I
n the spring of 1892, the superin-
tendent of schools in Arkansas
City, Kansas, was mulling over three
employment opportunities — the posi-
tion of superintendent of schools in
Wichita, a political race for Kansas'
state superintendent of schools and
the presidency of the newly-formed
University of Oklahoma. The Okla-
homa job was running a distant third.
However, a close friend encouraged
David Ross Boyd to reconsider.
"By all means, take that presi-
dency," the friend counseled. "Oklahoma
Territory will become a state
sooner or later, and no state univer-
sity has ever failed."

The wisdom of this advice is worth
remembering. The University of
Oklahoma is now, always has been
and always will be a state-supported
institution. And far from failing, this
state university is flourishing as
never before.

Obviously, OU's budgetary pros-
perity is due to the healthy condition
of Oklahoma's economy in a national
sea of fiscal troubles. But another
major factor in OU's relative afflu-
ence is a blending of public and pri-
vate resources which has created a
partnership unique to Oklahoma. The
endowed professorships are a good
example with the state providing the
base pay and private funds providing
extra compensation to attract the
very best faculty available. OU's
major building projects — the library,
the energy center, the music building
— are being financed by both state
and private money — and the physi-
cal fitness center even added student
fee support.

The extraordinary generosity of the
private sector in this partnership has
drawn most of the media attention,
but equally remarkable has been the
willingness of the legislature and the
governor to compensate for all the
have-not years which have hampered
the development of Oklahoma higher
education.

The 1982-83 appropriation for the
total state system of 27 colleges and
universities has been increased by
approximately $71.75 million, com-
ing on top of a $55 million increase
last year. Increased tuition will add
another $5.3 million for the system
during 1982-83.

While the University of Missouri at
Columbia, for instance, ponders cuts
of $12 million for next year, OU's two
campuses expect more than $20 mil-
ion in new state money and $1.5 mil-
ion in increased tuition. Meanwhile,
private contributions of cash and
property actually received (not count-
ing pledges) will top $18 million by
the end of fiscal 1981-82 — up from
$14 million last year — and the pros-
pect for 1982-83 looks even better.

With this sort of backing, the Uni-
versity is hiring while others are fir-
ing. Salaries paid full and associate
professors at OU have risen from last
to first in the Big Eight, and good
progress is being made at the lower
faculty levels. Teaching and research
support is being strengthened sub-
stantially and an unparalleled build-
ing program is under way — all in the
last four years.

The plight of the country's great
state universities and its distin-
guished private schools is cause for
national alarm. Oklahomans can
sympathize; they've been there. The
University of Oklahoma has a lot of
catching up to do, and fortunately its
public and private partners have the
means to help.

The legitimacy of private support
for public institutions still was being
debated 10 years ago. Traditionalists
warned that (1) if private support was
forthcoming, the state would reduce
public support and conversely (2) if
the state did its job, the private sector
would not feel obliged to help. Both
predictions have proven dead wrong.
State appropriations for the Univer-
sity of Oklahoma have gone from
$33.5 million in 1971-72 to $95.1
million in 1981-82, and private con-
tributions from $2.8 million to more
than $18 million.

It appears that everyone likes to
back a winner.

—CAROL J. BURR