

GORDON APPLEMAN
801 CHERRY STREET – UNIT 1
FORT WORTH, TEXAS 76102

MARCH 14, 2011

Dear Friends of The University of Texas

It disturbs me to feel compelled to write this letter, but circumstances have persuaded me to do so. Time is of the essence. If you agree with me, please contact members of the UT Board of Regents whom you know, the Chairman of the Board, Eugene Powell; members of the Legislature, university administrators and faculty, alumni, parents, students, and personal friends. Tell them that you oppose the direction toward which Governor Rick Perry, the Chairman, and others are trying to move our University and urge them to follow the vision of Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa and the System Presidents. Being a “silent majority” will not save our University.

I believe that The University of Texas at Austin and the other institutions in the UT System are at risk of serious, long-term, perhaps irreversible, degradation in academic stature as a result of initiatives being implemented by the new Chairman of the Board, with the encouragement and assistance of Governor Rick Perry and the Texas Public Policy Foundation. According to its website it “is a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-partisan research institute. The Foundation’s mission is to promote and defend liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise in Texas by educating and affecting policymakers and the Texas public policy debate with academically sound research and outreach.”

Paul Burka of Texas Monthly has written that “Perry has an ideological agenda for UT and Texas A&M, created by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, that is not consistent with the educational mission of a Tier One university.”

<http://www.texasmonthly.com/blogs/burkablog/index.php>

In my opinion, we don’t want our University to go down on the same road on which they have already taken Texas A&M. This is as much a threat to The University’s future as the proposed budget cuts. Strategically, now is a time to grow, not contract.

A number of recent actions at The UT System have been taken by the new Chairman of the Board without the participation of the entire Board (hiring a new Special Advisor to the Board, Rick O’Donnell, also affiliated with the Texas Public Policy Foundation) and are contrary to the visionary direction of our Chancellor and of our 15 campus Presidents. You may not have heard of their dissent, presumably the result of “muzzling.”

Paul Burka described Mr. Powell’s first meeting as follows:

At his first meeting as chairman of the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System, Gene Powell made some statements that were quite remarkable. Traditionally regents support the agenda of university leaders and try to keep politicians from interfering with the academic mission. Powell’s remarks, quoted by *Statesman* reporter Ralph M. K. Haurwitz, gave every indication that he intended to advance the cost-cutting agenda of Governor Rick Perry at the university’s expense. He clamped a muzzle on UT administrators who might take their case for more funding to the Capitol, saying they

should “remain positive” when approaching members of the Legislature. That means we won’t be hearing any more statements like this one from UT Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa: “[The] proposed reductions would have immediate and future devastating consequences for our students, patients, faculty, staff and the communities of Texas.”

The role of O’Donnell and his selection have been described as follows by Reeve Hamilton, writing for the New York Times:

Late last month, three weeks after becoming chairman of the University of Texas System Board of Regents, Gene Powell selected Rick O’Donnell, a former director of Colorado’s higher education department, to fill a newly created position, that of special adviser to the board.

Mr. O’Donnell’s \$200,000 annual salary and his hiring, which was not announced publicly, have set off some alarms — among lawmakers grappling with the state’s huge budget shortfall and among higher education observers who fear that the choice represents a precarious new direction for the U.T. System that could threaten its flagship university’s elite status.

The hire comes just months after the Texas A&M University System was criticized for implementing higher education reforms recommended by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative research group that advocates an approach that departs radically from the traditional research-driven model of academia. A spokeswoman for the organization said their recommendations strive for excellence in both teaching and research.

In November, Robert M. Berdahl, president of the Association of American Universities, an organization comprising the nation’s elite research institutions, urged Chancellor Mike McKinney of Texas A&M to resist such “ill-conceived calls for ‘reform’ ” that “appear to diverge” from the reasons A&M was admitted to the group. He argued that some of the proposals demonstrated “little or no understanding of the nature of graduate education.”

Before U.T. hired Mr. O’Donnell, he was a senior research fellow at the policy foundation, where he wrote a paper, “Is Academic Research a Good Investment for Texas?” The paper concluded that much research “has few tangible benefits.”

In an interview, Mr. O’Donnell said that he had no set agenda. He said he would collaborate with two new task forces assembled by Mr. Powell to improve educational quality while, at Gov. Rick Perry’s urging, lowering costs.

As for his salary, Mr. Powell said in an e-mail that the board was “keenly aware” of the financial difficulties facing the system’s universities but expected the investment in Mr. O’Donnell to pay off.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/us/13ttstimulus.html?scp=1&sq=reeve+hamilton&t=nyt>

According to Burka, Powell's most remarkable comment, which has received widespread attention inside the UT community and throughout the state, came in support of Perry's call for a \$10,000 baccalaureate degree, including textbooks and fees. "Using a car analogy," Haurwitz wrote of Powell's remarks, "he said a \$10,000 degree would be more like a Chevrolet Bel Air, a midlevel vehicle from a generation ago, than a Cadillac. There's nothing wrong with a Bel Air-quality education, he said."

To attempt to defuse the widespread adverse reaction, Mr. Powell sent an email. An excerpt from that email is reproduced in the attachment to this letter. Make no mistake – UT Austin is a prime target.

The Bel Air philosophy would devalue a degree from every UT System school to a marginal level and has reportedly offended persons who lead those institutions, serve on their faculties, support them, and attend them as students.

On August 12, 2010 Chancellor Cigarroa delivered a State of the System address that was circulated publicly and is on the System website. It contained a vision that was endorsed by the full Board of Regents, the System Administration, and the System Presidents. The new position expressed by Chairman Powell, but not adopted by vote of the Board of Regents, largely disregards the Chancellor's and the Presidents' goals. <http://www.utsystem.edu/cha/press.htm>

Much of the current movement by the Governor and Mr. Powell is perceived as directed at the selection two years ago of Dr. Cigarroa as the Chancellor of the UT System over the opposition of Governor Perry. Since then, the terms of many of the Regents who voted for Dr. Cigarroa have expired and they were not reappointed.

In addition, faculty members have been asked to review their research and to identify the revenue attributable to it. Decisions about the research and the faculty member will follow this "monetization" of their work. Chairman Powell's explains his initiative as follows:

Improve the Monetization of Research and Inventions Coming out of our Campuses
The Regents created a new Board Committee on Technology Transfer, chaired by Board Vice Chairman Jim Dannenbaum. He already has his committee up and running and will be working diligently to help our campuses realize more revenue from the technology developed by our researchers and scientists. Vice Chairman Dannenbaum also serves as the Board's liason (sic) to the Governor's Office on Technology.

This explanation appears inconsistent with other statements, including recommendations by O'Donnell:

Separate the teaching and research functions to stop the massive cross-subsidies that flow from teaching and useful scientific research to subsidize the more esoteric academic research favored by the tenure faculty.

Evaluate and reform the current system of Ph.D. fellowships, rejecting the conventional wisdom about academic research and the promise of free money.

March 14, 2011

Page 4 of 5

If you agree with me, please act now. Contact persons interested in Texas higher education and tell them that you oppose the new direction for UT universities as devised by the Governor, the Chairman, and others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gordon Appleman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Gordon Appleman

Excerpt from email of Chairman Gene Powell on March 9, 2011

The entire Board and I want to support each of our 15 institutions in their unique missions. Excellence requires focus, discipline and resolve. One can't be all things to all people (not even Harvard offers every discipline), and as Jim Collins of *Good to Great* fame says, one of the most important elements of going from good to great is having a "not-to-do list." One of the goals for the first task force is to work with each academic president to answer the question: Does each campus have what it needs to remain focused on what it takes to achieve its own unique, next level of excellence and, in an era of limited resources, do so in the most productive way possible?

Few comments that I made in the past month generated more discussion than when I suggested we may need to offer students the option of a solid, high-quality yet low-cost degree – a Bel Air rather than a Cadillac. This comment had nothing to do with U. T. Austin. Rather, I was talking about the cost of various four-year undergraduate *degrees* we offer across the System. Austin delivers a great Cadillac and needs to continue to do so as our flagship. Several of our universities deliver very good Olds 98s and Buick LeSabres. But for tens of thousands of students, many who are first-generation college students, we need to offer within the System an excellent no frills, low-cost undergraduate degree – or what I referred to as the basic Bel Air. That is one of the benefits of being a System – one size doesn't fit all. Excellence at U. T. Austin must include strengthening and expanding its world-class research while excellence at U. T. Pan American must include serving thousands of first-generation college students who often work while attending college and frequently need a different level of assistance.

Regents' contact information:

<http://www.utsystem.edu/bor/contactRegents.htm>