

COMMENTS REGARDING SELECTING A NEW COMMISSIONER AND DR. SALLY CLAUSEN

Paul Lingenfelter – President of the national State Higher Education Executive Officers organization (SHEEO)

Mr. Lingenfelter reported that “there was no thinking necessary.” He offered the following assessment of Dr. Clausen: “She’s smart, she’s knowledgeable, nationally recognized, understands the state, (and) her instincts are great.”

He saw absolutely no down side to her selection.

Katie Haycock – President of the Education Trust in Washington.

Haycock’s comments were interesting in regard to both Dr. Clausen and Louisiana.

“You know in my mind the national pool is somewhat weaker now than your Louisiana pool of applicants in qualified people”. She mentioned that Superintendent of Education, Paul Pastorek, was a “diamond in the rough” right here in Louisiana. She commented on the job he was doing in New Orleans and how there was no two-year learning curve for him. She said the same would be true of Sally Clausen. Ms. Haycock said that Dr. Clausen is “terribly well thought of in all quarters.” She complimented the Board of Regents and commented that she has watched the Board of Regents for many years. Haycock told the Chairman of the Selection Committee that the “Regents need leaders as good as they are, don’t settle for less, don’t settle for unknown quantities that may blow this thing wide open.”

Tom Meredith – Mississippi Commissioner of Higher Education and President of the National Association of System Heads (NASH), an organization in which Dr. Clausen serves as vice-president.

Meredith said that he has known Dr. Clausen for more than 15 years, knows the political climate here in Louisiana and knows that she understands the political climate in Louisiana, all very important qualifications, to his mind., in addition to the fact that she is very well versed on national issues. He said she is “respected and nationally visible.” He said that in his mind the Regents could go through the elaborate search process but there would still necessarily be a level of non-transparency. He stated that one would normally hire a consultant who goes through his universe of 300, 400, 500 or more candidates. They are mostly “wanna be’s,” “step ups” or, as Meredith called them, “look ups.” He said those candidates are then normally culled down to 10, 15, or 20, which are subsequently culled down to 3 to 4. But many times the really good candidates will not be in that pool because they want a certain degree of confidentiality.

Gordon Pugh – Chair of the University of Louisiana System and former Board of Regents member.

Mr. Pugh’s comments were similar to those of **Mike Woods, Edwards Barham** and **Bob Davidge**, who also serve or have served on the ULS Board and as chairs. All three acknowledged that Clausen is exceptional, is a known quantity and would be an excellent candidate for Commissioner. They all gave her glowing evaluations for her work as President of the University of Louisiana System.

Gordon Davies – Director, National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy

Dr. Davies offered the following comments to the Board of Regents as a guide in their selection process:.

National situation. State higher education executives (SHEEOs) seem to be in a transitional phase, with a number of new persons being appointed to replace experienced ones. Examples are Kentucky and, of course, Louisiana.

The strength of SHEEOs in general appears to rise and fall over the years. We may be in a trough right now, at least partly because declines in state funding have led institutions in many states to seek greater autonomy. (“If you won’t fund us the way we need to be funded, please cut us loose from bureaucratic control!”)

This does not mean that there aren’t any well-qualified people out there. It may mean that they’ll be more difficult to find.

I am inclined to think that the Board should identify good prospects and approach them, rather than opening a general search. You may get a lot of mediocre applicants from an open search (some of whom I could name!).

Within the state. Looking within Louisiana might be a good idea for at least three reasons. First, it’s always good to assure on-lookers that you are open to talent with the state.

Second, Louisiana, like every state, has its own complex political dynamics. (Indeed, Louisiana’s might be more complex than those of many states.) The Board of Regents is at a crucial stage in developing its new Master Plan and is working with a new Governor. A person who knows the right people and the relationships between the various groups and individuals who are crucial to the Board’s success might be extremely valuable at this time.

Search firms. My personal experience and observations lead me to think that most search firms do not understand the role of a state higher education executive. They tend to focus

on institutional administrators. I know of only a few search firm persons who have direct experience as SHEEOs.

Again, a general search might produce a lot of names but few really good candidates. Besides being smart, agile, and able to navigate in turbulent waters, the single most important characteristic of a successful state higher education executive is her or his ability to function without any natural constituencies. University presidents work with alumni, local businesses, athletic boosters, and other constituents who support their institutions. The Board of Regents and the Commissioner depend on the quality of their ideas and their political acuity.

Strength of BOR staff. The staff of the Board of Regents is very strong and experienced. While appointing a new Commissioner should have a very high priority, the Board can be assured that the work will get done, and done well. The Board should move expeditiously, but should not panic.