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*Student Housing*

Board of Visitors  
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Ladies and Gentlemen:

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Rather than take up the time of the Board at the mid-day meeting this communication will set forth my thoughts (which have been known to be quite protracted on occasion) on the Board's recent decision to build dormitories.

I seriously doubt that the Board had before it, or took into consideration a factor of the utmost importance to the future development of George Mason. To understand this adequately it is necessary to explain in some detail the background and attitude of the General Assembly with respect to residential appropriation requests. (As you know, dormitory requests have to go through the usual appropriations procedure as well as gain approval of bonds by the Governor.)

There are very few on the Board who know or recall that when I introduced the resolution authorizing the creation of the college, it would have failed of passage without my agreement, and that of the rest of the Northern Virginia delegation, to an amendment which specifically barred residential facilities. (Copy of resolution enclosed). I had to assure the Education Committee as well as the Assembly that we had no intention whatever of providing residential facilities, since they weren't needed as we were going to serve our region only. It was only on this assurance that the measure was reported out of committee and passed.

Now this was a considerable time ago and it might very well be said circumstances have changed, or that it will have been forgotten, even though there are still a number of the members of the Assembly who were there at that time and who are now on the Senate Finance Committee or the House Appropriations Committee. Nevertheless, I give you this history as a way of making clear what the general attitude of the Assembly is to creating additional residential colleges and permitting residential facilities at regional institutions.

You see, the Assembly is well aware of the fact that residential halls increase in many ways the overall cost to the state (and the student) of operating an institution. The fact that these residential units are self-financing from revenue bond funds doesn't alter the need to provide supportive services whose costs are considerable, and which would not otherwise be necessary. Furthermore, the Assembly is also aware that residential halls attract out of state students, who never begin, even at higher tuition for out of state students, to defray the overall cost to the Commonwealth of their education. Then add to that the opposition of partisans of various colleges who see someone else trying to cut in on their enrollment.

Also to be taken into account is the current disfavor into which residential halls have fallen in the legislative and State Council's mind because of today's administrative difficulties in their operation.

So at the very beginning there is real resistance to such development, as evidenced by the before mentioned resolution creating George Mason.

Far more important to us, however, is the fact that George Mason will be losing one, if not the greatest, of its psychological arguments for needed appropriations to further our educational development. George Mason has always been able to present a good case for its appropriation requests as a non-residential institution, and comparatively speaking, we have been

most successful. The appropriating committees know every dollar is now going to the educational function and on more than one occasion the argument has been made by George Mason, in presenting its requests, that the taxpayer gets more for his higher education dollar at George Mason than at any other institution of higher education. The wisdom of giving up this psychological advantage, which has helped us so much, in exchange for something which is not actually a pressing educational need, should concern all of us.

But that is not all. It may not be realized, but when appropriating committees are looking at an institution's budget, they look at the last line, and it doesn't make any difference that part of the total appropriation comes from special funds (including revenue bonds) or not. In other words, when the appropriation total is looked at in relation to whether a college has received "its share", dormitory expenditures are figured in the whole, and if granted it is usually at the cost of some other request. To put it still another way, you will usually have to exchange something else that is badly needed for a dormitory request. If you have any doubts about this attitude on the part of the Assembly you can ask Lorin Thompson who, just as I, dealt with the problem of appropriations for years.

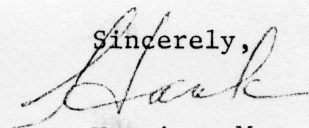
It is difficult to think of a more inauspicious time for George Mason, at the inception of its development and its many needs, including a request for a law school, to lose its strong position with the General Assembly and weaken its argument for appropriations. No matter what one's philosophical attitude is toward George Mason's future development, or student costs, the advantage we now have should not be given up except for the most compelling reasons. Of course, I recognize you may feel that there are compelling reasons of sufficient magnitude to override the above considerations.

I did not intend that the above be an argumentative expression of views,

but an informative over-view of a practical political condition presented in the fashion of a military "estimate of the situation", where the alternate courses of action seem to be: (1) We get shot down; (2) we may be successful, but with heavy casualties. Is it worth it? (3) etc.

I close on the profound note, which many of you have heard from me in the past ad nauseum: "Keep your eye on the doughnut and not on the hole."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harrison Mann".

Harrison Mann