

Week of October 26

Trustees -

With the spread of COVID-19 and early voting ahead of our coming national election dominating the news cycle these days, I hope you've found some respite in however you've spent the Halloween weekend so far.

Since most of you participated in the significant Board work over the past week, I'll offer just a reflective coda here on some of the matters that were before you in your committee and full Board meetings.

Monday's Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting included a presentation of our ongoing work to better understand and root out bias or inequity in our student enrollment and support, academic, and human resources practices. Because the continued onslaught of national tension over the pandemic's drift and hard-fought political campaigns are an ever-present risk to draw our attention away from this critically important work, I'm proud of the effort we've made to date, which, as you heard Monday, has already engaged student leaders, union leaders, university academic and student affairs leaders, staff in Human Resources, Learning and Organizational Development, and Organizational Effectiveness, and our universities' diversity, equity, and inclusion councils. Actions to eliminate questions from our student applications that could trigger implicit bias, reviewing our Student Conduct Code with an intentional anti-bias lens, and expanding our talent acquisition sourcing are examples of our early efforts to put our words about the "Imperative for Change" into action. We all appreciate your attention to and support of this critical work, and look forward to further reporting on our efforts and progress at your January 2021 meeting.

Wednesday's Board meetings focused on finalizing the FY21 budget. As you well know, this fiscal year's budget process has been unprecedented due to the fiscal uncertainties and challenges brought on by the pandemic and its impact on our academic and auxiliary operations and enrollment. And yet, for a variety of reasons, our overall enrollment is nearly stable compared to last year's normal operations. Though we are concerned about and taking targeted actions to shore up the in-state high school graduate enrollment pipeline, graduate and out-of-state enrollment are up, law school enrollment is solid, and undergraduate enrollment is up sizeably at UMPI. Two of our universities finalized balanced FY21 budgets, and four more will operate in balance using their own reserves. We're investing finite System reserves into current operations at the Law School and Farmington for FY21, understanding that each will need to strategically adjust its operations in future years in the unified accreditation environment to ensure fiscal stability. I want to thank Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low, his System budget team, our university Presidents, Law School Dean Saufley, and their Chief Business Officers, as well as Board FFT Committee members and leadership for their patience and hard work to complete the FY21 budget process in a responsible fashion. To say they've all worked hard to finalize the budget is, simply, an understatement.

We continue to proactively engage with our retirees in the ongoing work to support them through the transition to enrollment in exchange-based Aon supplemental Medicare health coverage with UMS-funded HRAs. The effort continues to engender some organized opposition from some of our labor partners in the AFUM (faculty), UMPSA (professional staff), and ACSUM/COLT (clerical/office/laboratory/technical staff) unions, and through their Maine Education Association a small public protest and picket was organized outside Board Chair Erwin's office on Thursday. Working with our outside legal counsel, our System Labor Relations team has made an initial written response to AFUM, UMPSA, and ACSUM/COLT grievances filed to protest the transition, and my Chief of Staff Jim Thelen and I will meet with union leaders this coming week to invite a positive, fact-based dialogue about how together we can best support our retirees through the transition. Similarly, Samantha Warren continues to lead our interaction with legislators who remain interested in learning more, answering a number of questions this week in writing in line with the significant detail we've already communicated to our retirees.

To maintain transparency with our work, we launched a web page this week -- available through [this link](#) -- to be updated weekly on our progress to support our retirees.

Finally, aside from the indisputable financial benefits that both UMS and our retirees will realize, we must continue to emphasize the value and flexibility our retirees will have from this transition. In that vein, I want to share an email sent to Chief Human Resources Officer Carol Corcoran this week on Thursday from a retiree who is now prepared to transition to an exchange-based plan offered by Aetna. The retiree had this to say:

*I just saw on my Facebook newsfeed that a group of current and retired faculty and staff were picketing, "demanding" a return to the old group Medicare Advantage plan for retirees.*

*I am a USM retiree. I am actually quite happy about the new coverage opportunities. The Aetna plan I will have starting 1/1/21 has no monthly premium and includes dental coverage. I will be saving about \$85 a month. Then there's the \$2100 available for reimbursement--that's never been offered before. What's not to like?*

*I suspect that there are a lot of us who have no complaints.*

As we receive more of these messages, we will build them into our legislative and communications strategy, including with our labor partners to encourage them to think beyond their frustration with our process to embrace the value and flexibility we're making available to our retirees.

Turning to the pandemic, I want you to know that we continue to monitor the COVID situation closely. While our own ongoing testing and public health strategies have the virus in check at present within our university communities, it is not too much to say that it is spreading everywhere around us. The public health and safety of our communities continues to be the guidepost for our actions, and to that end we will amplify our testing, communication, and other

efforts for UMS facilities located in Cumberland, Washington, Somerset, and Knox counties, which we've judged to be most at risk amidst the current virus spread.

Finally here, I note that this is a consequential week ahead for our state and country. I will be communicating tomorrow with the UMS community about the importance of honoring our democratic process through whatever transition lies ahead. I'll be sure the message is shared with you as well.

Best wishes for the coming week.

Regards,  
Dan