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THE ANNUAL STATE OF THE SENATE ADDRESS  
MAY 11, 2020

What does one say in a STATE OF SENATE ADDRESS during these 'interesting' times? Traditionally, these addresses offer the chance to reflect on the accomplishments of the Senate during the past year. However, I am not sure a retrospective address is well suited to this moment.

The STATE OF THE FACULTY at Texas A&M, and elsewhere, is concerned, and if we are honest, somewhat scared. Faculty have angst over their personal health and safety due to Covid-19, their jobs and finances due to budget uncertainties and anxiety over what the coming year will mean to their teaching and research. Over the past week, these concerns seem to be escalating, a trend I fear will continue.

The STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY is sadly, somewhat unsettled given uncertainties surrounding state revenue estimates and our current planning for a 7.5% budget reduction.

Fortunately, the STATE OF THE SENATE is strong. The University is perhaps experiencing the period with the most shared governance I have encountered during my time on the Senate. I hope this makes it well positioned to address the challenges ahead.

Over the past year, and certainly the past two months, I feel fortunate to have been able to work WITH the administration rather than AGAINST it. Together we were able to address issues of concern not only to our faculty, but also to our students and their parents. Seldom has the Faculty Senate gotten a callout from the Student Senate for our efforts! I hope this means we did at least something right.

Unfortunately, the short time frames for decision making during the past few months precluded extensive debate in the Senate or extensive involvement of its committees. I hope the pace of decision making slows in the coming months to allow the Senate and Faculty writ large to more fully engage in debate and discussion.

Extensive shared governance has been occurring behind the scenes. The Senate and our Faculty are indebted to Provost, her staff, and administrators across campus who have diligently addressed, often quite quickly, the myriad of concerns brought forward by the Senate. I am personally grateful for all you have done for our Faculty.

Whether we wish it or not, we are in the midst of what will be the most transformative period for higher education in our academic careers. We do not even know what to call the quick and massive shift from face-to-face to remote instruction we just experienced. As disruptive as the Spring may have seemed, Fall 2020 is likely to be even more challenging and will dramatically shape the future of higher education.

It is likely that the logistics surrounding next semester will require a fair percentage of our faculty to transition to fully online instruction, or to employ teaching practices that may not

match their ideal pedagogies or they may have to teach at unfamiliar times and in unfamiliar classrooms. The research endeavor faces similar challenges.

All of this will make the upcoming year uniquely challenging for our Faculty and the Senate. It is inevitable that these disruptive changes will lead to faculty anxiety, frustration and will raise myriad concerns the Senate will have to address.

The one thing I learned as Speaker is the most important thing that the Senate can do is to communicate effectively. Going forward this is going to be more necessary than usual. The Senate must remain the leading faculty voice, both to internal and external constituencies.

Internally, it is imperative that the Senate, and all Senators, listen to our constituents and convey their concerns to the administration. I would hope the Senate encourages administrators to think creatively about this disruptive semester and not to be afraid to implement changes that may have been long overdue (not everyone can teach T&R 10-2). Unfortunately that is the easy part...

The Senate also needs to remind faculty that for the upcoming year to be successful we are going to have to live by our University motto, "We are the Aggies and the Aggies are WE." Yes, individually it is going to be hard, but together Aggies prevail. The focus of our messaging must be that the Faculty's number one job this year is to provide the best educational experience we can for our students, especially our first year students, regardless of how individually challenging it may be.

Especially in these tough economic times, the Senate must remain cognizant of the public narrative surrounding faculty at public universities in communicating our concerns. Faculty are public servants and no matter how vitally important certain issues may seem to us individually, if poorly messaged they can easily come across as tone-deaf to the citizens of our State.

I encourage each of you as Senators to be leaders in your departments or colleges and help your Colleagues through the times we face ahead. Every small thing we do or effort we make, as trivial as it may seem, strengthens the Senate as a Texas A&M institution.

One year ago, I was not physically present at the May Meeting due to my Antarctic fieldwork. I would have never guessed that my year as Speaker would end with none of us being physically together. I look forward to the day, hopefully sooner rather than later, to see my Senate colleagues face-to-face.

It has truly been a privilege to work with all of you this past year. I thank each and every one of you who has reached out to me with a concern and hope I was able to help. I especially want to thank the Executive Committee members who have had to make some important decisions on short order. My intent had been to visit all of our branch campuses this spring. Sadly, Covid-19 preempted the majority of these trips. I hope it is something the Senate manages to pull off in the future, and if anyone in Qatar wishes to invite me, I would be happy to come – I am a geographer after all.

I want to thank our Executive Assistant, Betsy Peterson. Your support for the Senate under some truly trying situations has been remarkable. It turns out that Betsy and my father are both alumni of Coe College – sadly I can no longer joke about graduates of this fine institution. Thanks so much for all your help and keeping me organized!

While this year did not turn out as any of us might have anticipated, I am truly humbled by the opportunity to serve you over this past year. I hope I may now count each and every one of you as not only a colleague but as a friend. I now leave the Senate in the capable hands of Speaker John Stallone for the upcoming year.