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California State Senate

SENATOR
KEVIN DE LEÓN
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS CHAIR
TWENTY-SECOND SENATE DISTRICT



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November 28, 2011

Robert J. Birgeneau, Chancellor
University of California, Berkeley
AACHO - Chancellor's Immediate Office
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Chancellor Birgeneau:

I received your all-caps, urgent message (attached) calling upon my colleagues and me to come to your campus and "debate" the future of California's higher education system. I'm greatly encouraged to see a campus Chancellor stepping up on behalf of students to confront this crisis that threatens what has been historically the greatest public higher education system on Earth.

It's a bit perplexing, however, that the e-mail demand was sent after the UC system has ignored repeated calls for assistance from Sacramento policymakers. I understand you're anxious to change the subject after apparently rationalizing the use of batons against students, but nonetheless, I hope your e-mail is a sincere invitation to start an ongoing dialogue with you and your staff about solving this crisis so our students can have the access and education they deserve.

For months I have been after the UC President's office and leaders within the UC system to lend some of its great minds and talents to devise creative solutions to California's serious systemic problems. The response I've received has been absolute silence. You sit on probably the greatest collection of intellectual capital in the entire world yet as far as I can tell none of that talent is focused on helping restore this state's financial footing. You have three Nobel Laureates in economics alone, yet all of them are working on something other than helping us solve this historic financial crisis. I'm confident that if the great minds within our public universities devote themselves to devising a new model for funding California's higher education system and championing those solutions with the public, we can forge a brighter future for our students and our state.

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Mr. Chancellor, this budget crisis is the single greatest threat to our public higher education system we've ever encountered. As a result, our universities' leaders and great minds can no longer afford to stay above the fray. This state needs you and your colleagues to stop whining about our problems and start helping solve them. Last Spring, there was an unprecedented gathering of UC Presidents in Sacramento meeting with the Governor to lobby for no cuts. Let's bring those university leaders back to Sacramento, but this time rather than simply showing up with hands out, return with a plan to help out. Challenge Sacramento to confront this crisis and offer a road map for policymakers to finally stabilize higher education funding and restore our colleges and universities.

Additionally, I would be happy to have the urgent public discussion you've requested at Sproul Plaza, with students and faculty present, to discuss the future of the UC system. So tomorrow, Tuesday, November 29, I will be there – at Sproul Plaza – at 12:30 p.m. I encourage you to bring with you five ideas to restore our higher education system to its full glory and I will bring mine. I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,



KEVIN DE LEÓN
Senator, Twenty-Second District