



Montana University System
BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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February 11, 2011

Dear House Education Committee Members:

I am writing to you in opposition of the proposed bills to elect the Board of Regents. My name is Lynn Morrison-Hamilton, I am a current member of the Board of Regents. I was first appointed to the Board by Governor Racicot in 1999, and then reappointed by Governor Schweitzer in 2006.

The proposal to elect the Board of Regents raises some fundamental questions: To whom should the Board be accountable, and will the change make the Board more accountable? While they recognize the tremendous collaboration and consensus efforts of System administrators, Governors and politicians frequently question Regents' accountability because they want more control over the University budget, particularly the connection between State appropriations and tuition.

Over the years more than a dozen pieces of legislation have been introduced to structurally change how the University System is governed. At the same time, Montanans vote their continued support for the System every 10 years through the statewide Six Mill Levy, student enrollment continues to grow, and various independent surveys show popular support for the direction the System is headed and the services and opportunities it offers.

The Regents are accountable to various constituencies. The Board meets regularly with representatives of various groups including students, faculty and staff leadership, business and industry associations, and community leaders in sessions held around the State. Regents invite the participation of Legislative and Congressional delegates, as well as the general public, at board meetings and welcome their regular communications. The Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction are ex-officio members of the board and they or their designated staff representatives are active participants in policy conversations.

Montanans hold Regents, and the Board holds itself, responsible for the short term and long term consequences of its actions and decisions. The Board has moved from being simply stewards of public resources to being actively engaged in assuring campuses and agencies are working in the common public interest. The Board is aggressive in setting strategic goals (increasingly in consultation with interim legislative committees) and policies for the institutions that it oversees and moving management decisions down where they belong. The Board and System are accountable for promoting goals based in possibility, not circumstance; for building on System strengths, overcoming obstacles, and proactively measuring success. The Board can't govern for what matters without engaging students, campuses, taxpayers, and policy makers.

The current system is not broken; in fact, it is a system that promotes accountability and it is working well. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Lynn Morrison-Hamilton
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