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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 7, 2015

USM Chancellor Robert Caret
cc: USM Board of Regents

Dear Chancellor Caret:

I respectfully submit to you and the Board of regents the following regarding Byrd Stadium:

Recommendation for board action:

I recommend that “Byrd Stadium” be changed to “Maryland Stadium.”

Planned follow-up actions by UMCP if this recommendation is approved:

- Memorialize President Byrd in the library: UMCP will identify a suitable and visible location inside one of our main University libraries and install a permanent exhibit recognizing the enormous contributions of Harry Clifton “Curley” Byrd during his presidency (1936 – 1954) and in the 25 preceding years as teacher, football coach, and university administrator. As an institution of learning, we are duty-bound to memorialize his complete legacy.
- Announce a moratorium on any other honorific renaming: There will be a five-year moratorium on any honorific renaming of other buildings that recognize historical figures.
- Move from symbolic change to institutional improvements: True change is not realized by name change alone. This controversy is symptomatic of deeper divides on campus and in the nation at large. Early next semester, UMCP will launch a campus-wide “Maryland Dialogues on Diversity and Community” to help bridge the differences and to align better our practices and policies with our 21st century moral and academic vision.

DUE DILIGENCE

Over the summer, I talked informally with a wide range of stakeholders—people on campus, alumni, public officials, colleagues at peer universities—seeking their views and wisdom on this matter. Opinions are strong and divided. Some defy easy categorization.

This fall, I convened a 20-member workgroup of faculty, students, staff, administrators (including Deans), and other campus representatives (from the University Senate, student government, Intercollegiate Athletics, etc.) and alumni to study the subject. The workgroup was diverse and balanced. It included those who want to keep the name, those who want to change it, and those who are neutral.

I asked the workgroup not to make a recommendation. I did not want its members caught in the crossfire of the controversy. Instead, I charged the workgroup to undertake an assessment of the issues. The results are two very thoughtful reports: “*Arguments For and Against Changing the Stadium Name and Alternative*

Considerations” (10 pp.) and “*President H. C. ‘Curley’ Byrd: Biographical Notes*” (6 pp.). I want to thank the workgroup and its chair, Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill of the College of Arts and Humanities, for their work. It helped inform my thinking. I embrace their ideas of a permanent exhibit to memorialize President Byrd, their call for campus-wide dialogue, and initiatives on diversity and inclusion.

FRAMING THE ISSUE: ARGUMENTS AGAINST AND FOR CHANGING THE NAME

This is an agonizingly difficult, emotion-laden, and polarizing issue. Any outcome will likely please few. It reignites in our time a conflict that has simmered for decades. As William Faulkner observed, “*The past is never dead. It’s not even past.*”

History is not about the past. It concerns today’s debates about the past. We must be wary of “presentism,” which is to judge historical figures based on contemporary moral and ethical standards. It is unfair to fault them for not transcending the values of their time, even when we no longer subscribe to those values.

On the one hand, President Byrd is rightly regarded as “Father and Builder of the Greater Consolidated University of Maryland, founded in 1920,” as his epitaph reads. He left an indelible mark on the institution. He advocated successfully for merging the Maryland Agricultural College and professional schools in Baltimore into a single public university. He dramatically increased student enrollment, faculty, funding, and the size of the campus. He adopted the Terrapin as the institution’s mascot. He named the student newspaper, the *Diamondback*. He laid the foundation for what UMCP is today.

On the other hand, values of racial segregation and discrimination are associated with his iconic name and legacy. He was an ardent proponent of “separate but equal” education, both as president and later in his campaign for governor of Maryland. At this time of intensified racial tension in the nation, “Byrd Stadium” stands as a symbol to many African-American alumni and students. It is a painful reminder that a generation ago they were unwelcome on this campus. For them, this past is more than mere history. Their pursuit of inclusion and equal opportunity remains unfinished.

Neither side’s arguments can be ignored. President Byrd positioned the institution for greatness, a process that his successors fulfilled. He has earned his place in our University’s history. We can honor his accomplishments without intending any racial insensitivity or opposition to racial diversity today.

Still, the world has changed. Our society’s and our institution’s demographics have changed. The values that prevailed during the first half of the 20th century no longer define our nation and UMCP in the 21st century. We have evolved into a globally pre-eminent university committed to racial diversity and inclusion, respect for human dignity, and free expression—values that undergird our academic excellence.

We cannot move forward by looking through the rear-view mirror. How we understand the past may change, but the facts should not. We must embrace our history fully and build our future. We can memorialize President’s Byrd’s legacy and affirm the values that the University stands for today—without having the stadium bear his name.

RATIONALES FOR THE RECOMMENDATION AND PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Enduring Power of Symbols

Symbols matter. Monuments, battle flags, and building names elicit deep emotions, positive and negative.

They help us recognize truths about our past and affirm the values by which we live today. The Byrd name has acquired that power.

There have been three attempts by students over the past 25 years to change the stadium's name. The first two occurred in periods of heightened national consciousness about race relations.

The latest attempt began last spring. It coincided with the public release of a racist, sexist, and misogynist email that a student had sent to a handful of his friends over a year earlier. After an investigation and given the factual circumstances, the University concluded that this email—though appallingly offensive—was protected under the First Amendment. Meanwhile, urban unrest and the Black Lives Matter movement followed the shootings in Ferguson, Charleston, Baltimore, and elsewhere.

The Student Government Association subsequently endorsed a resolution in support of this call to change the stadium's name. The vote was 13 in favor, two opposed, with two abstentions.

For some African-Americans and other people of color, the name "Byrd Stadium" conveys a racial message hidden in plain sight. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained the cutting power of exclusion. In a speech on a college campus, he said: *"If one says that I am not good enough ... to go to school with him merely because of my race, he is saying, consciously or unconsciously, that I do not deserve to exist."*

Frederick Douglass knew the struggle in an earlier era. He said he wanted to be *"treated not as a color, but as a man."* I heard similar expressions of hurt and anger throughout this naming controversy. These feelings are raw and real.

When President Byrd served in office in the first half of the last century, the University of Maryland was monochromatic. In 2015, the UMD freshman class is the most academically talented and the most racially diverse in our history—42 percent minority, including 25 percent African-American and Hispanic. Yet, we know that these dramatic changes have not eliminated racial tension. Today's progress cannot fully undo memories of yesterday's wrongs.

Consider, too, the strong symbolic power of a stadium. Athletics is the "front porch" of a university. It is not the most important part of the educational house, but it is the most visible. Some 50,000 people gather there on Saturday afternoons in the fall. A name on the front porch carries greater weight than any other campus location. This explains in part why the stadium name elicits such intensity.

Embracing History on Campus

For several years, UMCP worked to develop symbols on campus that tell our full story. Distinguished University Professor of History Ira Berlin and faculty colleagues envisioned and labored for five years to create a memorial to the great orator and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, a native son of Maryland.

Recently, we dedicated Douglass Square, with a towering figure of the man. Etched in stone and metal are his soaring words on racial justice and the transformative power of education. Then, some 200 students gathered around the statue for a peaceful demonstration in solidarity with protesters in Missouri and elsewhere. Through them, this symbol became a living presence on campus.

We also added the name of Parren J. Mitchell to the campus' Art-Sociology Building. He was denied admission on account of his race. Thurgood Marshall sued successfully, resulting in Mr. Mitchell becoming

the first African-American permitted to study on campus and receive a degree in sociology. He later became Maryland's first African-American elected to Congress. His life devoted to civil rights and economic opportunity will inspire new generations to careers in public service.

The planned memorial to President Byrd in the library will complement this ring of history on our campus. These symbols teach us about our University's past and present and impart lessons for the future.

Moving Forward

Our national motto engraved on our coins is *E Pluribus Unum*, one formed from many. The Founders of our Republic got it right. We are a diverse people, but we are united by common values and ideals. We are of many different backgrounds but ultimately we are one. What holds us together is a commitment to core values that transcend our differences. They are the moral glue that binds our pluralistic society. They are the values of UMCP today.

Continuing the Byrd Stadium name divides us at a time when we need unity more than ever. We must accept the full truth of our past and the possibilities of our future.

The proposed actions—changing the stadium's name; permanently memorializing President Byrd's accomplishments and full legacy in a University library; creating a campus climate that supports the cultural and intellectual diversity essential to learning and growth—illustrate the ideal and the challenge now roiling American campuses everywhere: to reconcile racial justice and free expression.

This clash of competing ideas and values does not undermine an institution of learning. It strengthens it. Because the mission of a university is the pursuit of truth and knowledge, it is an indispensable place in society where the struggle for progress can take place. This struggle contributes to our nation's progress towards a more perfect union.

Early next semester, I will announce a campus-wide "Maryland Dialogues on Diversity and Community." It will be a series of conversations and educational programs that engage our students, faculty, and staff in all of our schools and colleges. It is intended to move us beyond symbolic changes to institutional improvements. It is to better understand and better bridge the differences—cultural, racial, intellectual, religious, etc.—that divide our community and our nation at large. It is to reaffirm the defining values of the University of Maryland regarding racial diversity and inclusion as well as academic freedom and academic excellence. And, it is to plan for actions that will better align our institutional practices and policies with our moral and academic vision.

UMCP honors history, respects the power of symbols, and assures free and robust exchange of views in the marketplace of ideas. We will preserve and protect these bedrock values.

Thank you for considering the recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wallace D. Loh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Wallace D. Loh
President, University of Maryland