Good Afternoon

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget and represent the nearly 2,000 faculty at Iowa State University.

I would like to sit here and tell you that all is fine with the faculty at Iowa State, but in all honesty, I can’t. After experiencing historical and unprecedented growth in student enrollment at our university over the past few years, the additional stresses placed on faculty to continue to provide the high quality education, and deliver our part of the “Iowa State Experience”, have taken their toll. The stress level of the faculty to simply do their jobs, and to do them well, has increased, and this stress is easily palpable when discussing workloads and increased responsibilities.

The faculty at Iowa State University are a very talented and skilled group of professionals, dedicated to advancing the education and research missions of the University, and I am very proud to call them my colleagues. Among their many positive attributes is that of loyalty to the institution, many choosing to spend their professional careers at Iowa State in service to students and to the State of Iowa, while pursuing their research and outreach activities. I have been at ISU for just 25 years - there are members of our faculty with tenures of 35, 40, and even 50 years – clearly demonstrating that loyalty. It is an excellent institution, and is deserving of this level of professional commitment.

My concern is that with repeated messages in recent years that their service is not valued, or at least under-valued, being communicated by the lack of meaningful salary increases, that loyalty will be tested, and our ability to attract and retain the best and brightest faculty will be compromised and progressively diminished over time.

Since 2008, our faculty have had to ride through the storm of the recession like everyone else, patiently and respectfully waiting for better times, and have experienced zero or minimal salary increases, even furloughs, while continuing their professional practice in teaching, research,
and outreach. We have not yet rebounded from that situation, and as salaries at other academic institutions increase around us, we fall further and further behind.

Although recent efforts by our administration to grow faculty numbers and reduce our student to faculty ratio from 19:1 toward our goal of 16:1, the continued increasing demand for an Iowa State education and growing enrollments have not enabled us to drop this ratio. The enrollment in many of our programs, and in the classes that faculty provide, have grown so significantly that finding available space to teach these high-demand classes is becoming progressively more difficult. These increased student numbers have also forced faculty to reallocate their time and effort away from research and other institutional support activities. The faculty have significant concerns about the ability to maintain the high quality educational experience that students and parents expect from Iowa State University, especially in the face of this continued growth. In short, the faculty are stressed and worried about their ability to maintain excellence in their jobs.

I realize this is a statement about the FY 2017 budget, and not on enrollment issues. I can, however, tell you that because of having to do more for less compensation, many faculty, likely most faculty, are feeling demoralized and unappreciated. The faculty’s previous willingness to “step up” and “go the extra mile” that I experienced in my first 20 years at Iowa State, is now quite different over the last 5 years. Hearing that there will be no salary increase, or perhaps a 1% increase, for several years in succession is frustrating at best, and sends a message that one’s efforts, and indeed, additional efforts, are not valued by the institution.

Despite the burgeoning student numbers, with the enrollment likely to be well over 36,001 students in the Fall, and the various system stresses the unprecedented higher enrollments present, the Iowa State faculty have risen to the challenge. Even with greater demands on time required for teaching and working with students, our faculty have continued to maintain active research programs, and have seen increased levels of external funding. The question remains whether all areas of excellence can be maintained under this current situation. Despite rumors to the contrary, faculty are human!

Everyone should realize that within its peer group, and in the geographic region, Iowa State has among the lowest tuitions of state-funded universities. Iowa State is a “bargain”, but can only be viewed as a great place to get an education if the quality of that education remains high. To do that, you need an excellent and dedicated faculty. This is simple logic. ISU’s tuition is at or near the bottom of our peer group, and faculty compensation is in a similar “near bottom” condition. It is clear that significant improvement is needed to increase compensation levels
which are commensurate with the demonstrated efforts by faculty to continue to maintain excellence and provide a top-quality educational experience.

We realize that, in the past, the Board of Regents has requested far more support from the legislature than what has been appropriated, and it seems that the same scenario will play out again for the 2017 Fiscal Year. I would like to ask the Board what can the Iowa State faculty do, or indeed, what my faculty colleagues at our sister institutions can do with us, to get the message to the Governor and legislature about the importance of continuing to fund our Regents institutions at sustainable levels? What message can we send about all of the excellent work we do to improve the lives of our students, advance the boundaries of knowledge and technology, and contribute to the economic development and betterment of the State of Iowa? In 1986, the legislature funded 75% of ISU’s general fund budget - thirty years later in 2016, the percentage is less than half that. Tuition freezes and diminishing legislative support - coupled with increasing costs of operation - collectively present an unsustainable situation for our University, which can only result in the loss of quality and inability to deliver on our missions of the entire enterprise.

My faculty colleagues and I hope that the Board will seriously consider providing President Leath and our other administrators the maximum flexibility possible in adjusting the 2016-2017 tuition to provide for meaningful and well deserved salary increases for the faculty at Iowa State. The faculty want to continue to provide a top-rate education for our students, and deserve a meaningful increase in compensation. As stated by President Rastetter at the beginning of this meeting, the need to increase tuition is apparent – please help us in recognizing our faculty’s efforts in allowing a tuition increase to enable a long awaited increase in compensation.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you today.