

Week of January 4

Friday morning, Commissioner of Administration Designee Jay Dardenne provided an overview of the state budget situation to the ULS Board of Supervisors. In November, the Revenue Estimating Conference (REC) projected a \$487 million revenue shortfall for FY 15-16, inclusive of a \$117 million revenue shortfall carried forward from FY 14-15.

Since the November REC meeting, additional information has been collected. Due, at least in part, to the continuing low price of oil, a dramatic slump in corporate income tax collections, and lower-than-anticipated sales tax collections, the state is faced with an additional \$400-450 million revenue shortfall. Add to that an approximately \$300 million expenditure problem from Medicaid, TOPS, and MFP, and the state has a current year challenge in the neighborhood of \$750 million. That is FY 15-16.

FY 16-17 is worse. The current shortfall for next fiscal year is \$1.9 billion. In the words of the Commissioner, belt-tightening will not be sufficient. I, for one, am optimistic that the new administration, our legislators, and the people of Louisiana as a whole are ready to make the tough decisions necessary to advance our state.

On a college football discussion board I play around in, the conversation recently digressed from talk of 3-4 vs. 4-3 defenses to a debate on Louisiana's higher education structure. In response to a statement about the state budget, one participant suggested we need to close some universities. I gave them one little factoid: closing every university north of I-10 would not save the amount of state funding cut from higher education over the past 8 years. In fact, it is not even close. The response was disturbing and telling. The other participants were incredulous. One said that could not possibly be a true statement. Another said it was just silly. After I shared the numbers, the conversation shifted. Florida was cited as a model due to the lower number of universities per capita. When I pointed out that Florida spends more per student than Louisiana and now has 18 community colleges that offer bachelor degrees because the universities could not keep up with demand, the conversation ended.

We obviously have an opportunity to better inform the public about higher education funding. I am amazed at how surprised stakeholders are to learn that NSU's state funding has been cut from a high of ~\$48 million in 2007-

08 to ~\$20 million this year. The larger opportunity, though, is to showcase the benefits of a university that is dedicated to delivering on its mission. That is why we developed the Strategic Framework. That is why our Strategic Budgeting Committee is working to develop a transparent, predictable model that ensures we invest resources in support of our strategic intents. That is why we will soon produce a 3-5 year plan to realize our vision of becoming the nation's premier regional university. Our best days are ahead of us as long as we remain focused on the student.

The Week

I don't know about you, but Monday morning seemed to come much earlier than I expected...

Steve Horton and I visited on a number of academic matters including several degree and certificate programs currently awaiting approval at the Board of Regents. We were joined over lunch by Vickie Gentry, Dana Clawson, Margaret Kilcoyne, and Darlene Williams. We discussed the coming semester and our approach to academic leadership during the search for a new provost.

Monday afternoon, the Academic Calendar Committee met to discuss ways to improve our scheduling. I believe the committee found minimally disruptive ways to tweak the calendar that will result in a tremendously improved schedule for students and faculty. Details are forthcoming.

Tuesday was full of professional development activities, presentations on the QEP proposal, departmental meetings, and the faculty/staff assembly. While I have given bad speeches before, I never made an audience member so nauseated that he would knock down his wife fleeing the room. In all seriousness, Dr. Wellman emailed to let us know he and his wife are okay, and in doing so, showed his sense of humor was completely unharmed. He does have more doctor's visits and tests ahead, so let's please keep him and Mrs. Wellman in our prayers.

Wednesday morning, I enjoyed a breakfast conversation with Pat Widhalm from LSMSA. As most of you know, Pat will be leaving after the school year to become principal at Ben Franklin High School in New Orleans. He has done an extraordinary job at LSMSA, and we wish him well.

Thursday morning, several representatives from our facilities and athletics departments joined Marcus Jones, Jerry Pierce, Chris Maggio, and me to receive the program planning materials for the multi-purpose event center. Architect Mike McSwain and his team have developed a concept that will greatly enhance the facilities footprint of our campus, provide a venue that will attract events (and potential students), and give our athletics teams a competitive advantage. Should the funding materialize, this center will have a positive impact on our entire university community.

Thursday afternoon, Darlene Williams, Steve Horton, Chris Maggio, Vickie Gentry, Dana Clawson, Margaret Kilcoyne, Drake Owens, and I met Martha Koury and Denise Jackson in Leesville for a visit to Fort Polk. Brigadier General McGuire and Command Sergeant Major Inman welcomed us to the post and provided a command brief. Education for soldiers and their families is a high priority in the Army in general, and Fort Polk leaders view our partnership as a key component in their efforts to make the Fort Polk a post of choice. We boarded a Blackhawk for an aerial view of the base, then wrapped up the visit with a conversation about the Fort Polk Education Center. I could not be more excited about or committed to our mission in Leesville/Fort Polk. As you will remember, we changed the leadership structure several months ago to place this facility under Darlene. Martha, Denise, and the entire team in Leesville have positioned us to elevate our service to this market significantly.

Thursday evening, Drake Owens and I had a strategic dinner with some NSU advocates from Baton Rouge. We talked about the infrastructure and operational needs of our campuses.

Friday morning, ULS Board Member Jimmy Long and I had breakfast in Baton Rouge to discuss NSU matters prior to the ULS board meeting. At the meeting, the first with Interim President Dan Reneau, the new board officers were sworn in. Beau Martin (president), Ed Crawford (vice president), and Kelly Faircloth (parliamentarian) took the oath of office. Afterwards, in-coming Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne provided an overview of the state budget (details above).

Please contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns.