

Speech at Appalachian's General Faculty Meeting

Paul Gates, Chair Faculty Senate

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When Appalachian formally adopted its latest strategic plan, now nearly two years in the past, many faculty and staff were heartened by the inclusion of Strategic Direction 5 – Preserving Faculty and Staff Excellence – as recognition of its centrality to the accomplishment of our primary mission of delivering a transformative educational experience to our students.

Since then, the university has made important headway in that area in the form of campus-funded tuition increases directed to faculty salaries for the last three years. The state? 1 ½ per cent last fall. Thanks, but that's just not enough -- particularly now that flat tuition is set to kick in next fall. Of course I also have to point out the obvious -- that this has all worked an even greater hardship on the staff in that they have no mechanism for raises *except* what the state deigns to provide.

Is help on the horizon? I don't know, but let me tell you what I do know and then I want to make the case for the state's ability to do better by us: the Board of Governors' strategic plan, released earlier this month does include "engagement and retention of faculty and staff" as the last of its 13 bulleted goals, included under its broader goal of "Excellent and Diverse Institutions." (It's caused a little confusion, but the reference to "diverse" institutions as it's used there means diverse institutional missions.)

The specific goal I want to focus on is that of recruitment, retention and development of faculty and staff. The metric mandated by the strategic plan is that by May, the UNC General Administration will create methods of data collection and metrics to measure engagement and retention of faculty and staff.

Since last fall, I've repeatedly pointed out at Faculty Assembly meetings in Chapel Hill that every dean and department manager in the system can probably recite from memory the numbers of offers not accepted and personnel not retained and the reasons for those failures. So that should not be difficult to accomplish.

Now, let me explain briefly why and how I believe that recruitment and retention goals, which I have to assume are sincere, can be met:

Revenue for FY 2016-17 through December is 3.1% above the revenue target. That's \$322 million. The General Assembly's Fiscal Research Division reports that the economy is on a "solid footing" and steady growth is expected to continue due to improvements in employment and faster overall wage growth, increasing the likelihood of surpassing the fiscal year's revenue forecast. The revenue picture has even improved since the current consensus revenue forecast was developed in May. These trends put economic conditions in their best position since December 2007.

In all three primary sources of revenue, collections are up for the six-month period. Personal income taxes are up 5.3% over last year, \$161 million above target; sales tax revenue is \$80 million above target and corporate income taxes are \$73 million above target. Sales tax collections have returned to their 18-year historical increase levels at 4.7%, showing solid recovery from the depths of the last recession. So far, North Carolina's recovery has tracked the nation's recovery closely, but the forecast is for the state to outpace the nation in 2017. A big part of that is the 100K – 105K new jobs that are expected to be added this year.

Large numbers are often hard to grasp and I don't want to belabor the point on a Friday afternoon, but stiff financial headwinds have turned into an encouraging tailwind that could propel the economic engine that is the university system along the path to even greater levels of prosperity than I have just described. But that requires a measure of political goodwill that seems not just lacking in Raleigh but is made impossible by the spiteful scorched-earth policy being pursued by the gerrymandered General Assembly.

One example will suffice. When it was clear that he'd lost the election but before he left office, Pat McCrory's parting shot was to sign HB 17 on Dec. 9 -- a move to strip incoming Governor Roy Cooper of the executive authority to make various personnel appointments. The subsection of the bill perhaps most harmful to the University of North Carolina's constituent institutions is the provision that removes the governor's prerogative to appoint four of the 13 members of the individual universities' Board of Trustees -- vesting that power in the General Assembly's meddlesome leadership instead. It is hard to imagine a more serious intrusion into the principles of institutional governance.

So let me make a plea for even broader involvement in the governance of Appalachian to conclude this, my eighth and last address to the campus community as chair of the Faculty Senate. The structures are in place, which I know because

I've seen up close how policies created over my four terms benefit us in many areas of our professional lives.

But this is most definitely not about me, a 22-year faculty member who arrived at Appalachian as I was moving into middle age. It's about you. Past accomplishments are just that – past. They were important at the time, but there are always new and different challenges and if anything, they're more serious and important than ever.

We talk a lot about academic freedom, of course, because it produces shiny new impressive and important knowledge and discoveries -- but we too often give short shrift to the behind-the-scenes hard slog that is governance. This is unfortunate, because I believe that effective governance is the foundation of – and the protection for – academic freedom.

For one reason or another, those of us who have been in the academy for a while have become acquainted with at least one low-quality college or university. Have they developed the habits of good governance? I would bet not.

The faculty, which is a subversive body in the best sense of the word, is charged with primary responsibility for the welfare of the university enterprise. John Henry Newman, the 19th Century Oxford scholar and theologian, described the faculty in his famous work, “The Idea of the University,” as a “heterogeneous and independent body setting about a work of self-reformation” to demonstrate through teaching and scholarship that new ways of thinking and acting are possible to address contemporary issues. The call is to defend the university's intellectual standards from the partisan pressures of off-campus laypersons and part-time experts.

Most of us are at least somewhat familiar with the assault on tenure – and by extension academic expertise – in Wisconsin. Already this month efforts have begun in Missouri to eliminate the tenure track for new hires starting in 2018. (The state representative who introduced this bill describes tenure as “un-American.”) In Iowa, the approach is to flat-out abolish tenure – even for those who already have it. I hope I'm right when I say those ideas aren't going to go anywhere, but I *know* I'm right when I say those are indicators of the attitudes of the forces arrayed against us.

Tenure, like liberty and democracy – particularly in these times – does not flourish automatically on its own. Like a hothouse flower, it requires constant tending,

without which it will wither. Its health, the health of the professoriate -- and the health of the university overall needs your attention through your service.

The chance of courses being taught well are greatly diminished when content and structure are imposed from outside without debate and discussion. All kinds of expertise and knowledge in an around campus are held by various groups: students, trustees, staff who know a lot about making the university function on a daily basis and alumni who collectively know just about everything else, but it is the faculty alone who have the deep expert knowledge about the primary mission of the university – teaching and research. This is what governance must protect.

I realize that governance comes at a price and that price is time – time that the Germans call “Sitzfleisch” or “sitting time.” The trick is to balance it all. I don’t want to seem to be promoting service for effective governance at the expense of our other professional responsibilities. I’m as sensitive as anyone to the value of uninterrupted time in the library or at a lab bench. I am fully aware that nobody earns tenure or the second promotion on the strength of the service alone. But service is the grease that makes the whole academic enterprise possible. Done right, it eases the way to the full exercise of academic freedom in the classroom and in scholarship that *does* lead to tenure.

We couldn’t do without the management work of staff because they perform the functions that let us perform our jobs. So it is that service to and by the faculty as a whole allows us to successfully pursue our own individual disciplinary interests.

Our philosophy of governance is a major, perhaps the major, factor in the quality of Appalachian and every other well-regarded university. Governance makes administrative leadership effective and it makes positive change and challenges to dogma by new ideas and methods possible. As the universities are the lifeblood of society, governance is the lifeblood of the universities. So as you move through your careers, please give a bit more blood -- and sweat (and perhaps tears) to keep Appalachian healthy.

As always, my best wishes for a successful semester.

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