November 16, 2011

Mr. Allyn Ford and Mr. Paul Kelly, Co-chairs
Committee on Governance and Policy
Oregon State Board of Higher Education
P.O. Box 751
Portland, OR 97207

Dear Allyn and Paul:

I understand that tomorrow your committee will discuss the possibility of establishing governing boards for one or more of Oregon’s public universities. I know that you have heard over the past several months from a number of national higher education experts and from each of the seven Oregon university presidents. Tomorrow, you will begin to pull together and discuss what you have heard. I thought it might be useful to share with you the thoughts I have on this subject so that you can weigh them during your discussions and during any subsequent work that flows from them.

The passage of Senate Bill 909 changes the way in which all of us view public education in Oregon. I expect that the State Senate will confirm my nominees to the Oregon Education Investment Board when it meets later this week. That will permit us to begin in earnest to redesign education in our state with a focus on student success rather than on institutions. We are all guided in this work by the goals of Senate Bill 253, better known as 40-40-20. It is with an eye toward overall educational achievement that I look at the question of institutional boards for Oregon’s universities. I am convinced that we are at the beginning of a true transformation—a transformation that we have to make sure goes well. Therefore, although I am anxious to move quickly, I also am anxious to move carefully. Any changes we make in the next few years must be aligned with our overall education reform agenda and must help us to make sure that we make rapid and real progress.

The Oregon Education Investment Board is charged with establishing achievement compacts with education service providers from K-12 through higher education. I want these achievement compacts to be both realistic and aspirational. I also will insist that progress be made in every part of our state and with every group of students, regardless of their location, their race, their ethnicity, or their family’s income. As the Investment Board begins its work, I believe it is important that the achievement compact for our universities be between the Investment Board and the Oregon State Board of Higher Education—the body with direct responsibility for all seven universities and for meeting our higher education mission statewide. I would expect, of course, that the Board would in turn enter into achievement compacts with each of the seven universities in order to meet its commitments to the Investment Board on a total statewide basis.
Mr. Allyn Ford and Mr. Paul Kelly, Co-chairs
November 16, 2011
Page Two

I am interested in advancing consideration of proposals to establish boards for individual institutions with clearly demarcated powers. I think that any university that feels it needs an institutional governing board to oversee its operations, to advise its president, and to raise private funds might benefit from having such a body. For some campuses this may spur the kind of innovation and superior performance we need in order to raise the bar for educational achievement in Oregon. But I also think that a university that does not see such a need at this time should not be required to be governed by an institutional board.

Your committee has to grapple with a variety of issues regarding which functions might be exercised by institutional boards and under what conditions, what the relationship is between any institutional boards and the foundation boards that already serve our universities, and whether there might be efficiencies and cost savings to be had from sharing certain services and operations among universities, regardless of whether or not they have institutional governing boards. It is my hope that as you continue this work, the State Board of Higher Education will develop a recommendation—well in advance of the 2013 legislative session—for what implementation of institutional boards for one or more of Oregon’s public universities could look like.

My thoughts on this matter are intended merely as one more input into your deliberations. And I fully recognize that once we have fully implemented the reforms called for in SB 242 and SB 909, we might want to revisit the structure of higher education in Oregon. I wish you well on your important efforts. And I thank you for undertaking them.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Governor

JAK:jlm