

To: BOR Chair Schauer and BOR Members
From: Concerned Group of WSU Faculty
Subject: Reply to October 9th Email from BOR Chair Schauer
Date: October 13, 2023

Thank you for engaging with us over the past few months. We have carefully considered the suggestion in your October 9th email for addressing the wide and deep structural, organizational, leadership, and resource allocation issues that have resulted in the decline in teaching and research excellence, reputation, enrollment, and financial viability of Washington State University. As detailed below, there are three main reasons why we do not believe this approach will be helpful.

Our intention has always been to provide the objective, transparent, and honest opinions of a group of veteran professors devoted to help making WSU the best it can be both in our respective disciplines, and overall. We mean no disrespect in not wanting to pursue your suggestion and hope you will continue to view our input as constructive.

Our rationale for respectfully declining the proposed course of action is based on three factors:

1. The President often delegates challenging issues to others, rather than provide direct, firm, effective leadership to address them himself. Although delegation can be effective, doing so is especially problematic for the issues we have identified because major organizational, prioritization, and resource allocation decisions ultimately can only be addressed by the President himself. Lack of promised follow-up from the President, both after our recent engagement with him and in the past is a related issue. Despite his initial expression of enthusiasm and gratitude for engaging with him and his leadership team, he has not delivered on the promised follow up, and instead suggested that further discussions should be conducted with the Provost, which indicates an unwillingness to directly engage, as we think he must, on many of these critical issues.
2. Chancellor/Provost Chilton is intelligent and articulate. However, a part-time Provost – especially one without clear high-level authority to make, mandate, and implement decisions relating to the academic and research enterprise throughout the “system” -- is both an ineffective and inefficient means of addressing the systemic high-level problems WSU faces. WSU’s substantial and widespread problems demand the efforts of a full-time, aggressive, energetic, strong academic program leader who fully understands and appreciates the structural and behavioral characteristics of an R1 research-intensive land-grant university. Mandating implementation for the whole “system” requires complete and unfettered authority to set and implement academic priorities, as well as the ability to direct funds appropriately to support them.

In the interest of complete honesty and transparency, and beyond the part-time Provost issue, we simply do not have confidence that Provost Chilton can

effectively address many of WSU's critical issues. In our view and experience, she has a limited appreciation and awareness of the broader needs of a successful R1 land-grant university that result in her not being well-suited to lead the WSU academic and research enterprise back to greater national prominence and restore WSU's reputation as a leading R1 institution. Relatedly, she values and prioritizes disciplines that are not the primary drivers of land grant mission and success, which are the STEM fields, especially including the life and physical sciences, agriculture, our broad array of health sciences, and engineering. This lack of understanding is exacerbated by her leadership style of rarely engaging with the core academic leadership of the university, the deans. In our view, the BOR's lack of guidance on the core academic leadership of our teaching, research, and creative activity is not in the best interest of the State of Washington and could have lasting negative consequences for years to come.

3. Accordingly, a final component of our rationale for not wishing to pursue your suggested path forward is our conclusion that the BOR will not be effective in addressing the issues WSU faces. Although well-meaning and committed, members of the BOR are part-time participants, with substantial other career responsibilities coupled with life/family commitments. Thus, they have only limited time and ability to provide leadership and financial accountability at the sufficiently detailed level of understanding that is needed to address the current set of complex and interrelated WSU problems. This results in the BOR relying very heavily on information provided by WSU administration for identifying issues, explaining their context, and suggesting remedies. As a result, we believe that the BOR's fundamental understanding of the current issues has been informed through too narrow a communication channel that cannot truly reflect the concerns we have raised.

In summary, we have concluded that meaningful solutions to the current university challenges cannot be achieved within the current executive leadership system structure and environment, and certainly not in the way proposed to you by President Shultz. Nonetheless, we stand ready to vigorously engage in the future, which we hope would be in collaboration with an effective full-time Provost who has the characteristics and leadership authority outlined above. Moreover, we will of course always provide you with our perspectives and answers to any questions you may ask of us. We will continue to do whatever we can to address the issues and to obtain support for solutions. If the administration seeks our advice or offers appropriate solutions, we will actively offer our support. In addition, we will continue to involve others who care and have concerns about the decline of WSU and the systemic issues that have led to our current situation.

Thank you for your willingness to engage with us, consider our concerns, and attempt to identify a path forward.