Dear Regent:

Four Employees are Better than One.

The September 26 letter from the President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) levelled serious criticisms of the governance structure of higher education in Alaska. Notably, that the division of responsibility between the president and the chancellors of the three separately accredited universities to the board required immediate clarification to be presented by October 31, 2019.

We note that the accreditors concern has nothing to do with the present quality of academic programs at UAF, UAA, or UAS, or any misgivings about the commitment of the leadership of all three institutions to fulfilling their respective missions. This is solely a question of governance of the university system which, in fact, has existed far longer than the state’s current budget crisis.

We believe that the simplest and best immediate solution to the problem is to elevate the chancellors of UAF, UAA, and UAS to the same position as the President, direct employees of the Board of Regents. Further, the board should require the three chancellors to report to them directly.

The resulting arrangement would make all four unit leaders, the chancellors of UAF, UAA, and UAS, and the President of the Statewide Administration, co-equals. This would transform the role of the President to that of conductor or ombudsman of the three chancellors while the executive direction of the three universities would be the responsibility of the chancellors.

This solution should satisfy the NWCCU and provide us time to deal with the two critical tasks with which we must deal. There are $45 million in cuts still to come. The newly empowered chancellors of the three universities will have the autonomy under this new arrangement to make the targeted cuts which will allow their institutions to survive.

This will also permit the administration, faculty, and staff of UAF to put their energies into securing a reaffirmation of UAF’s accreditation as UAF rather than some potential “new UA.”

Once these issues have been dealt with, we must turn our attention to how higher education in Alaska will be structured and governed in the future. But we must not allow it to take our eye off the ball and miss the most pressing issues we currently face.

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