



**BUDGET SUMMIT
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
MARCH 28, 2011**

**COMMENTS TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS
RICHARD L. WOOD
PRESIDENT OF THE FACULTY SENATE**

President Fortner, President Schmidly, and Regents:

[Note overhead: priorities endorsed by elected heads of ASUNM, Staff Council, GPSA, Parents Association, and Faculty Senate]

We are close to the feast of Passover, a three thousand year old celebration within the great Jewish tradition. In observant Jewish homes around the world, that celebration begins with a question: Why is this night different from all other nights? In the spirit of thinking together by asking good questions, let us consider:

Why is this budget different from all other budgets?

This budget is different for three reasons:

First, because we face our worst budget environment in a very long time. The I&G budget that sustains the University's core work has suffered repeated cuts in recent years, losing more than one-sixth of the total from its peak in FY2008 to the FY2010 original budget. In addition to that, every UNM unit absorbed at least a 3.2% cut earlier this fiscal year. Staff and faculty have watched funding for their programs wither, and seen their own paychecks shrink due to inflation plus a 1.5% ERB swap by the state. Those cuts combined are a real and present threat to our ability to serve our students and the State well.

Second, this budget is different because of the process behind it. Beginning last summer, the faculty leadership approached university authorities about creating a different way of doing budgets at UNM, what we called a “Strategic Budget Process,” to include the Faculty Senate, the Deans and Provost, the Staff Council, and the elected leaders of undergraduate and graduate students. I described this process to the Board of Regents in September.

President Schmidly endorsed this approach before he went on medical leave, we began working on it with EVP Harris’ office in September, and Acting President Roth advanced the idea through creation of the Executive Budget/Cost Containment group that includes **all** the groups mentioned above – raising ideas, arguing over priorities, and pushing for savings to help meet the budget cuts. So the **process** that got us here was far better than in the past – and much better than what happened at some universities that led to 30% tuition increases and higher. We see this as a **pilot project** for how budgets ought to be created in the future – imperfect, but a major improvement over previous budget processes, which we can adapt and improve to build future budgets.

Third, as a result of that Strategic Budget process, this budget is different because at its center lies the academic mission. In my comments to the Board of Regents last year, I had argued that we meet the ongoing budget reductions **not** with “across the board” cuts that damage our mission, but with **strategic decision-making focused on our academic mission of teaching and research**. This budget scenario does that, systematically and rather successfully. That is in the best interests of the University **and** its students. In a 21st century economy, it is also in the best interests of the state of New Mexico and its citizens.

As a result of these three things, the budgetary decisions the Regents will soon make are extraordinarily important: At stake are UNM’s ability to sustain its academic mission in fact rather than in rhetoric *and* whether an inclusive budgetary process can produce a strong budget that advances the University’s mission. I recognize that, like every budget, this one is in part a political document and you are under political pressure. But ultimately the Board of Regents is designed not to be accountable to a political constituency but rather to be

accountable for the health of this University as an institution. The budget scenario is designed to be oriented in the same way.

In formulating the budget scenario, the Executive Budget/Cost Containment group strove to balance two urgent priorities: protecting the academic mission and protecting students from debilitating increases in tuition.

Let me be clear: Like any budget process, the Executive Budget/Cost Containment process probably did not find a perfect solution. The Regents appear to want to push for further cuts to lower tuition impact. We support keeping tuition as low as possible, **as long** as that can be done without putting at further risk the University's academic mission.