

Remarks of Rob Ingram to University Faculty-Staff Meeting

April 26, 2000

Thank you. I am pleased to be with you this morning. The purpose of my presentation is twofold. One is to describe briefly activities of the Faculty Senate during the current academic year. The other is to introduce Senate Officers for this coming year.

Rather than provide a litany of actions by the Senate for this year, I refer you to the Senate web page. There you will find links to minutes, resolutions, and other documents that describe various activities of the Senate. Instead, I want to discuss briefly three important issues that the Senate has been involved in and that remain work-in-process for the future and that warrant the continued attention of faculty. These matters focus directly on the faculty and what we can do to improve the University.

The first issue is faculty involvement in political matters. The Legislative Agenda Committee under Scott Bridges has worked extremely hard this year to organize a concerted effort to keep the University community informed of legislative matters and to respond to those issues of primary relevance to the University. You have received many email messages about these issues, and I appreciate the efforts of many of you in responding to requests to write letters and call legislators. Also, I want to thank the SGA and University staff for their support in these efforts.

I know that many of us would prefer not to be involved in political matters. Political lobbyist is not a job description we covet. Unfortunately, reality is that if we are not involved in state politics we will not receive the state resources we need and deserve. Politicians respond to those who make noise and help them stay in office. We do not have the luxury of being non-political. This is a battle we should not expect someone else to fight for us. It does no good to complain about low salaries and lack of support or to expect the administration to solve these problems when resources simply are not available. Rather than complaining about the problems, I encourage each of you to become part of the solution. If you are not a member of the Higher Education Partnership, become a member. When the need arises to influence the behavior of politicians, please help by sending letters, making calls, becoming involved in political campaigns, being aware of issues that affect the University, and supporting the Legislative Agenda Committee, the Higher Education Partnership, and the University PAC. These are not one-time efforts. If we are to be successful, we must continue to deal with these problems on an ongoing basis.

The second issue is the evaluation and reward of teaching. Without minimizing the importance of research and outreach, I would argue that teaching is the most important mission of this university. Certainly, it is as fundamental to our existence as anything we do. And, yet I suspect that most faculty perceive that teaching is not highly regarded. The route to academic success often is viewed as emphasizing research and being an OK instructor. I do not mean to suggest that most faculty are not good teachers. I think most of us take teaching seriously, even if we think we are not highly rewarded for our efforts.

I would like to see us do a better job of measuring, rewarding, and supporting outstanding teaching, and I believe that measuring, rewarding, and supporting must all be part of this effort. The Senate created a committee to examine these issues last fall. That committee continues to look for ways to address this matter. The task is not easy. I encourage you to support this effort and to become involved by providing suggestions and input at the appropriate times. We should demand of ourselves and our colleagues excellence in the classroom and active participation in creating a learning environment that encourages and nurtures students and stimulates them to perform at the highest levels they can. And we should expect that those faculty who excel at these activities should be recognized and rewarded for their efforts and those who do not excel should have incentives and support to improve their efforts.

The third issue is diversity. The Senate passed a resolution at its March meeting that encourages faculty to treat people of all races, genders, religions, and sexual orientations with respect, courtesy, and dignity. Moreover, the resolution encourages faculty to raise their awareness of this issue and to become proactive in opposing those whose actions are inconsistent with respect, courtesy, and dignity for all people. These matters are not simple issues of discrimination and inequity. Racism, for example, is not a disease specific to certain extremist groups. It is a disease that we all must be alert to and that often afflicts those who consider themselves immune.

Several years ago I attended an honors ceremony in which three students were recognized for their academic achievements. Sitting near me was a senior faculty member, who has now been retired for several years. His comment after the three students were recognized was to the effect that "we were politically correct, we got a black, a female, and a Jew." The tone and content of his remark made it clear that he wanted others to know how he felt about the selections. Hopefully, such behavior and such attitudes are rare.

What is equally unfortunate, however, is that I sat silently and said nothing to this faculty member about his remark. I let it pass as though it were none of my business. I regret my inaction and point to this event because I want to impress on each of you a need to look deeply into yourselves to consider whether you also are a contributor to these problems, even if your contribution, like mine, has been inattention and lack of action. I suspect we can all do better. It is not enough not to be a racist or a bigot. It is important to stand up to those who exhibit those behaviors and to make it clear that they are not appreciated or accepted.

We can make a difference. We can create an environment in which all people feel welcome, comfortable, and excited about being at the University of Alabama. We can be an example to this state. I encourage you to help with this task. The Senate has created a Faculty Diversity Committee. It will be exploring ways that faculty can become more aware of diversity problems and issues and ways that we can change the culture at this institution for the better. We will keep you informed of its recommendations.

We applaud recently announced efforts by President Sorensen to support increased diversity efforts and education at the University. Also, we applaud efforts to increase diversity in the University's fraternities and sororities. At its April meeting, the Faculty Senate passed the following resolution:

Whereas, diversity and inclusion are critical values to the proper functioning of an academic community;
and

Whereas, systematic racial or ethnic exclusion of a group from participation in an activity associated with The University of Alabama conflicts with these values and is unacceptable; and

Whereas, the present system of Greek letter social organizations at the University is segregated by race;

Be it resolved, that the Faculty Senate calls upon the administration of The University to end segregation on our campus as a matter of priority.

We call on all faculty, students, the SGA, staff, the administration, and the Board of Trustees to endorse and actively support both resolutions passed by the Senate. An end to institutionalized racism is long overdue on this campus. It is time to work together to build a culture in which people of all races, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds are comfortable and fully accepted. It is time to demonstrate to this state and the nation that an institution founded on racial exclusiveness can become a model of equality and acceptance for all people.

Imagine for a minute the University of Alabama in the 21st century, building on our historical strengths and on the recent successes in increasing our research and funding base. Spearheaded by our present administration, we can become a university where faculty and staff are well paid, teaching is highly valued and rewarded, and diversity is celebrated. The benefits would accrue to our full community including all of us here, but most importantly to our students. I believe this vision is achievable, but it will require the efforts of all of us who share this vision. I encourage you to become part of these efforts.

I thank you for the opportunity to have served as President of the Senate. It has been a great learning experience. I have been privileged to work with outstanding faculty, staff, and administrators. I appreciate what all of you have done. Many people put a lot of effort into Senate and other faculty activities. I ask that you continue your involvement in and support for these activities.

I am pleased to introduce the Senate officers for 2000-20001. The new President is Pat Bauch from the College of Education. The Vice President, who is teaching at this time and, therefore, is not present, is Norman Baldwin from the

Political Science Department in Arts and Sciences. The Secretary is Steven MacCall from Library and Information Studies in Communications. I have had the pleasure of working closely with each of these people during the last year. I am confident they will do a great job.

Thank you.