

Comments Regarding the Resolution of
No Confidence in the Leadership of the Board of Regents
By UI Staff Council President Mary Greer
December 13, 2006

Colleagues:

Today we consider a resolution unlike one we have ever considered before, or hope to ever have to consider again: a resolution which formally declares that the elected Staff Council at the University of Iowa has lost its trust and confidence in the leadership of our Board of Regents.

Staff at the University of Iowa won't argue that it is the responsibility of the Board of Regents to select the president of this great center for higher learning. In fact, it is their statutory obligation to the people of Iowa. We get that.

We won't argue that strategic planning is something the leadership of the Board of Regents should be engaged in to help guide the future of our great University. We get that, too.

But what we don't get is why incivility and condescension dominate the way Michael Gartner and Teresa Wahlert, the president and president pro-tem of the current Board, communicate with us. Why promises are made and then broken. Why a dysfunctional approach to leadership is accepted by the rest of the Board. Why a blatant and disturbing pattern of secrecy, micromanagement, authoritarianism, and disrespect have plagued the leadership of the Board of Regents over the past two years.

Secrecy, micromanagement, and authoritarianism demonstrate the leadership's lack of respect for the university community and the public. Each and every member of the

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university community and the Board of Regents answers to the people of Iowa. A Board of Regents leadership that uses its authority this way, creating widespread anger and frustration, can neither do its job nor represent the best interest of Iowans.

As we consider this vote, let's not make our decision based on emotion, as Gartner claims we do. Or be radical about it, as Wahlert would characterize us. Let's look at some facts:

Last winter, despite our record of attracting outstanding presidents using a campus-based and led search process, the leadership of the Board of Regents selected a process in which four Regents were members of the search committee. With Regent Wahlert as chair and Regent Gartner on board, the committee was doomed to months of undemocratic processes and closed discussions.

Regents Gartner and Wahlert promised that they would allow the campus advisory committee to play a significant role in the search process, but it did not.

In the spring and summer, Regents Gartner and Wahlert publicly voiced their support for on-campus interviews, but then did all they could to prevent them.

On July 20, Gartner initiated via e-mail a strategic planning process that included Wahlert and none of the other members of the Board of Regents. They met privately with our interim president and the ISU and UNI presidents. These secret discussions only came to light when the media uncovered the e-mail and forced Gartner to admit the process was underway.

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On November 9th, Michael Gartner announced that the Board of Regents was entering a closed executive session to discuss a personnel issue. That closed session was begun, suspended and resumed no fewer than four times over the course of five days.

Between November 14 and 17th, deliberation about the candidates by the board members meeting together with a list of strengths and weaknesses for each candidate available never took place. Instead, Gartner called each board member individually to secure the votes needed to terminate the UI presidential search and disband the committee. Candidates that the four members on the committee had deemed fit for the job, were suddenly not worthy of consideration.

Each year during my performance evaluation, I am invited to make an appointment with “the boss’s boss” as it were. I don’t often take this opportunity, but it is there if I want it. Today we have an opportunity to talk with the boss’s boss.

So we’ve made that appointment today—with the citizens of Iowa; the taxpayers of Iowa, those to whom Michael Gartner and Teresa Wahlert ultimately report. We’re nervous about it. We know what we have to say will be difficult and it may not change anything.

But we also know that we can’t go on like this, without making the boss’ boss acutely aware of our concerns. We’ve tried working with Gartner and Wahlert—only to be confronted with bullying, intimidation tactics, and untruths. If we don’t take this opportunity to tell the boss’ boss, then we are returning to our cubicles knowing that our silence supports the status quo.

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This resolution is about something the leadership of the Regents owe the people of Iowa. It is called "duty of care." This is, in fact, the leadership's obligation to take reasonable care in acting in the best interests of the state's citizens and of public higher education. By repeatedly violating that duty of care, the Board's leaders have demonstrated that we cannot trust them any longer to carry out their appointed responsibilities.

The resolution before you is motivated by the conviction that a change in the Board leadership is essential to accomplish the interrelated goals of finding and retaining an outstanding president to lead this institution and restoring a functional governance structure within the Board of Regents and between the Regents and the institutions they oversee.