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## **UNIVERSITY SYSTEM TRUSTEES SEEKING STATE HELP TO MAKE HIGHER EDUCATION MORE AFFORDABLE**

### **Board Also Expresses 'Serious Concern' About TABOR Ballot Proposal's Impact on Educational Quality and Economic Development**

ORONO—Citing the need to make higher education more affordable for Mainers, the University of Maine System trustees on Monday voted to seek a \$14.8 million increase in State support for the next fiscal year, and a second, \$21.6 million increase for the following budget year.

The board's action complies with the State's budget-development process, which the University System and other State-funded departments and agencies are required to follow.

In presenting the budget request to trustees, University System Chancellor Terrence J. MacTaggart said the request is intended to stem the loss of students who leave Maine for colleges and employment opportunities out of state.

"Our budget plan is built upon three elements," he explained. "First is affordability. We need to reinforce the affordability of our institutions by trying to keep annual tuition increases around the cost of living adjustment.

"We also need to slow the 'brain drain'," he continued. "Maine is a net exporter of high school graduates. Shipping out thousands of your smartest people each year is not a good way to build the State's economy.

"To be sure, some students want to leave Maine for a variety of reasons, but others would stay in Maine if they felt good about the cost, quality, and reputation of our universities," MacTaggart stated. "That's why the third leg of the budget plan – faculty compensation – is so important. We need to be more competitive with the salaries we offer to attract and retain faculty members. Along with affordability, we need to offer strong academic programs – taught by a high quality faculty – to attract more students from Maine and elsewhere."

The Board's budget request would cover current programs and services, and amounts to annual increases of 8 and 11 percent, respectively.

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In addition, MacTaggart received Board authorization to pursue State and private partners for specific initiatives geared to improving the Maine economy. Those include:

- expanding the University System's ability to educate more nurses and therefore address a major healthcare concern in Maine
- support for the University of Maine's Graduate School of Biomedical Science, which is closely tied to Maine's rapidly emerging biomedical industry
- helping the University of Maine at Augusta make the transition to a four-year, baccalaureate degree institution, consistent with the recommendations of a State panel on the future of higher education in the Kennebec Valley
- funding for a job-growth initiative designed specifically to meet demand and opportunities in targeted sectors of Maine's economy and geographic regions of the State
- participation as a leading partner in the Maine Department of Education's College Readiness initiative, which is working to increase the number of Maine high school graduates and adult workers who pursue and complete a college degree

Trustees also voted to support a \$10 million annual increase in the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF), a State program which provides seed money and matching funds to help fund university-based research and development. Under Maine law, the University System Board oversees the MEIF program.

In other Board action, trustees adopted a resolution expressing its "most serious concern" about the negative consequences that the proposed "Taxpayer Bill of Rights," or TABOR, would impose on higher education quality and affordability. TABOR is a citizen-initiated referendum question which will appear on the November 7 statewide ballot.

"My concern is about the unintended consequences of TABOR should it pass," MacTaggart stated. "The reality is that if [it passes], Maine would have fewer tools to improve its economy, it would politicize many of the higher education decisions that this board currently is charged to make. Even more, think about the impact TABOR would have on Maine's efforts to stem the brain drain. If TABOR results in having to reduce programs and services for students, do you think the brain drain would diminish? Would Maine students want to enroll in our universities if the quality of those universities is negatively affect [by TABOR]?"

Among their concerns, trustees noted that, if approved, TABOR would impose new procedures and practices that would effectively place the tuition-setting process in the state's political arena. Specifically, TABOR would require that, in certain situations, tuition and fee rates would require a two-thirds vote of both the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine State Senate.

Currently the independent Board of Trustees determines tuition and fee rates as part of its statutory policy and governance responsibilities.

Furthermore, provisions in the TABOR proposal would establish a time-consuming process for approval of certain types of economic development initiatives, many of which involve one or more of Maine's public universities. That process would require two-thirds' approval by the Maine House, two-thirds' approval by the Maine Senate, and a subsequent majority vote in a statewide citizen referendum.

"The reality is that TABOR would put a relatively small number of individuals in Augusta in a position to block an economic development opportunity, even one with broad legislative and public support," MacTaggart explained. "It would create a situation whereby the few could thwart the will or desire of the many."

“Our role as citizen trustees is to advocate for the educational interests of our state,” added Margaret A. Weston, chair of the Board. “We do that as stewards of our university system -- through our budget request and through expressing our concerns about the impact that TABOR would have on educational opportunities for the citizens of our state.”

In other Board action, trustees:

- approved a tentative collective bargaining agreement with full-time faculty members;
- and
- approved the appointments of Donald Zillman as president of the University of Maine at Presque Isle; James Breece as System vice chancellor for academic and student affairs; and Edward N. Ashworth as dean of the University of Maine’s College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture

Established in 1968, the University of Maine System is the state’s largest educational entity. It features seven universities -- some with multiple campuses -- located across the state, as well as 11 University College outreach centers and more than 100 interactive distance education sites. For more information, log onto [www.maine.edu](http://www.maine.edu).