

## **Remarks of Rob Ingram, President of the Faculty Senate at the University of Alabama to the Board of Trustees, September 17, 1999**

Good morning. It is a privilege for me to speak with you today. I greatly appreciate the opportunity.

I should make it clear from the outset, in case I inadvertently offend someone, that my remarks have not been reviewed or approved by anyone else.

I have thought quite a lot about what I would like to say today, especially because it may be the only opportunity of this type I have.

There are many messages I could bring to you. I could thank you for your work on behalf of the University System. I could recognize the outstanding leadership provided by the administration of the University and the strong working relationship that has developed between the administration and faculty. I could list numerous accomplishments of faculty and students at the University. I could identify various challenges our universities face as we enter the new century. All of these would be worthy topics of discussion.

Nevertheless, there is one issue that I believe dominates all others and is the one item I have chosen to focus on today. That topic is the dismal state of faculty salaries at our universities. Perhaps you have heard this story from faculty so many times that we are in danger of being like the little boy who hollered "wolf!" too many times. I want to assure you that we are not hollering "wolf!" simply to attract attention. We face an extremely serious problem that looms larger with every passing year. Our salaries, on average, are well below those of our peer institutions. We continue to lose good faculty, and we have difficulty in hiring the caliber of faculty we need and that our students deserve.

As a research institution, we must compete at the national level. The faculty we want to hire and retain are the same faculty other universities want on their campuses. Highly qualified faculty are difficult to find in many disciplines. We have to bid for their services just as major companies bid for top managerial talent.

The Faculty Senates at our three universities have passed similar resolutions calling on the System to develop a strategic plan for addressing this problem. Further, we have asked that you make development and implementation of this plan your top priority. I plead with you, the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Meredith, and the Presidents of our universities, to address this issue. We desperately need your help. There is no other problem that comes near this one in importance. We need serious efforts and realistic planning that considers the lack of State resources and, at the same time, does not over-burden our students with excessive tuition. We need planning that addresses the issue directly and that considers all sources of funding that can be used to deal with this problem.

We need a realistic, practical plan that will solve the problem. We do not need pie-in-the-sky plans that have no realistic chance of being implemented. We do not need plans that argue that if the State would just come up with \$40 million of new resources, our problems would be solved. We do not need to assume that the State is going to legislate that K-university salaries be at the national level and expect that to be our solution, knowing full well that resources are not available to fulfill that promise. Politicians and others are prone to offer unrealistic approaches that have popular appeal but far outreach available resources and are likely to result in continuation of the status quo.

Faculty too must realize that a workable solution is not going to be simple and is not going to make everyone happy. The System needs to examine carefully all aspects of its operations and consider reductions in activities that are tertiary to the primary missions of our universities. Salary norms need to be developed in light of the missions of individual programs and the environments in which these programs operate. These norms should consider quality issues and provide incentives for faculty to achieve at national levels if they are to be rewarded at those levels. Our concern should not be simply to create a better environment for our faculty, though that is an important goal. It should be to create a better learning environment for our students. The planning process should see students, as well as faculty, as important players in that process.

I could provide a litany of examples of the salary problems we face at the University. I want to leave you with one short story, however. It involves a colleague of mine, and therefore, I am very familiar with her situation. There are

many similar stories throughout our campuses that are equally worthy of being told. I choose this one.

This woman is a senior faculty member, having been at the University for approximately 20 years. She has remained at Alabama largely because of her husband's career. She holds an endowed professorship. She has published in the top journals in her discipline. She has co-authored a major textbook. She serves on the committee that develops accounting standards for the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. She is a CPA. She is nationally recognized as an educator. She is president-elect of the American Accounting Association, the national professional organization for accounting faculty with over 3,000 members. She is an excellent teacher. She teaches courses at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral level. She is a recipient this year of the National Alumni Association Outstanding Commitment to Teaching Award.

She chaired the doctoral dissertation of a young man who completed his Ph.D. at the University of Alabama a year ago and took a job at another major university in the Southeast, a bright student but with limited credentials, as is true of any new faculty member. His beginning salary was higher than the current salary of his dissertation supervisor, after considering the supplemental income she receives from her professorship. Her salary is several thousand dollars less than his. We are paying less to a senior faculty member with a professorship, than many of our competitors are paying new faculty.

This should not happen. There is no reason, no justification, no excuse for this situation.

Thank you.