

June 5, 2009

Dear _____ :

I am writing as a long-time resident of North Carolina and as a faculty member at UNC Chapel Hill. I am also the chair of the UNC Faculty Assembly, a group of elected faculty delegates from the 17 campuses within the UNC System. We appreciate the excruciating choices you and your colleagues in the General Assembly are facing in connection with the state budget right now. I had to be in Raleigh earlier this week to assist several House committee leaders some challenging legislation related to my expertise, and could see the pain and exhaustion on their faces as they labored with the hard choices you are facing right now.

I'm sure that you have heard from hundreds or thousands of constituents about the problems that would result from the draconian cuts being contemplated in health care, mental health care, public services, K-12, community college and higher education. You undoubtedly have heard many stories of people's woes and are also weighing the challenges of finding revenue to offset cuts given the growing level of unemployment in the state.

Nonetheless, I and my colleagues hope that you will rise up in the face of these challenges. We owe you our best insights and information to assist you, and that's why I'm writing now. While I appreciate the range of pain facing all parts of our government, let me speak to what I know best: public higher education, the arena in which I have tried to serve our students and our state for the past 28 years.

You need to know that *every one* of the faculty and staff with whom I have spoken (and they are many) is trying to do their personal and collective best to pitch in during these difficult times. I've encouraged them to write to you directly in order for you to hear about their ingenuity and commitment. Here are some examples you need to hear about, however, since despite our best efforts, the proposed cuts of more than 11% in the University's budget for the 2009-2010 year and more than 16% for 2010-2011 will be truly devastating to our students, the state, and our collective future.

- We have swallowed the cuts in our paychecks (even though for some of us, they were cuts for work we had already performed during the academic year, not work that we would forego in the future). I've seen staff in tears trying to figure out how to make rent and child care payments as a result. Faculty members tell me that they can no longer subscribe to journals that they rely upon to keep up with developments in the field. Sudden cuts like these mean that goals like replacing home computers to allow late-night grading of student papers or helping them with homework are out of reach.
- The increases in health care costs for state employees are increasingly resulting in faculty and staff members having to make choices to have their families go without health insurance. Sick kids at home mean faculty and staff miss work time, or come to work sick and spread the germs. Students we are responsible for in turn get sick and lose momentum on their work.
- Students lose when we lose talented long-time faculty and staff who are being hired away without replacement. This spring, many faculty searches that would have filled significant holes in key programs were shut down. Many fixed-term and part-time faculty members are being let go although they are an essential part of our teaching cadre. Often these colleagues teach in such areas as English composition, or languages. Student advising services are being cut, as are library hours. Classes needed for many students to graduate will become unavailable, so that students will not graduate as quickly. Larger classes mean that teachers are unable to grapple with the challenges facing individual students. As time on grading increases, comments on student papers become less comprehensive, and time for office hours and advisement is lost.

- We're very concerned for all our students, including graduate students. For example, our graduate students are the faculty and researchers of tomorrow. They are also partners in teaching and research with their faculty sponsors. If their support is cut, or if fewer or less able graduate students are admitted to our universities, we will be less able to assist undergraduates in recitation sections and labs. We will also undercut our ability to succeed in competition for sponsored research funds (a substantial income stream that bolsters the state's economy).
- During times when jobs are scarce, more people turn to higher education to improve their chances for the future. Yet they are likely to be strapped for funds and thus rely on state financial aid. We are all enormously grateful for that support and believe it is one of the clear ways that distinguishes North Carolina from others states (such as California) which have cut deeply into such resources. We urge you to continue this support. At the same time, there is need for enrollment growth funding to be sure that these worthy students actually have faculty from whom to learn and classes that they can take when they come knocking on the door.

This extraordinary University system has been well-loved by the state's people since inspired founding leaders created it more than 200 years ago. Hard times have come and gone but our state has consistently maintained its commitment to the role of public higher education as a lifting force for all our people. We need to beware of assumptions that overwhelming cuts in funding will not leave lasting damage.

That's why I and many others want you to know, very frankly, that attention needs to be paid to the revenue side of the picture, not only to cuts. A recent report from the N.C. Budget and Tax Center documents how other states have been proceeding. For example, some have increased the level of progressive tax rates in their state income taxes to target those at higher income levels. Proposals to increase sin taxes (cigarettes and alcohol) also make a good deal of sense. As you know, the National Conference of State Legislatures tracks state decision-making of this sort: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17253>. North Carolina leaders should not be afraid to stand up and do what's needed.

Those of us who teach, like Christa McAuliffe (the schoolteacher-astronaut who died in the Challenger disaster), understand that "we touch the future." You, as a legislative leader, do that as well.

In dealing with the gravity of current budget dilemmas, please bear that in mind. While short-term expenditure cuts are needed, targeted revenue increases are as well. Our North Carolina Constitution calls for a "balanced budget," and that means that revenues are a crucial part of the picture. I firmly believe that a fair and balanced strategy to increase revenues while offsetting some of the worst cuts would be supported by the public. They certainly would be by me.

You hold our collective future in your hands. Thanks so much for your consideration of these observations.

Sincerely,

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