

Media Coverage of the University's State Funding Request

People often take words in a newspaper as fact and an accurate portrayal of one's opinion. I have found some articles accurately reflect my position on issues while others fail to hit the mark. In recent days, I believe the media has done a disservice to the Alaskan public by not sharing the full dialogue between University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton and myself during the House Finance Committee.

When groups approach the Legislature with funding requests it is my hope they put their best argument forward and understand the choices that we as Legislators have to make: prioritization of the state's investment. Millions of dollars are requested from the Legislature every day. Groups who understand the choices we face have a better opportunity to lobby the Legislature and advocate for their project or group. The conversation that took place in House Finance on February 3, 2009 was an attempt to explain this point to the University. Contrary to media coverage it was not my intent to pick on the University, stifle free speech, or advocate the benefits of the resource industry.

I support the University's students, faculty and administration, and stated clearly on the record:
"I certainly hope that nothing that I have said is misinterpreted or misunderstood as not being supportive of our University...I would not want to diminish the light that each of those advocate students (have) or (the voice of) advocate professors that come down (to Juneau) and speak in favor of our university('s) funding (request) ... "

I encourage you to listen to the full presentation in Committee and my closing remarks at the end of the meeting; many people have not. Let me be clear: my decisions on funding are not based on groups agreeing with me on any position or project.

Resource development - specifically oil and gas taxes - continue to provide 90% of the state's general fund dollars. This is a fact. It has nothing to do with support for one industry. The challenge we face as a state is the declining production on the North Slope and how our state reacts or replaces those dollars. My hope is for Alaskans to have a discussion about our history as a resource state and our revenue future if we choose not to maintain that course.

My remarks were intended to create a dialogue about funding. If you listen to the entire discussion in the Committee, you will hear my concern over the apparent lack of understanding by students of where our state revenue comes from. I have tried to engage Alaskans in a conversation about the alternatives they see to replace resource development for state revenue.

Today's students will pick the direction of tomorrow's Alaska. They may choose not to continue our history of resource development, but until that time, I believe we should impart an understanding of the realities of where our state funding currently comes from.

As long as I am a Legislator, I will strive to be receptive and respectful to ideas, even if they are different from mine. It is my desire as a Legislator to broaden my understanding of the issues. I ask questions, some more difficult than others, and want answers based in reality. We need to dream for a better tomorrow and make responsible choices in our efforts to walk the walk and talk the talk.

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Link to the House Finance Committee hearing on the University Budget:

<http://www.ktoo.org/gavel/archive.cfm?audio=13889&request=67100AE357EFBA39ED41996E3978A59F>