

## Statement to March 2, 2010 Board of Trustee's Meeting – Joel W. Russell

Good afternoon. I have had time to prepare my remarks today rather than giving the spontaneous one I would have given in November when I rose to respond to Trustee Baskin's charge that no faculty was willing to stand up for the statements made in the Bill of Particulars calling for a vote of no confidence in the President. The Board members in November appeared to believe this call for a vote was made only by the twenty faculty whose names appeared in writing. Only a limited number of full professors had been asked to add their names to the Bill of Particulars and over eighty percent of those asked added their names. Since I no longer speak for the AAUP, the following comments are made as a senior faculty member.

During the faculty job action in September I visited the picket lines at each university entrance several times each day. Nearly everyone on those lines believed Oakland University needs new leadership and asked for a vote of no confidence to be conducted. Faculty sought a leader who recognized in his/her heart, mind and actions the core values of academic freedom and shared governance that have made American universities models for the world. Such a leader would:

1. focus first on students and how to best provide them the intellectual, communication and social skills they'll need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
2. be interested in the details of how this process of developing student's talents and aspirations is working today at OU and how it might be improved;
3. through personal experience know how faculty dedicated to focused areas of scholarship provide ideas, excitement and motivation to not only students engaged with them in this scholarship but to all students in their classes willing to put in the time and effort required by intellectual activity;
4. recognize both his/her strengths and weaknesses and select support staff to compensate for his/her weakness and provide a constant stream of ideas, different points of view and potential solutions rather than staff chosen primarily for loyalty and blind acceptance; and,
5. know through his/her own scholarly experiences what is needed to recruit, support and retain the type of faculty that can simultaneously develop their individual research careers while motivating and developing the talents of OU students.

Last summer six presidential actions resulted in the job action and the widespread call for new leadership. These were:

1. bargaining proposals held until the final hours of the job action that would allow the administration to violate with impunity provisions of the constitutions of the University Senate, the College of Arts and Sciences and the professional schools;
2. statements to a MERC judge that faculty must “accept at their peril” whether the president is authorized to sign agreements with the faculty;
3. appeal of the MERC judge’s ruling to effectively assert that faculty cannot trust any presidential agreement not formally endorsed by the Board of Trustees;
4. refusal to construct new contract language similar to that in other collective bargaining agreements and/or university policy statements of other Michigan public universities to extend a non-discriminatory work environment to LGBT faculty;
5. accepting himself and awarding raises to his executive assistant and cabinet members during the fourteen months preceding the July 1, 2009 wage freeze far in excess of any other employee group (including academic deans) which in effect exempted these recipients from any sense of shared sacrifice during the wage freeze; and
6. proposing and getting the Board to approve the exorbitant nine percent tuition increase when an independent audit of university financial statements and your FY2010 budget showed continuing substantial increases in university reserves and when the only justification provided by Mr. Beaghan was to protect these reserves in order to keep a bond rating held by few public universities.
7. A seventh action was reported last summer but not released to the faculty since it had not been confirmed. Following a request made in July, data on raises for members of the athletic department were released in January. Twelve athletic staff received FY09 raises in the 11-31% range while other employees except those noted in 5 above had raises close to 3%. Most alarming was the fact that nine staff were given raises on June 30 after the president had announced on June 22 a wage freeze for all non-represented employees to begin on July 1. The fact that the wage freeze was imposed one day after Mrs. Russi received a second FY09 raise to bring her to 20% above FY08 shows the financial favoritism of this administration and the moral character of the president.

All these actions are those of a president who seeks and acts on advice only from his closest associates serving at his pleasure. You commented in November on your intense private discussions with the president on all aspects of the budget and some, particularly Trustee Baskin, have raised such questions in public. Do you appreciate how all data presented to you is prepared by a totally controlled support staff? OU has no independent Congressional Budget Office. Have you ever asked how many of the administrative professional staff you see at each public meeting and who seldom speak are ordered to attend these meetings to fill the room with a supportive audience? OU is paying these staff to perform other valuable services than filling seats at Board meetings.

Let me give you one personal example of the degree of message and action control in effect at OU. A few years ago a retiring dean wrote an article for the OU magazine recalling his accomplishments. Among those listed were several actions that occurred while I was the Interim Dean. When I requested an errata be added to the next OU magazine, I was told Oakland does not print corrections only positive statements. When I told this to an acquaintance who is the Director of Public Relations of the University of Toronto, he was shocked and thought that any administration that would not admit an error could not be trusted by alumni, faculty or governing boards.

Last fall I was fully supportive of the decision to postpone the vote of no confidence to see if the president and faculty could work together during the final portion of his presidency. I urged faculty to observe whether it was possible for the president to change his management style and utilize all components of shared governance rather than show the contempt for faculty displayed in his earlier effort to bypass governance provisions in establishment of the medical school. Three changes that could be observable by late March involve communications, budget development/transparency, and legal attitudes/actions.

The foremost communication change would be for the president to succeed in getting you to accept two faculty liaisons similar to the student liaisons and thereby open direct and ongoing communications between you and our faculty. President Russi told me last fall as he has on several other occasions during the past decade that he believes you will continue to reject his request for faculty liaisons. He proposed to have the provost

select small groups of faculty for one-time meetings with selected Board members. It was suggested this would allow you to develop a sense of trust in faculty. My first comment to you is that if you have no trust in OU faculty you should never have accepted the Governor's appointment. Secondly your interaction with different sets of faculty in one-time meetings will not accomplish what on-going interactions with faculty selected for this purpose by faculty can accomplish. Only with faculty designated liaisons can you be confident you are hearing fully representative and unfiltered faculty views. Only such faculty liaisons will be able to communicate to faculty your concerns and provide witness to the dedication of your stewardship of OU fiscal resources to maximize impact on student success. The strongest support you could provide the president at this meeting is not through words but action. I call upon you today to take the action that Trustee Baskin in June questioned why hadn't happened years ago by asking the faculty to select two liaisons to the Board.

Since November the president has had more open communications with faculty groups than during any similar period of his presidency. These communications are characterized by prepared statements from the president about his accomplishments, actual listening to faculty concerns about his performance, and chiefly cosmetic but some substantive changes after hearing faculty face-to-face. These communications have yet to move into serious discussions about the future of the university and how he can work with faculty to provide the support needed to allow every Oakland student willing to make the effort succeed in getting a degree. There has yet to be a discussion of the compatibility of the president's goal for 25,000 students with our ability to recruit this number of qualified students who can benefit from an Oakland education and our ability to adequately support them.

After the Esposito firing, the president agreed to change the top-down budget process and centralized control of all dollars. Academic budgets still don't cover our instructional needs. Donors to my department would be shocked to learn their donations bought chemicals for undergraduate teaching labs in addition to new instrumentation or student research grants they felt they were supporting. A decade ago and in November the president promised a more transparent budget development process and accounting of revenues actually spent. Once again the president has initiated actions that could change the budget process. One of his suggestions last fall was to have Mr. Beaghan participate in Senate Budget

Review Committee meetings. It is now March and Mr. Beaghan will attend his first SBRC meeting this week.

When asked how Oakland will fund its commitments to the School of Medicine, we are told via philanthropy, revenue from grants and contracts, and tuition. Before the first medical student matriculates and the tuition revenue stream begins, OU will have spent about 15 million in hard dollars on the medical school in addition to “in-kind” donation of staff time and effort. We know of no current contracts and grants by School of Medicine faculty with sufficient OU indirect costs to offset any significant portion of this 15 million. We are aware of the two million per year Beaumont grant but have not heard of other multimillion grants to offset these costs. Faculty are concerned by the statement in the School of Medicine’s accreditation document that undesignated gifts to OU will support the school. We fear the School of Medicine will be a constant hidden drain on the OU Foundation at the expense of all other academic programs particularly since the foundations alumni and community directors were replaced by OU staff. We hope your fiduciary duties allow you to monitor the Foundation now that it is a mere appenditure of the president’s office.

The one area where communications between faculty and the president appear to have borne fruit is in one aspect of the legal arena. The president promised and has delivered on providing faculty requested public data without resorting to court action. However, as long as the Board supports the general counsel’s efforts to refuse to acknowledge an unfair labor practice by his staff, this action will certainly cause more faculty to support the no confidence motion. Thus a second action you could take today, if you truly support the president, would be to instruct the general counsel to drop the MERC appeal and to stand behind the president’s words and signature.

I urge you to support the president by actions in addition to words by accepting faculty liaisons, acknowledging the unfair labor practice found by the MERC judge and ending the discriminatory treatment of LGBT employees. These actions I believe would have a major impact on the outcome of the faculty vote later this month.

Thank you for listening to me and considering my comments.