

Interim President Bill Roper's Report to the UNC System Board of Governors May 22, 2019

Good morning, and thank you, sir. It's an honor to present to you today. Along with others, I want to acknowledge that this is our first time gathered together since the horrific shooting at UNC Charlotte, and we all remain Niners today to be sure. I want to thank Trustee Chair Price for his gracious remarks and salute Chancellor Dubois, all of the senior team, and the whole UNC Charlotte community for the amazing things that they've done in this time of trial and tragedy.

Turning to good news, I want to ask you to join me in welcoming Chancellor-elect Kelli Brown who will shortly be the person in charge of Western Carolina University starting July 1st. Her husband, Dennis Brown, is with her. Please stand so we can recognize you. Many of you met Kelli last evening at the reception, and I'm quite confident, even more so, that she has the skill set, the talent, and the energy Western needs and will benefit from enormously. So, we welcome you to North Carolina and all that lies ahead.

Also, please welcome Dan Gerlach who was sitting right here. Where's Dan? Dan is the interim chancellor at ECU, and I wanted personally to thank him for his willingness to take on that position. He hit the ground running at ECU on May the 6th, two and a half weeks ago. Together the System Office and the team at ECU have underway an operational assessment at ECU that will enable the chancellor and his team to manage and lead ECU effectively going forward. The idea of an operational assessment, which I in error earlier called an audit, and State Auditor Wood taught me to say operational assessment. So, I'm trying to do that. The idea is for us to have an objectively verified, agreed upon set of facts and figures about the current state at ECU and going forward. The expression you might have heard is "we're all entitled to our own opinions, but we're not entitled to our own facts." We want to have one set of facts that we can all work from. I believe you understand that point. I've had the opportunity to get the sound advice and guidance from Auditor Wood, and among the things that we have discussed and agreed upon that we would hire Cherry Bekaert, the outside audit and accounting firm to help us in this process. And we are looking at doing this at other institutions within the UNC System, and Auditor Wood and I talked about that this morning.

I also personally want to welcome Adam Schmidt, the new head of ASG and new member of the Board of Governors. Adam and Raekwon Davis, the vice president of ASG, and I had lunch at an amazing culinary place called Sutton's Drugstore here in Chapel Hill.

Turning to other topics, the legislature continues to make progress towards a budget. The House passed their budget two weeks ago, which included a number of our top priorities from the Board of Governors.

Most significantly, the House budget included a significant portion of our summer funding request, funding for data modernization, faculty recruitment and retention, and a number of university-specific asks that were included in the Board's request. In addition, the House budget included a number of policy wins, including carryforward increase to 7.5% and most of our other policy requests. On the carryforward, I'd like to thank Governor Holmes and Governor Rucho for their advocacy of that important improvement in our ability to manage the universities and the University System in a productive way.

Recently, I completed visits with all 17 UNC System institutions, all three affiliates, and all of you Board members. It has been a remarkable experience to see and hear from so many about what makes this University special and to seek advice from each of you, almost all of those in person. A handful of you was by telephone, but I did interact with each member of the Board of Governors, including those of you that are about to depart and those that are about to arrive on the Board of Governors. And in those conversations, I sought your advice on what I should do, and do more of, and what I should do less of or even avoid doing. So, thank you for your wisdom.

Again, in your folders, you have a summary of notable news items from Across the System. We want to keep you informed and we want to do that in an efficient way. The notable news this time also includes information about our UNC System scholars' programs.

When I first met with you – four months ago – in January, shortly after I began this role, I set out three priorities for my work as interim president. Today, I'd like to give you an update report on our progress.

In January, I said my first priority is to “settle things down,” working with you, the chancellors, and the entire team.

With a lot of help from you and others, I believe we have made perceptible progress toward a more steady, stable operating environment. Of course, I acknowledge that one person's view of “unsettledness” will be different from another's – but a number of you and many others have told me they have noticed and are appreciative. The work continues, to be sure.

My second priority is to continue the implementation of the strategic direction begun by you and President Spellings. We continue to see widespread progress on the goals for the System and the institutions. Ultimately, with full accountability, we want to get more students from more backgrounds, into and graduated from college – faster, more conveniently, and more affordably than ever before.

My third priority is to do the work of the System Office – empowering and giving resources to the people doing the real work and then getting out of the way and letting them do their jobs.

At the System Office, the already strong senior team has been aided by the transition team. And it's been especially gratifying that everyone has worked seamlessly together – as one team – for the people of North Carolina. If you'll indulge me, I'd like to recognize and thank those people. All of you that were on the senior team at the System Office please stand so we can recognize you. [applause] And the members of the transition team, will you join them so we can say thank you to you. [applause] Hard workers.

This teamwork– under your leadership – has enabled for us to manage the leadership transitions at UNC-Chapel Hill and at ECU, to select a new chancellor at Western Carolina University, and a new CEO which we recommend for UNC-TV, to push forward your budget and policy priorities with the General Assembly, and to assist the universities and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics and other affiliates to deal with local issues and challenges.

As I said in January, it is an honor and a privilege to serve in this position. Thank you for your help and guidance.