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President's Weekly Perspective, 2008_11_03

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Monday Morning Message - November 3, 2008

Good morning.

In less than 48 hours, the results of the 2008 election will be known. If you have not already done so, I urge you to vote tomorrow and let your voice be heard. I also want to commend each and every one of the UNM community – students, faculty and staff – who have taken the time to vote, volunteer and participate in what everyone seems to agree is one of America’s most significant elections. Win or lose, you have played a role in history.

One of the greatest challenges facing our new President will be reducing our nation’s energy consumption. Not only is it vital that we reduce our dependence on foreign energy sources, as a biologist, I recognize the impact carbon-based energy consumption is having on global warming.

Here at UNM, we must reduce energy consumption for an additional reason – a fiscal one.

We all know energy costs are on the rise. PNM has filed for a \$126 million rate increase which, depending on how the Public Regulation Commission allocates the request, could cost UNM an additional \$800,000 each year in addition to the \$2.1 million increase from the most recent rate case.

Even now, UNM (including HSC) spends \$21.35 million each and every year just to provide utilities to our campus buildings - a sum that dwarfs the \$16.33 million allocated to us by the Legislature for utility costs. In other words, we are already being forced to dip into core mission-related funding to the tune of \$5.02 million a year just to keep the lights on – and even this sum doesn’t take into account the proposed rate hike now before the Public Regulation Commission.

In such an environment, reduction of energy costs is more than a priority. It is essential to the fulfillment of our long-range mission.

When confronted with a similar situation at Oklahoma State University, we engaged Energy Education Inc. to equip buildings on OSU’s five campuses with energy monitors that would isolate the causes of energy waste and implement building-by-building, floor-by-floor, room-by-room strategies to reduce consumption. Sometimes, an HVAC system was modified; on other occasions, the response was as simple as installing a motion-detector light switch in a hallway.

EEI’s strategies have helped OSU’s five campuses reduce \$2.2 million in energy costs over the first seven months of 2008 – a 17.3% savings. It’s impossible at this stage to project similar savings here at UNM, (we only retained EEI last December) but clearly, EEI’s approach has the potential to make serious reductions in out-of-control energy costs. Our Physical Plant Department is now loading the data and adapting the software and soon will be awaiting the first measurements. If our experience at OSU is any barometer, I’m optimistic for significant savings.

Another of the core priorities that align the mission, vision and values of the University of New Mexico is support of healthy communities. UNM’s indoor facilities have been smoke free for more than a decade. In 2007, the UNM Health Sciences Center took the lead and became completely smoke free, seeing benefits for students, faculty, staff; and patients alike. I now think it would be wise for the main campus in Albuquerque to take a look at doing the same. To help us look at this issue, I have tasked a university committee with looking at the issue and reporting back to me their recommendations. For information, please visit <http://www.unm.edu/smokefree/>.

Have a good week.

David J. Schmidly