

January 4, 2017

To the Regents of the University of New Mexico:

Such an improbable thing is our university, the University of New Mexico. It was conceived before there was any serious discussion that New Mexico might even be a state. It has been nurtured by successive generations, some much better than others, in our geographically isolated part of the country. The same circumstances that made our university so improbable have also made our university so necessary. New Mexico is so vast that its own size makes it remote, with Albuquerque and our vital university near its center.

We need our university to be great for so many reasons—some obvious and many which are subtle. A great university cannot only provide the obvious benefits and enrichment to its students, but it can also be the engine for so many other very tangible benefits to the economy of the entire state. Achieving that greatness requires astute leadership of successive university presidents and careful governance and stewardship of boards of regents. Central to the regents' role is selecting the president, but then more importantly, supporting that president and fostering a relationship of mutual respect and appreciation for the different roles of the board of regents and the president of the university.

Our university has experienced fortunate eras in which this relationship has been correct and the university becomes the beneficiary of visionary leaders who devoted large portions of their professional lives to take our university to places in which the community probably thought not to be possible. The names of those presidents are well known—Tight, Zimmerman, Popejoy, Heady, and Davis leap to mind. The identity of the regents who so diligently supported those presidents is not known, because that is the proper nature of their role, which many have carried out quite expertly. Those regents likely understood that it was not their place to in any sense of the word "manage" the university nor to allow our university to become an agency of state government. They understood their role as independent fiduciaries appointed for a term of years and charged with the duty to shield the university and its chief executive officer from improper influence of outside agencies and political demands.

Many in the community of UNM stalwarts are very tired. We have loved our university our entire life; we have chosen to attend our university; we have been proud to earn degrees under the attentive eye of our fine faculty; we have gladly spent hundreds of hours in volunteer service to our university; we have given money generously and consistently to the many programs and colleges which are at the bedrock of our university; and we have made elaborate plans to continue to support the university upon our death. But we are weary and tired.

The last 18 years has seen a parade of six presidents who have most frequently not been given a reasonable chance to lead our university. They have been made to respond to the transient

whims of boards of regents who seemingly do not understand their role to allow a president to arrive, settle into the demands of the position, assemble a team, and move towards stated goals. Presidents have been ushered in with the promise of support and their hope of serving our university for a long while, but they most often fell victim to an embedded board culture that thrives upon micromanagement and a complete lack of understanding long-term stewardship.

In the less than five years that Dr. Robert Frank was allowed to be president, he moved our university towards the adoption of the UNM 2020 Vision, a comprehensive strategic plan that was adopted after meaningful communication between all our university's stakeholders. Indeed, he was in the process of achieving the UNM Vision 2020 plan, as well as many other laudable accomplishments:

- An increase in freshmen retention rates of over 6%, including breaking 80% for the first time our university's history in fall 2016
- 75% of our students receiving financial assistance under the auspices of a vastly improved enrollment management program
- Record high graduation rates, increasing 4-year graduation rates by 5% and breaking 20% for the first time in our history. Six-year rates also increased by over 4% with a record high 49% in fall 2015. Those numbers reflect the 2010 cohort, and this year's numbers will be vastly better. For example, the six-year graduation rates will exceed 50 % this year.
- 2423 bachelor's degrees awarded last May
- A 10% increase in doctoral degrees since 2012
- Creation of an Honors College which was recently rated in the top 25 public honors colleges in the country
- Elimination of remedial courses and enhanced student success by moving students directly into credit-bearing coursework through the creation of the Math Learning Lab and new stretch and studio English courses.
- A 30% increase in international student enrollment since 2012
- 725 UNM students studied abroad last year
- Improvements in university economic development efforts, including coordination in the creation of Innovate ABQ, which will stand as a testament to Dr. Frank's truly groundbreaking work that will benefit our state for decades

- Building the Lobo Rainforest, which will open in the fall of 2017
- 2,200 students are taking innovation classes and we have 232 Innovation Scholars
- 39 start-up companies since 2012, growing out of UNM technology research
- 69 US Patents issued in 2016 alone
- \$142 million awarded in 2016 to main campus research— a 13% increase since 2012
- Record fundraising in the last five years—well in excess of \$420 million—as a result of Dr. Frank's constant work in appealing to major donors as well as his insistence that the university appropriately support the work of the UNM Foundation

There was no legitimate reason that our university and Dr. Frank were separated. He was doing an exemplary job. His separation from the presidency will not lead us to a better future. In point of fact, our university is well-known as a graveyard for those interested in taking on the extreme demands of leading a complex state university. Dr. Frank stepped into that graveyard in large measure due to his love for his home state and his status as a loyal Lobo. He was treated shamefully. How can future applicants think that they will be treated any better? There must be recognition that a presidency of less than five years can be as much the fault of the governing board as the supposed fault of the departed president.

We believe there needs to be a very public transformation, prior to inviting applicants in the search process, in the manner in which the board of regents views its role. Best practices in governance and stewardship have not been followed for a very long while. Prior to inviting applicants to be our president, the board should come forward with a concrete plan for board change and a public commitment to change the way the board views its role at our university. A good starting point would be for the board to consult with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (a process we understand that our boards of regents have resisted for many years, despite requests from at least two presidents) and announce the start of a new era at our university. Adoption of the Association's *Ten Hallmarks of an Effective Board* would be a small start:

- *An effective board understands and respects the vital difference between governing and managing. It nurtures and supports presidential leadership.
Make it a habit: Cultivate a healthy relationship with the president*

- **An effective board gives primacy to the institution's interest and welfare.**
Make it a habit: Uphold basic fiduciary principles.
- **An effective board observes and imposes the highest ethical standards and avoids even an appearance of conflict of interest.**
Make it a habit: Consider strategic risk factors.
- **An effective board, even when sharply divided, speaks with one voice.**
Make it a habit: Create a culture of inclusion.
- **An effective board listens to and learns from the institution's constituencies without giving them a veto.**
Make it a habit: Delegate appropriate decision-making authority to committees.
- **An effective board nurtures and enhances the legacy of the institution.**
Make it a habit: Focus on accountability.
- **An effective board recognizes its special responsibility to students for the quality and value of their educational experience.**
Make it a habit: Provide appropriate oversight of academic quality.
- **An effective board represents and advocates for the institution in the larger community.**
Make it a habit: Select an effective board chair.
- **An effective board commits itself and the institution to due process and academic freedom for faculty and students.**
Make it a habit: Develop a renewed commitment to shared governance.
- **An effective board commits adequate time and energy not only to its basic tasks but also to the enjoyment of the board experience.**
Make it a habit: Establish an effective governance committee.

We feel strongly about the necessity of change. We cannot continue to invest in an institution at which the board culture does not allow for long-term presidential leadership. So, despite how difficult it is for us, we are suspending our pattern of having made gifts, since the year of our graduation, to the Schools of Management, Public Administration, Law, the Honors College, and

the Cancer Center until the board of regents, individually and collectively, makes a commitment to best practices and promises to move away from its pattern of destructive behavior. Our endowed scholarship and our testamentary gifts will remain in place, as will our beloved Lobo statute commemorating our marriage in the Alumni Memorial Chapel. We both are proud of our chairmanships of the UNM and Anderson School foundation boards, and we will continue to speak out. Too often, the passage of time allows bad judgement to be forgotten, and we will not be party to that in this instance.

We take this action with deep regret, but to continue with business as usual would be an acquiescence in conduct that so many recognize as destructive, vindictive, and politically motivated. Other alumni have made similar decisions without making a public declaration; it is clear the University of New Mexico is suffering from board decisions that do not reflect the best interests of the university. A bare majority of regents, acting mostly behind closed doors, cannot be allowed to inflict such long-term damage on our university and the state of New Mexico on such a repetitive basis.

Very truly yours,