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FLANAGAN TELLS UMS TRUSTEES THAT TASK FORCE IS ON TRACK

BANGOR—The chair of a task force examining the functions and structure of Maine's 45,000-student state university system said Monday that despite the "magnitude of our mandate," his committee anticipates completing its work this summer.

David T. Flanagan, chair of the 12-member task force, made his remarks as part of his scheduled update to the University of Maine System's Board of Trustees, which met Monday at the UMS offices in Bangor.

"Our task force has accomplished a lot since our first meeting in early February," he explained. "We have held 18 hearings throughout the university system and have received testimony, in person, from 228 individuals. We will continue these hearings tomorrow in Lewiston and Portland. We have sought written input through a special web page dedicated to this charge. We have made 42 data requests of university offices and staff."

Flanagan, the former CEO of Central Maine Power Co., told trustees that his task force has prepared an organizational outline to guide the conduct and focus of its work.

"Our plan is to provide a concise, written assessment of the current situation before the end of this month," he said. The next step would be to review a series of self-assessments currently being compiled by the universities, the chancellor's office, and centralized university services. "In May, the task force will meet with outside experts in higher education organization and governance to evaluate alternative courses of action. We expect to provide [University System Chancellor Richard L. Pattenau] with our recommendations by the beginning of July.

"I have no talent for sugar coating things," he stated. "I hope we'll come up with a report that is helpful to you."

Flanagan served on the UMS Board of Trustees from 1985-95, including one term as chair of the board. On Monday he addressed the timetable for the task force to complete its work.

"Some people have looked askance at this undertaking and said it's too big a job to complete [by July 1]," Flanagan stated. "They see that it's taking a lot of time and resources of the university system. We have asked for a lot of data and have received most of it already. We're moving at a good pace. I emphatically do not want to ask for an extension of time, but in keeping with a responsible approach, I can't rule out the possibility. We're going to do our best to avoid that."

In response to a question, Flanagan said that trustees have the ability to ensure that the final plan adopted by the Board does not "end up on a shelf somewhere."

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“The tool you have available to you is the budget-setting authority,” he replied. “That’s what I would use to ensure the outcome of this initiative.”

Appointed by Pattenaude, the task force is part of a larger, multifaceted initiative he unveiled in January entitled “New Challenges, New Directions.” Authorized by the Board, Pattenaude’s initiative is intended to produce “major transformational changes” to the 40-year-old, seven-member state university system through administrative, academic, financial, and structural modifications. Once fully implemented, the initiative is expected to reduce UMS’s overall expenses by \$42.8 million over the next four fiscal years—in addition to \$34.2 million in reductions already adopted to balance the current year’s budget alone.

The task force’s role in this effort involves review and recommendations pertaining to several aspects of the university system’s operation, including the size and role of the chancellor’s office; the structure, funding and oversight of common functions serving all universities; and funding levels, missions, and relationships among universities. Flanagan’s task force has been holding a series of meetings throughout the system to gain public and stakeholder input. As originally designed, the task force is scheduled to submit its recommendations to Pattenaude in June.

Pattenaude, who developed the “New Challenges, New Directions” initiative along with the seven university presidents, has said that the plan is necessary due to the financial consequences of the current recession on students and the university system itself; rising health care, energy, and personnel costs; changing demographics; and the need to invest in technological improvements related to teaching and learning, research, and university management and operations.

Flanagan is expected to provide a similar update to the Board when it meets again in May. Members of the public may submit suggestions by writing to taskforce@maine.edu.

In other business, trustees on Monday approved the creation, at the University of Maine in Orono, of the Acadia Professorship of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing. The position, funded through a \$250,000 gift from The Acadia Hospital in Bangor, will support a teaching and research position related to the care of persons with mental illness and/or substance dependency.

Trustees also approved construction at UMaine’s Center for Cooperative Aquaculture Research (CCAR) in Franklin, Maine. The construction will increase research and development capacity in aquaculture research, and will provide additional environmental control and improved energy efficiency and bio-security. The project will be fully funded through a \$1.9 million grant that UMaine received from the Maine Technology Institute.

The Board approved the nomination, by University of Southern Maine President Selma Botman, of Margaret A. Weston of Yarmouth for the dual role of USM’s Vice President for Advancement and the USM Foundation’s Chief Executive Officer. Weston’s professional career includes several years as a senior executive with Konica Corp., and with Guy Gannett Communications. She served on the University of Maine System Board of Trustees from 1998-2008, including two years as chair of the board.

Established in 1968, the University of Maine System is the state’s largest educational enterprise. It features seven universities—some with multiple campuses—located across the state, as well as 10 University College outreach centers, a law school, and an additional 75 interactive distance learning sites. With an annual enrollment of approximately 45,000 students, it educates 68 percent of all students enrolled in Maine’s public universities, community colleges, and Maine Maritime Academy. Its student population represents 48 percent of all students enrolled in Maine’s public and private postsecondary institutions combined. For more information, visit www.maine.edu.