Dear Legislator:

UA May Be Strong, but UAF, UAA, and UAS are Stronger.

Governor Dunleavy announced that his proposed cuts to higher education in Alaska will be reduced to $70 million spaced over three years. The restoration of $65 million is certainly useful, but the most precious gift the governor’s decision provides is time. This time is needed not just to manage the impending cuts but to permit a proper, thorough, fact based discussion on just how higher education in Alaska should be reformed.

Under the flag of financial exigency UA president Jim Johnsen rammed through a proposal for a single accredited “new UA.” It would assume many of the functions currently performed by the separately accredited University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), and University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Those functions deemed redundant or too costly would be abandoned. President Johnsen has stated that this remains his goal for higher education in Alaska going forward.

In the pressure cooker of the fiscal crisis only one person was officially authorized to speak for the university. In many ways president Johnsen became its public face. While he alone was permitted to articulate the future of higher education in Alaska the people who actually provide it, administration, faculty, staff and students at UAF, UAA, and UAS, were silenced. Their doubts about the wisdom or feasibility of the “new UA” concept were ignored. This is not acceptable, especially since no evidence was provided to suggest that a consolidated “new UA” would cost less, and much evidence suggests it would deliver significantly less value to the state.

The governor’s gift of time allows us to make slow haste and proceed with deliberate speed on a course towards reform for higher education in Alaska based on evidence, solid planning, and a thorough knowledge of the foundation upon which a reformed system can be built. UAF, UAA, and UAS are rooted in their local communities, responsive to their needs, and have actually been delivering higher education in Alaska for more than thirty years. By acting as a consortium, the three institutions can maintain the unique cultures, services, and specialties they have developed to serve the communities where they are based while achieving significant cost savings.

We hope you will tell the regents that the people of Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska must not be denied access to higher education. You can contact the members of the Board directly or you can testify during the public comment session scheduled to take place September 9.

We thank you for your service to the people of Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska. We deeply appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely

Save the Seawolf Committee