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The Election, Politics, and Higher Education

It is probable that a sizable majority of academics on our campuses across the country would have preferred to see the Democrats in control of the White House. There has not been much love lost between the present Administration and the intellectual community. But a case can be made that the Nixon landslide is, in a fundamental way, the best thing that could have happened to academia.

Basic decisions about the future of virtually all of higher education are now clearly in the hands of the federal government. The Higher Education Amendments of 1972, passed with bipartisan support and White House approval, will profoundly affect the character and quality of education beyond the high school for a long, long time. The failure of the Washington-based spokesmen for higher education to contribute significantly to the shaping of those amendments verges on the scandalous.

This failure is worth noting since there are lessons for the future. The "centerpiece" organization of higher education, the American Council on Education, had, until recently, leadership which eschewed a vigorous active role on the governmental scene. Its small staff has not been given to easy communication with public officials or with other Washington-based educational associations. There has been a good deal of in-house jockeying for domination among the associations. A paucity of solid data and an overabundance of wishfulness have characterized the representations of the spokesmen for higher education before congressional committees.

The deep-rooted reason for the ineffectiveness of higher education's Washington representatives is in the apolitical or anti-political attitudes of many academics. Do faculty members across the country know the essential features of that legislation which is bound to markedly change their lives—the Higher Education Amendments of 1972? How many of them know which way their congressmen and senators voted on those amendments? How many have expected and wanted their Washington representatives to compete effectively with other claimants for federal resources?

Had the election turned out otherwise, it would have been tempting for higher education's leadership to sit back and say, "We're O.K. now; we have a friend at court." It would have been tempting to rely on the old attitude that higher education being so clearly important to the national well-being, its needs should be attended to *ipso facto*. What happened on 7 November may impress on academia the urgency for quite different approaches.

The President has been abundantly clear that he intends to make fiscal restraint the hallmark of his second term. If there is to be reasonable funding for the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (the bill which was passed authorized the legislation; it appropriated no monies) the spokesmen for higher education in Washington will need to do several things, and quickly. They must add staff who can work effectively with the Congress and with officials of the White House, the Executive Office of the President, and the executive agencies. They must develop capabilities for producing the facts and the evidence in support of dollar requests. They must put their house in order at the National Center for Higher Education through sharing and fixing responsibility.

Above all, higher education's leadership needs to begin to educate its constituents to an important fact of life—namely, that the country's expectations for education beyond the high school are so important that Washington cannot ignore them. Washington will continue to address those expectations, and, if necessary, without instructive inputs from higher education's leadership. But Congress and the Executive Branch would prefer, and the nation would be better served, if spokesmen for higher education were in there at the crucial junctures, making their case in informed, persuasive terms.—JOHN C. HONEY, *Chairman, Department of Higher Education, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13210*

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John C. Honey

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