

Week of November 2

Trustees,

As we close the most important week in our democracy's quadrennial election cycle, I'd like to call out and thank our university communities for their calm and patience through the week of counting votes.

I'd like to share a breakdown of what we know about UMS alumni, students, and employees who will serve in the next Maine legislature (with thanks to Samantha Warren for tracking our state elections to compile the information I'll summarize here). Some of the numbers here reflect individuals who graduated from more than one of our universities; in those cases, they are counted for both. In total, on the Senate side, 24 of the 35 Senators-elect have strong UMS connections (graduate or employment) and on the House side, it's 56 of 151. By institution:

Univ of Maine/UMM -- 35
Univ of Southern Maine -- 21
Univ of Maine School of Law -- 11
Univ of Maine at Augusta -- 5
Univ of Maine at Farmington -- 5
Univ of Maine at Presque Isle -- 4
Univ of Maine at Fort Kent -- 2

A number of UMS employees were elected, including incumbents Jim Dill (UMaine Extension), Alison Hepler (UMF Faculty) and John Martin (UMFK), as well as Senator-elect Chip Currey (UMA Rockland Center Student Services Coordinator), Rep-elect Amy Roeder (UMaine MBA student and adjunct) and Rep-elect Laurie Osher (former UMaine faculty). Employees from UMPI and UMFK who sought seats in the legislature were not successful.

Two of our law students (Trey Stewart and Maggie O'Neil) were returned to the Legislature, with Rep Trey Stewart moving from the House to the Senate by winning his election against former AG and Maine Law grad, Mike Carpenter. And USM's Student Representative to the Board, Nathan Carlow won a seat in the legislature as House District 16's new representative.

Congratulations are due as well to our own Trustee Sam Collins's sister, U.S. Senator Susan Collins, for her re-election to another term.

We are fortunate to have such strong connections to our legislative bodies at both the state and national level.

Aside from this past week's election, the COVID pandemic continues to demand our attention and cautious prudence.

While Maine's COVID caseload remains low compared to our peer states nationally, cases and community transmission are growing exponentially. Maine cases per 100,000 residents are more than 53 percent higher this week than at the start of our fall semester (515 cases per 100,000 residents on November 4, compared to 336 as of August 31), and the number of current active cases statewide is nearly five times the late summer low point.

We've seen a corresponding increase in COVID cases in our university communities. Based on data we are analyzing even as I write this morning, we are managing 27 active cases across the University of Maine System. While these cases are spread across five of our seven universities, the most significant occurrence being managed at present is an outbreak in the University of Maine's Facilities Management office on the Orono campus. Asymptomatic testing of Facilities Management staff since Thursday has identified a total of 12 positive cases (out of 43 total tests administered); all but one are among administrative staff who do not regularly interact with students or perform work outside of Orono's FM office. All of the employees who tested positive had mild or no symptoms as of yesterday, and none have been hospitalized. They are isolating at home and doing well, and have the support of UMaine and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This coming week, any of the 240 Facilities Management staff members (including 80 members of the custodial team) who have not previously opted for COVID-19 testing will receive testing on campus, and the FM office will be temporarily closed for deep cleaning. Facilities Management's continuity of operations plan is in place, and the leadership will limit the number of FM employees working on campus in the coming week.

Out of an abundance of caution, both the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine at Presque Isle temporarily suspended in-person instruction and work on Friday to analyze positive COVID test results that came in late Thursday and early Friday, respectively, from both asymptomatic and wastewater testing. At USM, a detectable level of SARS-CoV-2 was identified Thursday evening in the Gorham campus wastewater, leading to Friday's suspension of in-person activities. Vault Health was rapidly mobilized to test essential staff there on Friday, and asymptomatic COVID screening is scheduled next week for all residential students and student-athletes, as well as randomly selected commuter students and faculty and staff whose work involves spending time on any of USM's campuses. At UMPI, operations were remote for Friday to permit time to contact trace after President Ray Rice learned early Friday morning that an asymptomatic employee who is now isolating off campus received a positive test.

In all cases, we are following Maine CDC protocols and our own COVID public health and safety plans.

At present, we cautiously remain confident that we may complete our in-person instruction plan to the Thanksgiving break. While the quantity of our caseload demands close monitoring, and localized temporary actions may be necessary as have occurred at UMaine, USM, and UMPI this week, the fact that we have not yet seen outbreaks in our student residential communities is encouraging. Our on-campus isolation and quarantine capacity is strong. How we've handled, contained, and transparently communicated information about current COVID cases reinforces

the need for ongoing compliance with our mask, social distancing, and other public health protocols. There seems to be great respect for compliance with these safety measures among our university communities; indeed, one of our own students [penned an opinion piece for the Bangor Daily News at week's end](#) to express confidence in our COVID management precisely because of our prudent planning and discipline with compliance, contact tracing, and quarantine and isolation when necessary.

As always, the public health and safety of our university communities remains our highest priority and will be at the foundation of our decision-making as we continue through the final days of our in-person instruction.

Beyond these significant matters, this was a busy week.

Monday saw many of us together for a tremendously engaging virtual summit for Trustees and Boards of Visitors members, during which we provided updates on unified accreditation and academic affairs planning, budget and financial matters, our \$240 million Harold Alfond Foundation grants, and ongoing pandemic management. My thanks to Kim Jenkins, Samantha Kramer, and other staff from the Office of Organizational Effectiveness, along with Ellen Doughty and Heather Massey in the Board office, for managing a creative and interactive Zoom format that allowed a number of break-out sessions to facilitate questions and discussions about all of the matters described above.

My thanks to Trustee Trish Riley, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low, and Chief Human Resources Officer Carol Corcoran and her HR team as well for their ongoing work to transparently support our retirees through the ongoing transition from our inflexible group health plan to HRA-funded, exchange-based supplemental Medicare health benefits. We continue to make good progress on enrollment among our current retirees and their dependents -- to date, with more than 7 weeks to go in the enrollment period, nearly one-quarter of our roughly 3,000 retirees and dependents have already successfully enrolled, and our experience continues to result in positive feedback when we are able to engage with our retirees to support them and explain the new flexibility and cost benefits to the exchange-based plans available to them now. To that end, my Chief of Staff Jim Thelen and I met via Zoom with UMS union leaders Jim McClymer, Cheryl Spencer, and Neil Greenberg on Thursday afternoon to maintain an open dialogue about their concerns with our process and communications. While we should expect to hear more concerns at citizen comment at your upcoming Board meeting, rest assured that I and our team will spare no effort to support and communicate with our retirees through this transition.

There is always more to report, and with the November 16 Board meeting ahead we'll address additional matters on which space here does not permit further discussion.

I hope you have a productive week ahead.

Regards,

Dan