Dear Regent:

Step back, take a breath, and do no harm.

The Board of Regents’ decision August 20 to lift the declaration of Financial Exigency it imposed on July 22 was a gratifying development. It suggests that with the governor’s recent budget compromise a degree of stability has returned for something like normal life to resume.

But it should also serve as a cautionary tale. The original decision of July 22 was made in haste, while many particulars of the situation remained unclear. A delay of only three weeks might have avoided the need for such a declaration entirely. This would have been far preferable as the mere fact of the declaration did lasting damage to the reputation of Alaska’s system of higher education.

Now the board stands ready to make yet another momentous decision regarding the basic structure of Alaska’s university system going forward. The current proposal for consolidation into a single accredited “new UA” was brought forth under circumstances of extreme stress and pressure of time, while the costs and consequences of such a restructure went unstudied and remain little understood. That pressure is now removed. This calls the wisdom or necessity for making such an important determination in haste into serious question.

This precious gift of time permits all of us to give this subject, a matter of grave importance to every single individual associated with higher education in Alaska, the deliberate, thoughtful and full consideration such a critical matter deserves.

While president Johnsen’s “new UA” single accreditation model has been the only proposal to receive consideration, it is hardly the only one and certainly not the best. There are several alternatives, such as the consortium model, which hold out genuine promise for savings and would cause substantially less disruption. These have yet to receive the consideration they deserve.

As you contemplate your decision on September 12 we hope that you will remember the lesson of this summer and make your guiding principle to ensure that, whatever your decision, it does no harm. Do no harm to the careers of faculty. Do no harm to the lives and livelihoods of staff. Do no harm to the success of students.

“Do no harm” is the positive duty of the Board of Regents. As stewards of higher education in Alaska you have an obligation to ensure your decisions do nothing to add to the level of harm already done to higher education in Alaska during this long and bruising summer.

We thank you for your service and deeply appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely

 Save the Seawolf Committee