10 October 2011

P.O. Box 405
Old Town, ME 04468

Ms Ellie Baker, Mr. Gregory Johnson
Co-Chairs, University of Maine System Chancellor Search Committee

Dear Ms Baker and Mr. Johnson:

I write to express my interest in the position of Chancellor of the University of Maine System. At the risk of introducing my candidacy with a cliché, this is a critical search for the University System and for the people of Maine.

As part of my candidacy for the UMaine presidency, I wrote that the University is answerable to a community of internal and external stakeholders that are alert to the financial and systemic challenges UMaine faces and who are eager for real and effective change. The same is true of the University System, if not more so. The significant contextual difference between what I wrote earlier and what I write here is that the Board of Trustees now has a unique opportunity to affect comprehensive change at a time when the System and the state can no longer afford the status quo. This change effort, if successful, will yield enormous benefits to the people of Maine.

There has been much recent discussion about the role of a Chancellor and even of a University System. This discussion has often been driven by what are perceived as the System's primary challenges, including:

- its frequent behavior as a bureaucratic federation rather than as a truly interoperable educational system;
- achieving long-term financial stability in a poor economy and with a contrary demographic environment;
- its administrative size compared to our population base, compromising efforts to allocate resources more effectively and to achieve economies of scale;
- the perceived lack of a coordinating mission and brand, and too often a perceived disconnect with the needs of Maine's people.

Yet there is much room for optimism. New leadership acting in concert with the Board of Trustees and key stakeholders can meet each of these challenges and create a truly comprehensive system. The new Chancellor should have no greater priority.

The tools to meet some challenges are at hand. Take the relatively straightforward case of a unifying mission and brand. The mission of the System and its members is the landgrant mission of the university: to provide education, research, and service to the people of Maine. The brand is no more than the clear articulation of this mission and the daily behaviors that support that mission.

Some of the challenges, however, require more fundamental change. To give a sense of how I would lead this change, there follows here a brief outline organized around three stages: internal alignment, engagement and planning, and plan implementation.

Alignment. The Board of Trustees and the new Chancellor must take all steps necessary to align themselves around broad System goals, the degree of change necessary to achieve those goals, and the timeline to accomplish those changes. Ideally, establishing this alignment should be among the most important and, indeed, exciting features of the search process. Successful alignment means that the new Chancellor will take office ready to start the change process immediately. Misalignment means failure.

Engagement and Planning. Given successful alignment, the Chancellor must develop a new strategic plan with clear goals and rationales for comprehensive system change. This planning process includes:

- engaging directly with Maine people to convey the challenges and opportunities facing public higher education in Maine, clearly identifying the processes that will be used to mitigate those challenges and build on those opportunities;
- acknowledging that the System leadership owes the Maine public a higher level of accountability both for their financial investment in public higher education and for entrusting their sons and daughters to the Maine university system;
- engaging with key stakeholders to determine their core interests. These include: the state and federal political leadership, the campuses and their host communities, and the business and investment communities;
- effectively using key data and existing analyses, of which there is a wealth;
- close consultation with the Board of Trustees.

In developing and implementing strategic plans, I believe strongly in constancy of purpose, clarity of outcomes, and clarity of assessment criteria to measure those outcomes. I also believe plans must contain sufficient flexibility to react nimbly to contingencies and opportunities.

This process will deliver a comprehensive strategic plan with clear goals, timelines and audit/update cycles. It will incorporate stakeholder engagement and continue open communications, meeting each of the challenges listed above while creating a system that delivers mission excellence and is financially durable. I would expect to complete this new plan within 4-6 months of taking office.

Without going into detail, I would emphasize a point I made during the presidential search. I do not believe the smaller campuses can be closed without doing unacceptable economic and social harm to their host communities. Nevertheless, the status quo is untenable both financially and in terms of achieving the System's mission. I believe the solution involves a combination of administrative cooperation and consolidation followed by a significantly higher level of academic integration.

Implementation. System change should begin with administrative change. I would first look to the System office, making it smaller, more efficient, and more engaged with and responsive to the campuses and the public. I would then expand the process to achieve improved administrative integration throughout the System, a necessary but not sufficient step towards achieving true interoperability.

Beginning with administrative changes will signal that this is serious change, building support with public and private stakeholders. It will also free resources that can be used to reduce costs and strengthen academics throughout the system. This in turn will facilitate the next step of academic integration of the campuses, a process to be led by the academic leadership guided by the senior administration. Only when that integration is achieved will Maine have a true university system.

In the longer term, the question of consolidation of the university system with the community college system will be called. It is possible that public education in Maine would benefit from this consolidation, likely including the Maine Maritime Academy as well. In my opinion, however, it would be a mistake to rush into a consolidation before the university system is academically integrated and economically stabilized. Combining the two systems prematurely risks compromising both.

As noted in your search document, the Chancellorship requires an individual who can lead a large, complex organization through transformational change. This individual must be able to articulate a clear vision, be unrelentingly focused, practice transparency and open communication, be an expert negotiator, and, above all, model personal accountability. I would add that the Chancellor must also have a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the people of Maine, as public higher education in Maine can succeed only if Maine people also succeed. I believe I have the business, academic, and leadership skills, as well as the experience and commitment, to meet these requirements.

I am honored to have been invited to apply for the Chancellor's position and I wish you well in this search. There has been much productive discussion about higher education in Maine this past year and more, and I have had the good fortune to participate in some of it. I look forward to the opportunity to continue that discussion with you.

Sincerely,

James H. Page

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