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Turtle on a Fence Post

Posting the Rawlins Legacy

Lane Rawlins is notorious for his country expressions. One of them is, "If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't get there by itself."

The WSU Alumni Association turned the table at the Board of Regents meeting last week when they presented President Rawlins with a plaque with a turtle perched on a post. WSU has been posted as one of the top 50 universities in the country during the last seven years. The plaque made it clear Lane Rawlins had his large handprints all over that development. The Olympia perspective is similar.

If legislators see freshmen students attending WSU Vancouver this year, new medical students at WSU Spokane next year, a new pedestrian mall down the center of the Pullman campus, a new wine researcher at WSU Prosser, a reinvigorated apple breeding program, ten new scientists working on biofuels at WSU Tri-Cities, a new WSU PhD nursing student, or a new Small Business Development Center, they know they didn't get there without the help of a WSU president. If they hear of campuses that were once "branches," referred to as "four-year institutions," they know Lane Rawlins had a hand in that. And when they see a new WSU biotechnology research and education complex in Pullman, they are certain it didn't have a chance of being built so soon without his hand.

Lane Rawlins' final year as president was capped with one of the most successful legislative sessions in history for WSU. In the next week, the Governor will sign 2007-2009 Operating and Capital Budgets that will complete many improvements at WSU and move forward his initiatives in quality undergraduate education and research that started seven years ago.

There are unquestionably many factors that influenced a 17.9 percent state budget increase for WSU and a record \$180.6 million construction budget: Gov. Christine Gregoire, the "Washington Learns" Study Team, the Washington Roundtable, the Prosperity Partnership, enlightened industry leaders and legislators that sincerely wanted to make a difference for the state.

However, all of these influencers cite Lane Rawlins as shaping their higher education positions and posting WSU's gains.

Public Education Is “The Main Thing”

On May 21, President Rawlins will go back to the faculty ranks as an economics professor. But he will leave behind profound changes to the state's higher education system and WSU. Here's an incomplete summary from a state legislative perspective:

One of Lane's favorite expressions is “Make the Main Thing, The Main Thing.” And he always makes it clear that while he loves WSU specifically, his “main thing” is his passion for public higher education. The only WSU president to emerge from the university's faculty ranks, his strategy was based on his conviction that outstanding undergraduate education for students grew out of its continuous interaction with world class research. It is the kind of interaction that occurs at a research university.

At a time when many institutions were considering “privatization,” Lane affirmed that WSU would not be confused about its clear mission as a public institution to serve the state of Washington and its citizens. From the beginning of his presidency he was a relentless advocate in Olympia for state funding to assure that state needs are met.

He argued that increases in tuition paid by students should never be considered without corresponding increases in state funding. He argued for benchmarks to compare both tuition funding and state funding against other institutions that were globally competitive. That concept was advocated by the governor and signed into law April 20 as Second Substitute Senate Bill 5806.

Despite his lobbying for state funding, Lane steadfastly refused to allow WSU's quality of student education and the excellence of its faculty to be defined exclusively by the size of its state legislative appropriations. The Rawlins years featured creative reallocations of existing dollars and a more focused effort to secure more federal funding. The university reached its second highest mark in the WSU Foundation's 27-year history with \$54,116,173 in gifts and pledges during FY 2006, which ended June 30.

Straight Fences for Quality Education

Lane believes it is nearly as important to do the job right, as it is to do the job. As a youth on the potato farm, Lane said he learned that fences should be built straight, even if people couldn't tell the difference from where they were standing.

President Rawlins rearranged the WSU budget to use other local funds to make up the difference on faculty salaries and other critical issues when the Legislature could not find general state funding. Over the past two years, the WSU faculty was appropriated funding equal to an average 4.8 percent salary increase. President Rawlins' realignment of the budget led to an average of 8 percent salary increases for WSU faculty instead.

Always bothered by the return on WSU trust land investments, voters this year will consider a legislatively-approved constitutional amendment to improve funding for higher

education projects that was requested by President Rawlins and the Board of Regents. (Substitute House Joint Resolution 4215.)

He passionately argues that the tuition a WSU student pays should be retained at WSU to enhance programs that benefit the student. The final legislative budget this year held that position despite an initial state Senate position that it shouldn't matter, as long as there's still enough money to do the job.

Opportunity for 22,250 Students

Now more than ever, WSU is the university sought by some of the state's brightest students. For Fall 2007, WSU has a record number of applications. Nearly 40 percent of WSU's incoming class in 2006 had grade point averages of 3.6 or higher. Average entering freshman SAT scores increased by more than 65 points in past five years. Almost 40 percent of entering freshmen at WSU come from the top 10 percent of their high school class. The final legislative budget will now allow 850 more bright students to attend the WSU system. Thanks to the Rawlins years, 22,250 students will be enrolled at WSU in 2008, marking a 16.2 percent increase in enrollment during his tenure as president.

Sharp Shovels for Science

President Rawlins always advised his staff to keep their tools sharp. He said it made it easier to do the job. He sharpened his shovel by digging in on science and research.

When Lane took over in 2000, there had not been a major state-funded university research building built in the state in decades. Legislators believed research was a federal mission, not state. They believed that university research could not make big changes in the economy. It's a cynicism that is not dead in the Legislature, but was forced underground in the Rawlins years.

Against all internal and external political advice, Lane Rawlins put a \$12.4 million "Shock Physics" building near the top of his 2001 capital construction list. The WSU legislative request package was dubbed "A New Way of Doing Business at WSU" and the Legislature funded the building. He expanded, relocated, and accelerated a new Nursing Building for Spokane. The Legislature not only accepted the recommendation, it put it on a faster track.

His next project would not be a single science research building but several buildings! President Rawlins proposed a major biotechnology complex of buildings in Pullman. The first part of the complex was proposed in 2003 with a \$35 million request for a Plant Biotechnology Building, reconfiguring a project that was previously a building addition. Later, he sought and has received some federal funding for a nearby Agricultural Research Service (ARS) building. That same year he secured design money for a Life Sciences Building for National Institute of Health-sponsored researchers in Pullman. But that would prove to be his most controversial legislative proposal. Ironically, there wasn't so much opposition to the Life Sciences Building proposal as there was support for other projects that Lane had moved higher on WSU's priority list. In many ways, Lane's top priority fell victim to other ideas he proposed that were more popular with legislators. The Legislature refused in 2005 to fund the

Life Sciences project but still gave the university a \$114 million construction budget with new buildings in Spokane, Vancouver, Tri-Cities and Prosser.

Among the highlights in 2005, WSU requested and received \$13.1 million for a new WSU Biological Sciences and Engineering Laboratory (BSEL) in Tri-Cities to house researchers for the university and Pacific Northwest National Laboratories. And the nursing building in Spokane received its construction appropriation, \$31.6 million.

These state projects were all debatable priorities before the Rawlins presidency. The 2007-2009 capital construction budget that will soon be signed will appropriate \$58 million to complete the Pullman Life Sciences Building. It is the highlight of a record \$180.6 million WSU construction budget. A \$29 million classroom building for WSU Vancouver and \$59 million in critical dollars to improve and preserve existing facilities are in this construction budget. Other accomplishments include securing funding for the long-planned Spokane Student Academic Building during the 2004 supplemental budget session. It became the library centerpiece of the Riverpoint Campus.

Of course, these were buildings. His work focused on ensuring that there would be programs to fill them.

Diggin' with the Meerkats & the Huskies

Always a Cougar, Lane nevertheless has a curious fondness for "Meerkats," a mongoose-like African creature noted for its ability to team up altruistically and partner with other species around a network of underground burrows. In developing WSU's network around the state, Lane followed the lead of his beloved meerkats.

The Rawlins Presidency brought unprecedented cooperation between WSU and the University of Washington. He reasoned that if outstanding research universities were the answer to making substantial improvements to the state, how could one overlook the University of Washington, one of the most successful institutions in the country? UW Presidents Richard McCormick, Lee Huntsman, and of course, Mark Emmert, all worked closely with Lane on common agendas from student funding to a new proposed Washington Academy of Sciences. President Emmert and President Rawlins had great fun advocating for the others programs and finishing the other's sentences. Cooperation between the presidents was never muted except around football...and later basketball.

With this budget, The UW-WSU partnership will create a new program to educate doctors in Spokane, effectively delivering the services of a medical school to the WSU Riverpoint campus. This is the first expansion of medical school opportunities to Washington residents in decades. WSU's Spokane health sciences faculty and facilities will serve to educate those students in their first year of medical school. The medical students will spend their second year at the UW Seattle campus before returning to the Spokane region to complete their education.

Under his presidency WSU Spokane and WSU Pullman were designated as a single campus to efficiently advance research and instruction His presidency fostered many shared research and professional education programs between the two locations in areas like chromosome research, sleep research, nursing education, architecture, applied sciences, etc.

A similar partnership with UW and EWU will provide dental education in the Spokane region, the first major expansion of the UW College of Dentistry in 20 years.

Partnerships for Growing & Fueling Washington

Working with the agriculture industry, Rawlins and his Agriculture Dean Dan Bernardo fashioned the “Unified Agriculture Initiative.” The proposal involved dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of commodities and attracted support from across agriculture, Washington’s largest industry. The 2007 Legislature invested \$5.3 million in the unusual concept that largely used farmers and industry leaders to write the research agenda. It is one of the largest state appropriations for WSU agricultural research in history. This happened in a Legislature dominated by Democrats on an issue thought to be owned by Republicans. The unprecedented alliance involved organizations as diverse as the Washington Farm Bureau, the Northwest Turf grass Association, the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers, the Washington Wine Institute, and the Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network. More than 35 agricultural organizations formally endorsed and lobbied for the proposal. The result is an assortment of new research programs benefiting everything from organic farming to livestock production to apple and cherry varieties.

The new state budget provides the first core funding for another joint venture with UW, the William R. Ruckelshaus Policy Consensus Center. The joint academic center has been charged, among other things, with resolving differences between agriculture and environmentalists over the growth management and “critical area ordinances.”

Depending on the final allocation, the budget provides \$5 million to \$6 million in biofuels and bioproducts research funding. Part of that funding will provide the state match for a team of ten scientists, reporting to WSU and Battelle’s Pacific Northwest National Laboratories at WSU Tri-Cities.

“WSU Is Not A Place”

Insisting that “WSU is not a place” he promoted development of the university statewide. He supported the successful efforts to add freshman and sophomore students at WSU Vancouver and WSU Tri-Cities. He maintained WSU's historic position that a degree attained from the newer campuses had the same quality as a degree granted in Pullman. He personally visited WSU many locations statewide, even the more remote ones such as the Goldendale Learning Center. Funding was secured this session for operation of new facilities at WSU Mount Vernon and some of the first state improvements in decades have been made to WSU Prosser.

The Path To Success

Lane Rawlins says it is puzzling that cattle will often follow the same trail, even when the utility of the path has diminished. He tells the story of how one herd would follow a path for generations that led around an irrigation pond...even though the pond had dried up in later years.

Lane Rawlins didn’t always follow the beaten path as president. And we suspect he will keep making his own trails.

WSU thanks him for the seven-year ride. It was fun, productive, world class, and he got us there quick.

Olympia Update is produced for persons interested in state government developments impacting Washington State University. For more information, go to www.olympia.wsu.edu. Contacts: Larry Ganders, Assistant to the President, 360-956-2165. From WSU campuses, dial 8-2165. If you wish to subscribe to Olympia Update directly by email, send a completely blank message from your e-mail account (no signatures or footers please) to: subscribe-olympia_update@listserv.energy.wsu.edu