

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BOARD OF REGENTS

PUBLIC FORUM ON THE UNIVERSITY BUDGET

Tuesday, May 18, 2004

A meeting of the Board of Regents was held on Tuesday, May 18, 2004, at 11:30 a.m. in the Boardroom, 600 McNamara Alumni Center.

Regents present: David Metzen, presiding; Peter Bell, John Frobenius, Lakeesha Ransom, and Maureen Reed. Clyde Allen and Patricia Simmons participated via telephone.

Staff present: President Robert Bruininks, Vice Presidents Kathryn Brown and Charles Muscoplat; Acting General Counsel William Donohue; and Executive Director Ann Cieslak.

Regent David Metzen, Chair of the Board of Regents, welcomed those in attendance at the Board of Regents Public Forum on the University Budget. He noted that the University of Minnesota Crookston, Duluth, and Morris campuses were connected to the meeting via interactive TV. He reviewed the procedures to be followed for the meeting and stated that the Board of Regents intend to vote on the proposed budget at their June 11, 2004 meeting.

Metzen then called forward the following individuals:

Joe Jameson – Chair, Civil Service Committee

Mr. Jameson thanked the Board for upholding salary increases for employees. He acknowledged that the rising cost of health care is major concern of employees and maintained that the University could play a lead role by initiating symposiums on health care.

Candace Lund – AFSCME 3937, Minneapolis

Ms. Lund recognized the difficulty in securing public funding for the University. However, she added that increases in tuition and wage freezes should not be the way to solve the problem. She encouraged partnership between the administration and its employees, but emphasized the need for mutual respect.

Dan Rivera – University Union Employee

Mr. Rivera said he believes the University is a significant cost to the people of the state, and cannot simply be labeled as an investment. He offered the idea of closing a campus as a way to cut long-term costs.

Abu Jalal – President, Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Mr. Jalal spoke about the impact of the proposed budget on graduate and professional students. He highlighted the following issues as concerns to graduate students: tuition increases, a decreased number of fellowships, access to programs, and insufficient support for international students.

Paul Hanson - AFSCME 3801, Duluth

Mr. Hanson maintained that the University should invest in its human infrastructure as much as its brick and mortar structures. He pointed out that while administrative positions have doubled, many low-level University employees have been laid off and new jobs have been awarded to outside applicants. He challenged the University to decrease the number of administrative positions and to put a moratorium on staff layoffs.

Teri Wallace – Chair, Council of Academic Professionals & Administrators

Ms. Wallace stressed the importance of investing in human capital. She advised the Board to seek the advice of the University community on becoming more efficient and seeking new opportunities for revenue. Finally, she encouraged the University to work harder to recruit and retain qualified faculty, staff, civil service, and clerical workers.

Rita McCue - AFSCME 3260, Minneapolis

Ms. McCue encouraged the Board to remember and respect the important role of all workers, including clerical and custodial. She added that a wage freeze is not shared pain and that more work must be done to provide adequate, affordable health care for University employees.

Tom Zearley - President-Elect, Minnesota Student Association

Mr. Zearley focused on the impact of the budget on undergraduate students. He cautioned the Board that tuition increases and increased student housing costs have resulted in greater numbers of students being denied access to the University. He also challenged the University to lobby more for the benefit of students.

Laura Thielke – AFSCME 3800, Morris

Ms. Thielke asserted in last year's budget employees saw only wage freezes, take-backs, and increased health care costs. She challenged the University to make an investment in those who have shared the burden of funding cuts.

Chris Pappas – President, Council of Graduate Students

Mr. Pappas expressed concern that many graduate students will not want to attend the University because of rising costs and diminished benefits. He stated that 75% of polled graduate students are opposed to an increase in fees to pay for a stadium and that the administration has not presented a convincing argument as to how the stadium contributes to academic priorities.

Phyllis Walker - AFSCME 3800, Minneapolis

Ms. Walker maintained that while an experienced workforce is the greatest asset an organization can have, the University has laid off many frontline employees in recent years. She emphasized that long term employees save the University money and that instead of employee layoffs, the University should cut administrative salaries and positions.

Charles Campbell - Chair, Senate Finance & Planning Committee

Professor Campbell reported that the faculty was consulted extensively about the budget. Noting that the erosion of state support threatens faculty through reduced compensation, decreased research funding, and insufficient funds for fellowships and assistantships, he argued that there will be a weakening or elimination of valued programs if funding continues to decrease.

Pete Bestilny - Teamsters, Local 320

Mr Bestilny urged the Board to improve employee health care benefits and cautioned that the health care crisis will deepen if the University continues to shift the burden to employees. He asked the University to explore a prorated rate structure.

Shirley Baugher - Dean, College of Human Ecology

Dean Baugher commented on the fundamental transformation of higher education in the state and nationally. She urged the Board to examine the consequences of less public funding and think about what this state will look like in twenty years if more public support is not given to the University. The University, she stated, is moving from a public institution to a private one.

Judith Martin - Chair, Faculty Consultative Committee

Professor Martin commented that the proposed budget is a well-crafted investment strategy in the context of the most severe budget cut of any institution of higher education in the country. She expressed frustration with recent tuition increases, but recognized the need for such increases given the decrease in state support. She added that cuts in support to graduate students make it nearly too expensive to support a teaching assistant. Martin also observed that it will be exceedingly difficult to replace good faculty given low salaries, and emphasized the critical role of the arts and science core of University.

Regent Metzen thanked the presenters and the public for their participation.

The meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

ANN D. CIESLAK
Executive Director and
Corporate Secretary