



The University of Texas System
Attn: Regent Wallace Hall
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201 West 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

April 16, 2013

Regent Hall:

In Monday's Q&A with *Texas Monthly*, you demonstrated a complete unawareness or a deliberate mischaracterization of the scope and mission of our group, the Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education (the Coalition). To correct the record, please consider the following information about our membership and goals.

The Coalition was launched in the summer of 2011 by a diverse, nonpartisan group of concerned, principled citizens—many of whom are and have been for decades actively involved with The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, and other public higher education institutions around the state. We believe strongly in the power of higher education to transform lives, build our economy, and shape Texas' future. With our initial launch, we listed more than 200 members. We now number more than 400, including our Young Texans group. These members are listed on our website: <http://texaseducationexcellence.org/about-us>

The Coalition exists to preserve and promote excellence, accountability and progress in all of our state's institutions of higher learning and to advocate thoughtful reforms to ensure degrees earned from our state's public higher education institutions remain a valuable investment. We also exist to oppose, and expose to the public, policies, actions, and recommendations that would destroy the hard-earned quality and long-term sustainability of our institutions of higher education.

Since our founding, we have regularly communicated with the media and others on issues concerning public higher education in Texas. Some of the issues that we've addressed include: [our support of Tier One institutions; citing the fiasco at Virginia \(UVA\) as a cautionary tale for Texas; recognition of philanthropy as a cornerstone for success in Texas higher education; our support of UT Austin's plan to increase graduation rates, thereby reducing college costs](#); and [Texas A&M University's EmpowerU initiative](#), to name a few. Last December we commissioned a [report](#) by Dr. Michael McLendon, an independent, national expert in state higher education policy. The report highlights the differentiated mission of Tier One universities, and demonstrates, based on nationally reported data¹, how well Texas' two public Tier One institutions compare to their national peers.

A snapshot of our actively engaged membership includes: Kenneth Jastrow II, chairman of The Commission of 125 and chairman of The University of Texas at Austin's capital campaign; Beth Robertson, former chair of The University of Houston Board of Regents; Gerry Griffin, former member of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and former director of Johnson Space Center, NASA; Dan Burck, former chancellor of The University of Texas System; Perry Adkisson and William Mobley, former chancellors of The Texas A&M University System; Larry Faulkner and Peter T. Flawn, former presidents of The University of Texas at Austin; and Jon L. Hagler, co-chairman of Vision 2020 and Ray Bowen, former Texas A&M president, and co-chairmen of



Vision 2020. Our membership also includes some whose names are on University buildings, members of the UT Austin Development Board, members of the Chancellor's Council, former public servants, a former U.S. Ambassador, former regents and university presidents, past and current CEOs of some of Texas' leading companies, long-time financial supporters of UT Austin and Texas A&M, and many others who have devoted countless hours of their time to advance the mission of higher education. Reasons why these individuals—and many more prominent Texans—joined the Coalition can be found [here](#).

To suggest our actions and our calls for good governance, transparency and quality have “damaged the university” or the Board of Regents is ludicrous. Indeed, we exist to strengthen and improve them.

Actions by some regents have forced our group to become increasingly concerned—and vocal—about the governance of our institutions. Our members have regularly spoken out against actions that are undermining our leading universities, putting them on a path toward mediocrity, and threatening their Tier One status and the economic, educational, and societal benefit to the state that they have worked for generations to achieve.

What has indeed been damaging, to UT-Austin in particular, is the lack of support for institutional leadership, and the environment of mistrust and micromanagement propagated by some regents. Philanthropy in particular is a function of certainty—donors want to know who is in charge and that their dollars will be well stewarded. In addition to threatening philanthropy, the current environment has already been cited in high-profile departures of talented teachers and other campus leaders. We can't afford to lose more.

The level of passion, talent, commitment, and philanthropic support provided by the Coalition is unmatched. This group of individuals has always and will continue to support our institutions and stand for excellence in higher education, especially when ill-advised actions, disguised or overt, threaten these priceless state treasures.

Sincerely,

Gordon Appleman, H. Scott Caven Jr., Gerry Griffin, Kenneth M. Jastrow II, Arno Krebs, Charles W. Matthews, C. Patrick Oles Jr., Melinda Hill Perrin, Hon. Pamela Willeford
Operating Committee, Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education

CC: Members of the UT System Board of Regents
Chancellor Cigarroa
Founding Members of the Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education
Brian Sweany, *Texas Monthly*
Reeve Hamilton, *The Texas Tribune*

ⁱ It uses the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to provide “apples to apples” comparison of public research universities.