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President's Weekly Perspective, 2008_11_24

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MONDAY MORNING MESSAGE

Monday, November 24, 2008

Good morning.

Since my message to you just last week, the rapidly-tumbling price of oil and natural gas has caused even higher deficit projections for our state, and each of us is justifiably concerned – students worry about the impact on tuition and educational quality, while our faculty and staff are concerned about the impact on jobs, benefits and compensation.

As I said last Friday in my WebCast message to the University community, which can be seen here (<http://mtsmsite.unm.edu/mediasite/Catalog/?cid=d698f7e9-100b-4150-8f15-d25935a9b8ea>), we won't be in any real position to assess how these events will affect us until the Legislature reconvenes, passes any measures, and the Governor signs the bill. After that, with your input, the Regents and I will implement the law, with the objectives in mind of keeping our workforce intact and keeping tuition affordable while carrying out our core missions of education and research.

We've been fortunate in being able to move quickly and prudently to implement a four-part strategy to set aside significant funds to cushion the blow against whatever lies ahead, but we'd be fooling ourselves if we underestimated the seriousness of our predicament. Not only do we face the prospect of a mid-year budget rescission, but of state appropriations that may be significantly reduced for several years to come.

I want to make sure that the entire UNM community understands the nature of the problem. The funds at stake are those appropriated to us by the Legislature – “Instruction and General” funds (also known as “I-and-G” funds) as well as state appropriations for line-items such as Research and Public Service Projects.

What's NOT at stake are those dollars we receive from the recently-approved General Obligation (“GO”) bonds, or dedicated funds such as contracts and grants. Obviously, privately-donated monies are not affected, nor are those dollars we earn from the sale of tickets to athletic events, TV and radio rights, advertising and the like. These other dollars are often restricted in how they are used, however. This is why, for instance, we can't legally apply bond funds set aside for renovation of “The Pit” for salaries: the law doesn't allow us to do so.

Knowing the parameters of the situation will help each of us think strategically, not reactively, about what needs to be done. We all need to work together to get through this, and we want your input. I invite each of you to submit your ideas, comments and suggestions to me at unmpres@unm.edu, and coming soon, a “Comments” section will be added to my website where we post this message for you to join in the discussion.

On Friday I was honored to join Regent Don Chalmers, Provost Suzanne Ortega, Dean Richard Howell and other guests to break ground for the new College of Education building. As an environmentalist, I'm especially pleased that the new structure will be built according to LEED standards, with considerable energy savings. Even in these uncertain times, UNM is moving forward, and in a way that will set the standard for sustainability across the southwest.

While we are facing some serious budget constraints ahead, there is a lot of great news on our campus. Three grants, totaling more than \$17.5 million, were recently awarded to the New Mexico Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NM EPSCoR) through the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation. NM EPSCoR is a program that gathers resources and expertise from academic institutions, our national labs, private industry, and state and federal sources to benefit education, the environment, and the New Mexico economy.

Also, Biology Professors Marcy Litvak and Robert Sinsabaugh, in collaboration with Los Alamos National Labs and the United States Department of the Interior, received a three-year EPSCoR-State/National Laboratory Partnership Grant for \$150,000 per year. The awards are significant because they tie in to the state's science and technology plan, which is focused on our state's needs.

In more good news, congratulations to the Anderson School of Management, whose state-of-the-art “video wall” and conference system in the School’s Financial Center took first prize in the category of Corporate Application and Excellence in Creativity at the Fourth Annual “DIGI” Awards in New York City.

Working with the Anderson School’s IT staff, the wall was designed and installed by Alpha Video’s Digital Display Group. It gives a “trading floor” look and displays real-time stock pricing information for several stock issues that are monitored by Anderson students, as well as satellite business news and information relating to Anderson.

Lastly, as we prepare to give thanks with our loved ones this Thursday, let’s try to remember those less fortunate with a gift to the United Way. Please, take a moment to fill out a Pledge Card, which you can obtain by clicking <http://unitedway.unm.edu/pledgeform.pdf> or by asking your Department Coordinator.

I hope everybody has a safe and happy holiday this week.

David J. Schmidly