



**MINUTES**  
**Montana Board of Regents**  
Conference Call Meeting  
February 6, 2009

**Friday, February 6, 2009**

The Board convened at 1:00 PM.

Roll call indicated a quorum present.

**Regents Present:** Stephen M. Barrett Chair, Clayton Christian Vice Chair, Lynn Hamilton, Lila Taylor, and Mitch Jessen, all by phone. Regents Janine Pease and Todd Buchanan were excused. Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns, *ex officio*, was present in person, Governor Brian Schweitzer, *ex officio*, was represented by Jan Lombardi by phone, and Superintendent Denise Juneau, *ex officio*, was represented by Joyce Silverthorne.

Sites represented by phone were: Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), UM-Missoula, UM-Western, UM-MT Tech, UM-Helena COT, MSU-Bozeman, MSU-Billings, MSU-Northern, MSU-Great Falls COT, Flathead Valley Community College, Dawson Community College, Miles Community College, and the Office of the Governor.

**1. Legislative Update**

Deputy Commissioner Mick Robinson, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) reported that the majority of executive action has yet to take place in the Joint Education Subcommittee. The Montana University System (MUS) is currently below in the general fund and executive budget of December 15.

Associate Commissioner Tyler Trevor, OCHE, reviewed some bills of interest to the university system.

**Bills of interest discussed:**

- HB 87, sponsored by Representative Sue Dickenson, provides an increase in employer contribution to the optional retirement program.
- SJ 12, SJ 2, and SB 41, all bills relating to the establishment of community colleges
- SB 80 & 81, both sponsored by Senator Dan McGee, to elect the Board of Regents and the Board of Public Education
- HB 355, sponsored by Representative Edith McClafferty, to fund a math and science academy
- HB 459, sponsored by Representative Wanda Grinde, to create and fund a K-12 distance learning network
- HB 467, sponsored by Representative Dave McAlpin, which is a bonding bill for new buildings in the university system
- HB 185, sponsored by Representative Bill Nooney, to allow tax deductions for other states college saving plans



Commissioner Sheila Stearns clarified that the bills being tracked by the MUS include any bills that will affect the university system in one way or another. The university system does not necessarily take a position on all the bills on the tracking list but does watch the bills on the list to be aware of any action taken that relates to higher education.

Regent Christian said if the revenue predictions are higher than originally anticipated, then the legislature certainly has the prerogative to issue funds higher than the executive budget. If funding is available beyond the December 15 version of the executive budget, then he wants to see the budgets for the Montana University System to be restored to the November 15 budget level.

Regent Stephen Barrett reminded the Board that no one can control what the legislature decides to vote in.

### **WICHE/WWAMI**

Deputy Commissioner Mick Robinson said that committee action on the three professional student exchange programs that offer educational opportunities at specific, out-of-state professional programs in select fields of study the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Colorado, Montana and Idaho (WWAMI), and Minnesota Dental Programs has been deferred. The deferment of executive action has created concern among the university system, as well as current students in the process of applying to medical, dental, and veterinary schools at this time. OCHE has provided the legislative members with information on the impacts that would result if they chose to eliminate the present law adjustments. Regent Barrett added that the WICHE/WWAMI/ and Minnesota Dental programs are a way for Montana to provide medical, dental, and veterinary schools options to Montana students. The slots for these programs are highly competitive and the ramifications of not having these slots are significant. If these go away, those slots will go to other states and Montana may not be able to get them back.

Commissioner Stearns said Montana's Incentive Program, which pays for returning medical students to Montana to rural areas, has been beneficial to the state.

## **2. Federal Recovery Reinvestment Act as it Relates to Higher Education**

Brad Eldredge, OCHE, explained the Federal Recovery Reinvestment Act as it relates to higher education and Montana. The following points were made:

- The House bill has passed and the Senate is still negotiating with efforts aimed at lowering the price tag.
- The House version raises the maximum Pell Grant amount to \$5,350, an increase of \$500, while the Senate version would increase it by \$400 per person.
- Both bills have money to expand broadband access to community colleges and other institutions of higher education.



## MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

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- The Senate version contains funding to expand healthcare informatics degree programs from certificates to masters degrees.

The meeting recessed to executive session at 2:10 PM in the OCHE Library.

### **Executive Session**

- Personnel Matter – Closed for Individual Privacy

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

**Posted on**

**Approved by the Board of Regents on**

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Date

Date

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Sheila M. Stearns  
Commissioner of Higher Education  
and Secretary to the Board of Regents

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Stephen Barrett  
Chair, Board of Regents