Good morning. I cannot tell you how pleased I am to be able to address you today. Thank you for the opportunity.

My comments today are emblematic of Bismarck’s epigram that “to retain respect for sausages and laws, one must not watch them in the making.”

But in order to see how well the Senate, the Provost Office, and the Board of Trustees worked together I want to engage in a little sausage-making discussion.

We all know the recent history of the P&T document…in the Spring the Senate approved several documents, then the Board approved two and sent one back to the Senate for several proposed revisions regarding mentoring, at-risk students, undergraduate research, and instructional pedagogies, then the Senate adopted a resolution that essentially edited out the suggested revisions...

The real sausage-making began at that moment. President Daniel’s expressed his concern that the redlined excisions made it look like the Senate was ignoring the Board’s wishes, while the Senate felt that the intended additions were addressed in other added language.

Had stasis occurred a poor outcome awaited. But stasis didn’t occur. Senate leadership was quick to recognize that the unintentional messaging of the redlining was the result of poorly presented documentation, and owned up to that. Senate leadership was frankly critical of the crafting of the revised and adopted P&T document, and sent it back for revision. The Office of the Provost and members of the Senate’s Faculty Affairs Committee went to work to revise the document as directed by Senate leadership to achieve the desired intent of the Board.

Meanwhile Trustee Brouillette and I began talking and meeting to better understand and communicate the issues. Those discussions were extremely collegial and helpful, and I am ever appreciative to JoAnn for that. As the process continued I also received very helpful inputs from Trustee Castagna and Hardin, and I thank them very much as well. This clearly was a team effort.

The Senate’s Faculty Affairs Committee did a wonderful job working with Alyssa Panitch from the Provost’s Office and together recrafted the P&T document which came to the Board and was approved yesterday.

So that’s the sausage-making, and while messy, I can say was very effective, and a good example of how shared governance can work very well. Kudos to all parties.

Next, I would briefly like to address another example of Senate leadership and shared governance in action.

Several weeks ago when Board Chairman Berghoff and Provost Dutta went to Purdue Calumet to speak to the Calumet and North Central Senates I also attended. I went to listen, and to represent West Lafayette Senate leadership.

The topic, of course, was unification, and there was a mixed bag of responses from the combined Senators regarding the unification process.
In industry I was involved in two significant major industry consolidations – one in the 1980s with Jamaica Water and Power out of New York City, and the second with Integrated Electrical Services out of Texas. In both of those cases the intent was to consolidate large numbers of construction firms from across the country in order to form one large firm to attempt to gain national dominance through economies of scale and efficiencies. Both were remarkable multi-billion dollar failures in at least their first iteration.

The reason they failed was culture. They could merge support systems...accounting, estimating, purchasing, etc. and they could capture some national marketing benefits, but they couldn’t successfully take multiple companies, merge them, and then say...it is done.

Yesterday Trustee Lehman got it right when he said that there is much hard work yet to be done. Both Chancellors Dworkin and Keon have been working hard in leading their teams in the unification efforts, as have Senate leaders Shires from PNC and Abramowitz from PUC.

The hard work yet to be done is in ensuring that the cultures of the two entities merge in a positive and thoughtful manner. This cannot be done by fiat or decree...that was tried with the stupendous and costly JWP and IES failures. It must, of course, be done via collaboration, negotiation, compromise, patience, and understanding.

Purdue’s Intercampus Faculty Council met last week, and one of its actions was to appoint the team of myself and John Niser of Purdue Fort Wayne to attempt to facilitate the mediation of the merging of the PNC and PUC senates.

Two days ago I fruitfully spent the day doing some shuttle diplomacy, going first to PNC to meet with Senate leaders, and then to PUC to listen, and then to see if I could help them with a Way Forward...my theme this year as WL Senate Chair.

The reason that the IFC empowered John and I to do this is that the two Senates are currently at an impasse over how the Senates will merge. When unification began a Constitution committee was formed, and a proposed Constitution emerged. The PNC Senate adopted the new Constitution, and then as required, their full faculty body voted on it and approved it with an 80% margin. The Constitution failed to pass the PUC Senate, and there is strong disagreement at PUC about how to move forward. As a result there is an impasse that must be resolved.

Yesterday after the Board meeting I was castigated by a colleague for failing to “express a countervailing opinion” after the Chancellors positively characterized the unification and Trustee Castagna described her equally positive visit to PUC the previous day. I was on both campuses the same day as Trustee Castagna, and yes, the two Senates are quite far apart, but there are also many participants that are pleased. So yes, as Trustee Lehman said, there is still much hard work to be done, but regardless, we must do that hard work and find the way forward. The act of unification is done, so now we must find the collaborative solution.

The two Senates and the two faculties must find a mediated way forward. The Senate is important as all curricular and academic matters must be crafted, vetted and approved in that body. The IFC, through John Niser and myself are providing a way forward toward a mediated agreement. As of yesterday both sets of Senate leadership have selected three-person mediation teams, and John and I will be serving as
mediators. This truly is effective sausage-making and shared governance in action, and we will find a way forward.

Why does this matter? While much of the hard work of joining curriculum, programs, majors, and accreditation is well underway, much is still yet to be done. Equally as important are the cultural concerns...respect, trust, fear...all must be carefully treated. This isn’t just an administrative and economic merger, it is a cultural merger. The two campuses have very different cultures, and they must be gently helped to find a way to merge their cultures.

If the new Purdue Northwest is to truly be one institution then the faculty cultures must be effectively joined. Helping to facilitate finding common ground is part of how Senate Leadership adds value to the Board of Trustees and the Purdue system, and we look forward to helping to achieve success.

Thank you

Kirk Alter

University Senate Chair
