

Week of August 9

Trustees,

I hope you're finding ways to stay cool and comfortable through a rare uncomfortably warm and humid Maine summer weekend.

Monday morning of this past week, our Presidents, Vice Chancellors, and Maine Law Dean and I boarded a bus and headed north together to visit the University of Maine at Presque Isle on Monday and the University of Maine at Fort Kent on Tuesday. I want to thank Presidents Ray Rice and Deb Hedeem and a number of their faculty and staff for hosting us and showcasing their campuses and signature programs. And I want to specifically call out for your attention a number of the notable programs, faculty, and even students we heard from or met, including:

-- Stacy Thibodeau, an Assistant Professor of Nursing at UMPI who showed how the use of virtual reality headsets in the nursing simulation lab helps nursing students learn to handle and triage difficulties during childbirth.

-- Leigh Belair, Co-Director of the two-year program in Medical Laboratory Technology offered collaboratively by UMPI and the University of Maine at Augusta. Belair is the state's only professor of Medical Laboratory Technology, a field like others in the state facing a workforce shortage in the future as approximately 40 percent of the current laboratory workforce is expected to retire within five to ten years.

-- Dr. Jason Johnston, Dean of UMPI's College of Arts and Sciences, who showed us the Zillman Family Greenhouse, a 2,400-square-foot state-of-the-art teaching and research greenhouse with two research labs, a teaching classroom, and faculty offices.

-- Dr. Chunzeng Wang, UMPI Professor of Earth & Environmental Sciences, who launched the drone that took our group photo during Monday's tour and opportunistically pitched a viable research funding request to our gathered System leadership.

-- UMS Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Carolyn Dorsey and Courtney Boma, UMPI's YourPace CBE Curriculum Coordinator and Coordinator of Student Teaching and Field Experience, who showcased the incredible growth in UMPI's Competency-Based Education "YourPace" programs, which in Fall 2017 had 3 degree programs and 80 students and in 4 years' time, heading into this fall, has grown to 15 degree programs, including one graduate program, and 384 students.

-- UMFK student Rajah Maragh, who hails from Jamaica and explained the wonderful diversity of UMFK's Student Activities Board, the student programming subcommittee of the UMFK Student Senate. UMFK's overall international student population is notably diverse as well, with more than 100 international students from 39 different countries enrolled.

-- Dr. Kennedy Rubert-Nason UMFK Assistant Professor of Chemistry, who demonstrated a plant photosynthesis analyzer and showcased research work underway this summer by UMFK students Kennedy Ashby, Jonathan Carter, and Yuliana Sanchez.

-- Dr. Neil Thompson, UMFK's Irving Woodlands Professor of Forestry, who demonstrated how he is using the popular social media platform Tik Tok -- under the pseudonym "[forestryprof](#)" -- to increase aware of UMFK's forestry programs -- and with apparently notable success, given that [his most popular post](#) has received more than 1.4 million hits.

-- Leslie Kelly, UMFK's Executive Director of Academic Support Services, who showcased the history and breadth of UMFK's Acadian Archives.

-- Pam Ashby, UMFK's Chief Business Officer, who led us through the 2018 bond-funded Enrollment and Advancement Center, an impressive facility at the gateway to UMFK's campus entrance.

This was the third month in a row we've traveled together across the state for each president and the Law Dean to showcase what they felt was important for their peer System leaders to see and know about their university and its signature programs and resources. In June -- the first time our presidents gathered together in person with me and our System leadership team since the beginning of the pandemic -- we toured several facilities and programs at the University of Maine in Orono, traveled together to tour the new Law School building on Fore Street in Portland, dined together, and then toured several facilities at USM's Portland campus the next day. July had us touring several facilities and programs at the University of Maine at Augusta, dining together in Hallowell, and then touring the University of Maine at Farmington the next day. Our time traveling together has fostered important unhurried conversations among our presidents and System leaders that typically don't occur during the press of a normal work week, and I'm confident we'll see work toward several new collaborations among our universities as a result of our time together on these tours.

I traveled to Albuquerque, New Mexico for the remainder of the week for a meeting of the [Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellows program](#), which brings bipartisan groups of state leaders together to discuss the challenges and opportunities in public education. This particular meeting focused on the teacher workforce, including preparation, diversity, evaluation, and compensation, as well as higher education access and completion.

As some of you know, I first became involved with the [Hunt Institute](#) in my years as Governor of Connecticut. Inspired by former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt's vision for education excellence, the Hunt Institute was first established in 2001 as a nonpartisan center for educational policy and leadership at the University of North Carolina. The Hunt Institute launched its flagship event at Chapel Hill in December 2002 -- the Governors Education Symposium (GES), a first of its kind symposium designed by governors for governors. The GES brought governors together in a private, non-partisanship setting to receive in-depth information from experts and engage in candid dialogue about the best approaches to critical challenges

facing education. The Institute grew, and in 2016 became an independent, nonprofit entity that joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships and events related to improving education policy. The Institute continues to work in nonpartisan ways to design strategy, shape policy, and drive educational improvements on the national and state levels, and it's an association I'm privileged to continue. Indeed, it was my work with the Hunt Institute that inspired me to consider higher education as my fifth career following my time spent as a prosecutor, lawyer in private practice, mayor, then governor.

The group gathered this week included, among many others, the Honorable Janet Napolitano, former President of the University of California System, Governor of Arizona, and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security; James Milliken, Chancellor of the University of Texas System; Dr. Ryan Stewart, New Mexico Secretary of Education; Dr. Leslie Fenwick, Dean Emerita and Professor of Education Policy, School of Education, Howard University; Keilani Goggins, Director of the Black Educators Initiative, National Center for Teacher Residencies; Janet Godwin, Chief Executive Officer of ACT; Mushtaq Gunja, Vice President and Chief of Staff, American Council on Education; Oscar Sweeten-Lopez, President, College Success Tools, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation; and Dr. Dhanfu Elston, Chief of Staff and Senior Vice President of Strategy, Complete College America.

A unique aspect of this particular Hunt Institute program is that Fellows have access to a broad bipartisan network of former governors who continue a bipartisan and nonpartisan interest in improving public education. Besides me, the governors who joined this particular Fellows program included Tom Kean (NJ), Jim Douglas (VT), Susana Martinez (NM), Janet Napolitano (AZ), and Bob Wise (WV). And six sitting governors – Governor Kate Brown of Oregon, Governor Kim Reynolds of Iowa, Governor Brad Little of Idaho, Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, Governor Tate Reeves of Mississippi, and Governor Spencer Cox of Utah -- are Fellows program alumni.

I'll close this week's report with an update on our vaccine verification progress. As of close of business this week, we have received a total of 13,736 vaccination card uploads from nearly 9,900 students and 3,665 employees. This number includes nearly 50 percent of the total roster of students, faculty, and staff we expect to have in-person this fall, and by group, now includes 73 percent of full-time employees and 61.5 percent of expected residential students.

We have more work and planning to do to be safe together this fall. Requiring a COVID vaccine for in-person activities is just one part of our multifaceted strategy to teach, work, learn, and research safely together, and the growing number of Maine institutions -- including the Maine Community College System this week, as well as the University of New England, Bowdoin College, Colby College, Bates College, Thomas College and Maine Maritime Academy -- adopting vaccine requirements proves that we're all in this together in higher education in Maine. We have no higher priority than to be safe together this fall.

I hope you have a good start to the week ahead.

Regards,
Dan