



## Montana Board of Regents

Conference Call Meeting

February 24, 2009

2:00 – 3:00 PM

**Tuesday, February 24, 2009**

The Board convened at 2:00 PM.

Roll call indicated a quorum present.

**Regents Present:** Stephen M. Barrett, Chair, Clayton Christian, Vice Chair, Lynn Hamilton, Lila Taylor, Janine Regent Pease and Todd Buchanan, all by phone. Regent Mitch Jessen, Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns, *ex officio*, and Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, *ex officio*, represented by Joyce Silverthorne, were present in person, Governor Brian Schweitzer, *ex officio*, was represented by Jan Lombardi by phone.

Sites represented by phone were: Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), UM-Missoula, UM-Western, UM-MT Tech, UM-Helena COT, MSU-Bozeman, MSU-Billings, MSU-Northern, MSU-Great Falls COT, Flathead Valley Community College, Miles Community College, and the Office of the Governor.

### 1. Budget Update

- Education Subcommittee Action

Deputy Commissioner Mick Robinson, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), gave an update on legislative budget activity including funding for the educational units, agencies, present law funding, and pay plan funding. Deputy Commissioner Robinson explained the document detailing executive action status by the Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Education as prepared by Pam Joehler, legislative fiscal analyst.

Discussion focused on the following:

- ✓ Items below the December 15 executive budget are funding for the Public Broadcasting System, salary of Deputy Commissioner position, funding of non-beneficiary students at the Tribal colleges, and funding for educational units.
- ✓ Concern for students with respect to affordability.
- ✓ Downward movement in revenue projections.
- ✓ May pay plan assumptions were based on 4% pay increase and 7% increase in health insurance contribution. Current funding for pay plan health insurance contribution is 8.5% increase for the first year and 8% for the second year, plus a small one-time bonus for lower earning employees.
- ✓ There is an agreement with the governor and the unions for state employees, but there is not an agreement between the MUS and



the unions.

- ✓ There are two ways to fund increased costs in the MUS – spending reductions and tuition increases.
- ✓ Change the level of cost transferred to students by tuition increases by offsetting with increases in state funding.
- ✓ There will be a second budget bill – HB 2A – to address the stimulus package funds.

- Bills of Interest:

Associate Commissioner Tyler Trevor, OCHE, reported on the MUS tracking list for legislation of interest. Specific bills mentioned were the bills related to the establishment of a community college, including SJ 12, specifically establishing a community college district in Ravalli County, which was tabled in the Senate Education Committee; SJ 25, the interim study of rural-urban issues, which has passed the senate; and HB 228, the self defense and firearms bill scheduled to be heard on March 10, 2009, which is a bill of interest throughout the state. Regents Barrett and Hamilton stated concerns with HB 228 and reminded the group that the university system already has firearms policies in place which ban the possession of firearms on the campuses.

## **2. Federal Recovery Reinvestment Act**

Dr. Brad Eldredge, OCHE, gave an update on the Federal Recovery Reinvestment Act (the “stimulus package”) in regards to the Montana University System (MUS) and higher education, Dr. Eldredge has identified twenty-six sections of the Act that could affect the MUS. Categories of sections affecting higher education include aid for students, education aid for states, infrastructure, scientific research, job training, and distance learning.

Commissioner Stearns told the Board that Deputy Commissioner Sylvia Moore is in Washington, DC at this time with representatives from Montana State University and The University of Montana. They are working with the EPSCoR coalition and several federal research agencies to determine the best research opportunities for Montana that will arise from the stimulus package.

Deputy Commissioner Mick Robinson explained that he has focused on the state stabilization fund portion of the bill. He has had discussions with the campuses regarding base funding opportunities as well as one-time-only funds, how the funding would flow to both K-12 and higher education, and tuition rebates. Deputy Commissioner Robinson and the campuses have developed a list of infrastructure projects and equipment needs for use of the federal stimulus dollars on the campuses. Priorities have not been established for the funding. Decisions on the use of the federal stimulus funds that relate to education will be determined by the legislature with input from the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), OCHE, the MUS campuses and the Governor’s Office.

## **3. Other**

Commissioner Stearns told the Board that she and several of her senior managers had



## MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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very productive meetings recently with the boards and faculties of Miles Community College and Dawson Community College where they discussed common course numbering, transferability issues, communication, and other issues of concern to the boards. A meeting will be held in the near future with the board of trustees of Flathead Valley Community College with the same purpose.

The commissioner also informed the Board of the meeting with the Montana Higher Education Student Assistance Corporation (MHESAC) board in which it was reported that there will be funds available for student loans for Montana students for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Meeting adjourned at 3:20 PM.

**Posted on**

**Approved by the Board of Regents on**

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Date

Date

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Sheila M. Stearns  
Commissioner of Higher Education  
and Secretary to the Board of Regents

Stephen Barrett  
Chair, Board of Regents