

Beauvais Lyons, UTK-UTIA Faculty Senate President-Elect
Address to the UT Board of Trustees
Finance and Administration Committee Meeting
Hollingsworth Auditorium, Thursday June 22, 2017, 10:15am to noon.

Dear Members of the UT Board of Trustees,

I come before you today as faculty member from the Knoxville campus for the past 32 years where I hold the title Chancellor's Professor in the School of Art and head our #2 ranked graduate printmaking program. I also come before you as the next Faculty Senate President for UTK and UTIA, an elected office which I will assume July 1st. My career as a faculty member has been invested in making a positive impact in my discipline, educating our students, and serving the people of Tennessee. As printmaking studios require many of the same safety features of a scientific lab in terms of ventilation and hazardous waste disposal, we are very reliant on facilities that are of the highest quality, clean and well maintained. I speak to you today to express my opposition to outsourcing facility services. While I am aware that Chancellor Davenport is empowered to opt out of part or all of any proposed service contract, I believe that it is also important for the Board of Trustees to hear from a long-time faculty member on this matter.

I appreciate the goal of fostering greater efficiencies and savings for the taxpayer. But the experience on the UT Knoxville campus with privatizing custodial services beginning in the early 1990s was a total disaster. The private contractors used part-time, minimum wage workers with no health or retirement benefits. Because of work force issues and poor management, often, basic requirements of the contracts were not fulfilled, with floors un-swept and trashcans overflowing. In addition, theft and failure to report needed repairs to buildings were commonplace. It became so bad that a staph infection developed in one of the campus restrooms. Next door in the Plant Biotechnology Building a new outsourced custodial worker, who spoke almost no English, disposed a clearly labeled container with radioactive isotopes in the regular trash. This is a reminder that what we do at the university, often involving potentially dangerous chemicals and microorganisms, not to mention radiation hazards, is far different from servicing a conventional office building. Outsourced, untrained workers could put lives in danger and the university at risk for litigation.

As the chair of the Faculty Senate Budget and Planning Committee, we came to perceive outsourcing custodial work as "penny wise and pound foolish," especially in the context of our aspiration to be a top-25 public university. Under the leadership of Chancellor Cheek and Associate Vice-Chancellor for Facility Services Dave Irvin, we initiated a multi-year effort to close out our custodial contracts and in-source this labor to state employees, those who are truly invested in serving the university and our citizens. As a result, the appearance, operations and morale of the Knoxville campus has improved significantly.

While projects such as building construction may be appropriately outsourced, recurring university functions are best done by regular state employees. Studies of UTK and UTIA show that the current cost for services per square foot are below average in relation to national standards. The state and the university are well served by our current facility services operations. Safety, performance, and appearance of the university will all be compromised by an outsourced rotating workforce with little loyalty to UTK.

Recently, our Faculty Senate Budget and Planning Committee issued a report about the budget implications of possible outsourcing as an independent source of information that the UTK Chancellor's

Cabinet will find useful in making their decisions regarding outsourcing. I have distributed a copy of this report to you today. The specific objective of the report was to consider costs to the university and the state from outsourcing facilities which are not taken into consideration from the State of Tennessee's Office of Customer Focused Government's Strategies for Efficiency in Real Estate Management (SEREM). While certainly review of any proposed calculations of cost savings will be in order, our report sought to identify components of any outsourcing plan that might reduce the potential savings.

The actual costs to the university and the state would be many. They include the upfront costs of paying annual leave that has been accumulated by employees who could either leave UTK or be absorbed by an outsourced firm; costs to the state of a UT employee who previously had health coverage, but loses it and moves to TennCare; loss of institutional knowledge, which is critical to maintaining and servicing the many complex pieces of equipment on our campus; loss of Tennessee tax revenue as an outsourced contractor uses fewer local vendors for requisitions; as well as the cost to the university of managing the outsourced contract. These, and other added costs should be calculated against any projected savings.

There are also real human costs at stake with this decision. Facilities workers have decades of experience with campus infrastructure, staff members, faculty, and students. This experience cannot be measured only monetarily. This past year I participated in the SEC University Academic Leadership Development Program. While at Mississippi State University we were addressed by President Mark Keenum, who served in the administration of President George W. Bush and was long-time Chief of Staff to Senator Chad Cochran. In his address to campus leaders, President Keenum emphasized the moral responsibility we have to all the members of the campus community, not just those with the privilege of being administrators or faculty, but especially the staff members who attend to the facilities and operations of the university. His message was based in moral principles, emphasizing the human and social commitments we have as a university as we seek to serve the people of our state. The University of Tennessee is a land grant university, with the mission of lifting up all the people of Tennessee. Shifting facilities work to a private contractor would not serve them, our university or the people of Tennessee.

In closing, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share this perspective with you today and hope many of you will be able to join the Faculty Senate on Friday August 25th for our retreat in Knoxville. We hope to hear from many of you, and invite opportunities for future dialogue.

Beauvais Lyons, Chancellor's Professor
2017-2018 UTK-UTIA Faculty Senate President

Links:

http://www.tn.gov/assets/entities/generalservices/cpo/attachments/RFI_32110-16200_FMO.pdf

<http://www.nimbios.org/~gross/Senate/BudgetandPlanningOutsourcingForumReportFinal1May2017.pdf>