full committee chairs, sometimes described as the "barons" of the House, often fought with each other. And our bill was not an exception.

This time, however, in the hard fought jurisdictional contest that followed, we came out on the winning side.

As mentioned earlier, our land grant provisions were then made a section of the Higher Education Act of 1972, and the Act was sent to the full House.

Our involvement now becomes more interesting and more difficult to follow.

We were committed to the passage of this legislation. We had worked for several years to get this far, and we could not be certain that we would ever have another chance. The overall provisions of the Higher Education Act, however, were very controversial at that time, and passage of the bill was in serious doubt.

As the scheduled vote on the bill was nearing, the best vote counters in the House had the bill losing by approximately 20 to 25 votes.

To make matters worse, our friend Edith Green, who was the author of the bill, decided that the jousting for final votes had resulted in some unacceptable changes to her bill. She then appealed to the other members of her subcommittee to support her, which she believed they would normally do for a

male subcommittee chair. When they refused, she became furious with this perceived unfairness, and she decided to move against her own bill to defeat it.

The role the University of the Virgin Islands played now came into sharp focus. We believed that we would need more than 30 additional votes to succeed. The higher education community was divided with Yale, Princeton and others apparently trying to defeat the bill.

Convinced we had no other choice, we came in very heavily on the side of passage. We created an Ad Hoc Committee for the Passage of the Higher Education Act of 1972, and then we systematically contacted the presidents of virtually all of the major universities in the country. We sent more than 2000 cablegrams from the St. Croix office of the cable company.

We also concentrated our attention on carefully chosen congressional representatives who were still making up their minds. We analyzed the makeup of the districts of these House members, looking to find where they got their reelection support. And we then communicated in more depth with the college and university presidents in these districts. We asked them to create their own ad hoc committees made up of their key board of trustees members, the heads of relevant businesses and labor groups, community leaders, and especially financial supporters of the incumbents.

The message was clear. The colleges and universities in their districts needed this higher education act to pass, and they were counting on their representatives to support the bill.

We worked very hard on a full-time basis for three weeks, with the result that we helped materially to change the vote. The bill finally passed with a small majority in the House and then with a larger majority in the Senate. The counsel to the subcommittee on higher education in the House of Representatives, Bill Gaul, later credited us with having played a vital

role in passing this legislation. We received similar acknowledgments from others, as well; but Bill Gaul had more overall and balanced knowledge about this bill than anyone else.

Turning to the question of what was accomplished, it is clear that without the equality provisions of Title IX, women would have continued their slow advancement. It is equally clear, however, that with the passage of Title IX and moving forward from 1972, a major acceleration in the enablement of women has taken place.

The earlier reference to a kingpin strike is supported by the evidence. This can be measured by the number of women who are now enrolled in graduate programs compared with the earlier period. It can be measured by the number of women entering the professions such as the field of medicine and by the larger number of college and university presidencies and senior academic positions now held. And it can be measured, among other important yardsticks, by the ascendancy of women to the highest corporate positions and by the increased numbers of women filling elected and appointed political and judicial offices.

Having cited these advancements, we must freely admit that changes of such proportions have also been brought about during the intervening years by other very significant factors. But the contribution we made in 1972 remains.

In conclusion, I believe the University of the Virgin Islands can fairly be given credit for and take pride in the role that it played. And we can look ahead as these advances continue.

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