

Faculty Senate Resolution Supporting Bowen-Hagler Editorial

Whereas Dr. Ray Bowen, former President and Professor Emeritus and distinguished alumnus of Texas A&M University and Mr. Jon Hagler, a distinguished, generous, and concerned alumnus and former Chair of the Texas A&M University Foundation consistently speak out in support of this university,

Whereas they have, in a recent editorial, outlined their views on the damage done to Texas A&M University by micromanagement of this university by some members of its Board of Regents,

Whereas the ability of Texas A&M University to provide the best possible educational programs for its students is made increasingly difficult,

Whereas the importance and quality of scholarship and creation of knowledge that makes Texas A&M University an outstanding institution of our nation and the world have been frequently denigrated,

Whereas the principles of shared and enlightened governance of the university that involve all responsible parties in the operation of Texas A&M University have been so blatantly ignored,

And whereas the ability to achieve the goals of Vision 2020 and become one of the great public universities of our nation and of the world are significantly hampered, rather than enhanced, by the actions of the Board of Regents,

Therefore be it resolved that the Faculty Senate of Texas A&M University applauds the courage of Ray Bowen and Jon Hagler in speaking out and wholeheartedly endorses the sentiments expressed in their recently published editorial attached to this resolution.

The Eagle

A&M regents failed to protect university

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By **RAY M. BOWEN** and **JOHN HAGLER**

Special to The Eagle

Today, the entire Aggie family will assemble around the world for one of the Texas A&M's most cherished traditions: Aggie Muster. Muster means different things to different Aggies, but it is certainly a day of remembrance, reflection, and celebration -- and especially it is a day to honor those we've lost in the past year.

Perhaps most of all, Muster is a celebration of the Aggie community and of our unique Spirit. As we gather again this year, we are among those who wonder why so many Aggies have remained silent in the face of this generation's most serious challenge to the long-term quality of our university. The challenge arises from the persistent failure of the Board of Regents to display the enlightened leadership that characterizes the governance of great universities.

Texas A&M University is great because of its unique history and values, its superb faculty, the caliber of the current students it attracts, its passionate former students, and a long history of generational efforts to make it ever stronger.

Poor stewardship by regents

An essential element in our success is the historical quality of the volunteers who serve as regents. Unfortunately, for the past half dozen years, the newspapers of our state have reported many occasions of poor stewardship on their part. The failure of governance of our university and that of the University of Texas has even been the subject of hearings by a special oversight committee of the Legislature.

We write out of love and respect for Texas A&M University. While the adverse publicity has embarrassed our university, we are not personally angry at any group or individual. We are saddened, however, because our students, current and future, deserve better. Texas A&M is a great university. It is a tragedy when regents, through their inept or thoughtless actions, fail to make it even greater for this and future generations of students.

In the spirit of the broader meaning of the Aggie Muster, we wish to describe our concerns. Our university's governance began to be corrupted when the governor's appointment of regents was not primarily based on a candidate's fiduciary loyalty to the university, on competence and on qualifications, but rather based on their personal and financial relationship with the governor. These practices have been broadly reported in the news outlets of our state.

As a consequence, these same regents have cost the taxpayers significant "settlement" sums for regent failures in presidential or chancellor selections. The damage has continued with ill-advised and counterproductive intrusions by both regents and the chancellor into the academic and administrative autonomy of our flagship, Texas A&M University. One chancellor, now departed, even explored combining his office with the presidency of Texas A&M University.

Texas Public Policy Foundation

A highlight of irresponsibility came when our regents began to implement, in a secretive way, the half-baked proposals of a wealthy oil man and the pseudo think tank misnamed the Texas Public Policy Foundation. No one can be against controlling costs and teacher efficiency. But our university -- one of the most administratively efficient and well-regarded universities in the state -- should not have been the starting place for this discussion, and our regents failed everyone by rolling over without a peep and facilitating an illegitimate disruption of the university's sanctioned mission.

At the time these proposals were made, Texas A&M University was both an efficient and cost-effective research university. It has been widely reported to be among the best "values" in higher education. It has increased tuition in recent years primarily to make up for a significant decline in per student funding by the state, and yet its tuition remains among the lowest of its higher-education peers. Why would regents do this? According to the media of the state, they were influenced

to do it by the governor. Responsible regents, those who accept and understand their fiduciary duty to the citizens of Texas, do not impose untested and damaging new directions on their university. They simply exercise their constitutionally awarded independence and say no to outside pressure.

Instead, our Regents began implementation of the Texas Public Policy Foundation initiatives as if Texas A&M University was an immature, limited-mission, college.

Many other examples

There are many other examples of regent failure. Their actions caused a warning letter from the American Association of Universities, a treasured membership that our university worked years to attain. On other occasions, at least one regent has proposed the admission of thousands of additional freshmen. In addition to costing money, an increase in freshmen enrollment would lower academic standards and diminish the undergraduate experience of the existing undergraduates. This kind of proposal displays in stark terms that the regents do not endorse Texas A&M's long-held mission as a nationally prominent teaching and research university.

Contrast this behavior with the regents of more than a decade ago. Working with the university administration, those regents empowered a task force of more than 250 of our best supporters and friends, current and former students, faculty, and staff to collaboratively chart a university vision. Those regents were participants in the discussions and unanimously endorsed the outcome.

The media of our state has written extensively about the governor's Emerging Technology Fund and the Texas Enterprise Fund and how these funds have been assigned to the university in partnership with private interests. The regents owe our community an explanation as to how accepting these controversial funds are benefiting the University. They have remained silent in the face of embarrassing speculation in the media.

One of the most recent and most poignant examples is regent behavior with respect to athletics. While micromanagement has become a hallmark of these regents, the result of their actions in athletics has been distressing. It is an elementary fact that athletics directors should run athletic programs, not regents. Presidents supervise athletics directors, and regents supervise presidents and chancellors.

Inevitable damage

When a part-time group chooses to micromanage at the operational level, damage is inevitable. The newspapers of our state have reported an inappropriate role of the regents in the firing of the head football coach. They have asserted that a mutually agreed upon contract with the former coach would not be honored by the university. These assertions have not been denied by the regents.

Their treatments of a discharged head coach and of our athletics director were textbook cases of misbehavior by the regents.

At best, what they have done is not in keeping with the image of A&M as an institution where integrity is a core value and verbal commitments are always honored.

We believe that the facts overwhelmingly indicate that our regents have damaged Texas A&M University. But, we also believe that every Aggie needs to reach his or her own decision about the accuracy of our opinion.

Our challenge to former and current students is to manifest the spirit of the Aggie Muster 2012 and become more informed about the future of our university. We ask that you ask yourselves the fundamental questions: Are our regents being faithful to history, to their obligations and to future generations of Aggies? Are the regents and their chosen administrators taking actions which enhance the university in its teaching, its research, its leadership training and its service roles?

Their jobs are not honorific. Being a regent is a demanding and a crucial role of stewardship that will determine Texas A&M's future greatness. Our challenge to the regents is to explain in a public way to all of us how their activities make Texas A&M better for this generation and subsequent generations of Texans.

They need to help us understand how they are strengthening the hard-earned status of Texas A&M University as an internationally recognized and internationally respected teaching and research university. If they accept this challenge, they

can regain the confidence of the Aggie community that regents of our university have historically enjoyed.

Authority and responsibility

Our discussion here has focused primarily on the regents. The reason is that they have the legal authority and the moral responsibility to provide independent, ethical and high level governance of the entire Texas A&M System, Texas A&M, and its other universities and agencies.

Our job is to help them understand that we fully comprehend the seriousness of their roles, and that we are determined that they remain faithful to the highest standards of performance.

Both of us will be the first to celebrate and support the regents and their appointees when they assume their proper roles. We love our university, and we want to support it in every way.

** Ray Bowen and Jon Hagler are 1958 graduates of Texas A&M University. Jon Hagler served as board chairman of the Texas A&M Foundation and is a Distinguished Alumnus of A&M. Among his professional positions was a five-year period of service as treasurer and chief investment officer of the Ford Foundation. Ray Bowen is president emeritus and professor emeritus of Texas A&M University.*

<http://www.theeagle.com/columnists/A-amp-amp-M-regents-failed-to-protect-university--7110238>