

Week of June 26

We finally have at least a little certainty with the state portion of our FY17 budget. After the longest continuous legislative session in Louisiana history, we avoided the catastrophic cuts that many suggested were inevitable. The leadership of Governor Edwards, the vast majority of the legislature, and the higher education community worked diligently to prevent the worst case scenario from materializing.

So where are we? As you saw from my Friday email, TOPS funding was reduced by 70% of the projected need. Language was added to the appropriations bill to fund TOPS at nearly 100% of need in the fall semester and to apply the reductions to the spring semester. The rhetoric supporting that language centered on giving students and families time to prepare for that reduction. In reality, many members of the legislature are holding out hope the revenue generated by the bills passed this spring combined with a recovering economy will exceed the economists projections and be sufficient to cover TOPS. If that does not happen, students will receive approximately 42% of their TOPS benefit this spring.

Here is the deal with TOPS: whether you like the program as structured and executed or not, Louisiana students made life decisions based on the promise of TOPS. Some turned down lucrative offers from out-of-state universities to stay in state. Some turned down employment where they would be further along that pathway of career development. How any legislator can look one of these students in the eye and tell them that a local pork barrel project or a handout to a narrow corporate interest is more important than fulfilling the state's promise is beyond me. That is why we will work tirelessly to ensure those students who bought into that promise and came to Northwestern State will not be forsaken this year. That work will involve advocacy efforts with policymakers and advancement efforts with donors. We will get there.

The other piece of the puzzle to fall in place was the distribution of state general funds. The Board of Regents approved a funding formula distribution that reduces funding to University of Louisiana institutions by ~\$5 million. Our reduction in funding will be a little more than \$500k. Though that is significant, our enrollment projections remain robust. We have also proposed an HB152 fee increase of approximately \$300 per semester to the ULS Board of Supervisors. Though we met all GRAD Act

performance measures, we will NOT increase tuition. While the combination of these measures will ensure yet another tight budgetary year and prevent us from making some of the needed investments in our operation, we will continue developing and executing our strategic framework and position ourselves for the coming reinvestment in higher education.

The Week

Monday morning, Carl Jones and Daphne Sampite met with me to continue analysis of a proposal from a potential partner aimed at growing our online footprint. Any partnership must ensure we are able to expand access to quality education with a significant positive financial impact that will enable us to invest further in our traditional offerings.

Later Monday, Drake Owens dropped by to update me on our advancement efforts, and Roni Biscoe met with me on the HR transition and other matters.

Tuesday morning was Freshman Connection in Leesville. I cannot get over the transformation of that campus over the past year. You can feel the energy there. The faculty and staff at the campus are to be commended. Reatha Cox and her team delivered a great program, and I expect significant growth on the campus.

Tuesday afternoon, Darlene Williams and her team provided an annual update on the work of Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development.

Later Tuesday, Eileen Kendrick joined me for a visit with a team from Boys and Girls Club of America. The team was in town to evaluate our local organization that is headed by Demon Alum Eliza Behrendsen.

Jack Duty from CASA stopped by to enlist support for a fund raising effort for the organization. In the effort to close the \$2 billion state budget, CASA was one of the casualties. Our local organization was cut ~\$65k.

Finally Tuesday, Steve Horton, Vickie Gentry, and Greg Handel visited with me on some transition matters in Academic Affairs.

Wednesday, I traveled to Baton Rouge for the Board of Regents meeting. Governor Edwards opened the meeting with a muted congratulatory message that recognized the great work of the higher education community during the legislative sessions but acknowledged the unfinished business we have left. Afterwards, the board took up the funding formula distribution. Several UL System university presidents, including me, provided testimony on the formula. My testimony centered on the lack of transparency in the process. I suggested any successful performance-based funding distribution model must be transparent, predictable, and aligned with our strategic intents. Those principles are non-negotiable. The chair of the board committed to working towards increased transparency and inclusion of university presidents in the development of the formula.

Back in Natchitoches, we were delighted to host the United Way of Northwest Louisiana grant award presentation. Thanks to Leah Jackson for coordinating the event and to the External Affairs and Athletics staff who helped ensure the event was everything it should be.

Thursday morning, NSU Debater Ryan Ware joined me for the drive to suburban Dubach to visit with the Rotary Youth Leadership Camp. Davina McClain has represented NSU for years at the camp, but she stubbornly refused to fly back from rural Turkey for this year's presentation. Ryan and I did our best to fill in...

Back in Natchitoches, Jerry Pierce, Drake Owens, Jill Bankston (CFRE), Leah Jackson, Beth Mann, and Cole Gentry met with me to discuss short and long term advancement efforts. Because our alumni are energized and committed to growing NSU, because we are committed to Northwestern State becoming the nation's premier regional university, and because our students deserve nothing less, we are planning the most aggressive advancement push in our history.

Friday, we were honored to welcome Dr. Vince Bertram, CEO of PLTW, to campus to talk about our efforts in Louisiana and to introduce him to our Engineering Technology programs. Ali Ahmad, Christina Lake, Cade Stepp, and Phil Brown showed Dr. Bertram the quality of our program and its tremendous potential.

Later Friday, Greg Handel and I met with Kirsten Bartels, our new director of the Louisiana Scholars' College at NSU. We are thrilled to welcome Kirsten and her family to Natchitoches and look forward to her leadership.

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