

Week of January 6, 2020

Trustees -

With the forecasted freezing rain underway across Maine, best wishes for a quiet day and safe travel if necessary.

On Tuesday, my System team and I hosted our monthly gathering of UMS Presidents, with Interim Maine Law Dean Dmitry Bam invited for the first time in recognition of Maine Law's transition to reporting to me as Chancellor. (An aside: several of our Presidents and System staff were on I-95 at the time of Tuesday morning's mass pile-up and accident. Although Glenn Cummings, Dmitry Bam, and Ryan Low were caught in the traffic backup on the highway, and Becky Wyke, Jim Thelen, and Edward Serna were detoured around it, fortunately no UMSer was caught up in the accident itself.) Dmitry talked briefly in our meeting with our presidents about expanding collaboration with the Law School and Maine Center, and I look forward to his and the next Dean's contributions to our Presidents' Council meetings.

Later on Tuesday afternoon I met with Orono State Representative Ryan Tipping, a 4th-term legislator who currently co-chairs the Legislature's Taxation Committee. I enjoy these meetings, and of course having established relationships with key legislators enhances the credibility of our messages and needs, which include the FY21 appropriation we hope to see in the Governor's coming supplemental budget.

At Wednesday morning's Finance, Facilities, and Technology Board Committee meeting, in which several of you participated, you heard me express concerns about the University of Southern Maine's parking, student center, and dorm projects. Due to the limited availability of capital funds over the last decade, I know the University of Maine System has not developed and managed large-scale capital projects for several years, and in that environment, our universities -- especially our smaller institutions -- may not have appreciated the range of issues that should be fully developed before FFT Committee review. We cannot afford to be unprepared now, however, as last fall's infrastructure bond passage and the possibility of alternative capital funding models (e.g., PPPs) put our universities in the position to move forward several large projects at the same time in the coming years. I am committed to holding our presidents accountable to be fully prepared and transparent in their presentations to FFT and the Board as a whole. Vice Chancellor Ryan Low has already made a number of process changes, and we will be requiring our universities to have firm plans for financing and source of funds in advance of FFT deadlines. And to the point of this week's concerns, we'll be working with USM's team to make sure they are fully prepared to answer your questions when these projects come before you at the upcoming January 26-27 meeting.

Thursday morning Ryan Low, Jim Thelen, Maine Center Ventures CEO Terry Sutton, and I participated in a group conference call with all of the academic leaders of the University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center: Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy and Glenn Cummings, Provosts Faye Gilbert (UM) and Jeannine Uzzi (USM), and Deans Jo Williams

(USM's Muskie School), Dmitry Bam (Maine Law), and Michael Weber (UM Graduate Business/MBA). With my efforts since last summer to manage the Maine Center's development more closely, including by right-sizing both the planned fundraising and building projects associated with it, I've now charged the group just named to develop, by February 1, a strategic academic vision for the Center that aligns with Maine's newly released 10-year Economic Development Strategy. Such a vision will be of great interest to all who consider investing in not only the Maine Center, but the University of Maine System's broader efforts, through unified accreditation, to work together to advance Maine.

I note that this is my last update before materials for your January 26-27, 2020 Board meeting will be publicly posted. Included among them, following from my September and November recommendation and process reports on the matter, will be a resolution finally seeking your authorization for UMS's universities to unify their institutional NECHE accreditations within the University of Maine System. There is historic significance to the vote, and with the time I've invested talking with faculty, students, and academic administrators across our state, I'm fully convinced that unified accreditation will not only protect our universities where they are, but open the door to innovative new opportunities for academic collaboration, resource sharing, and multi-university program offerings that make Maine's public universities stable and attractive destinations for life-long learning, new credentials, and cutting-edge research that drives the Maine economy forward. I hope you will support our plan to move Maine's public universities forward to seize the opportunities that unified accreditation will make possible, and I pledge that we will remain transparent and accountable to you on the journey.

I'll close with a note of thanks (as I've said previously) for your service to UMS and the State of Maine. As this week has shown, with not only our FFT Committee meeting, but also Monday's Academic and Student Affairs and Human Resources/Labor Relations Committee meetings, the time you invest in governing Maine's public university system is significant. I want to assure you that it's also much appreciated.

Regards,
Dan