

# Editorial

## In true fairness retain Paul Olum

The State Board of Higher Education's executive committee has committed a grievous error in forcing University President Paul Olum to retire in 1989. In the best interests of everyone involved, the board should reconsider the decision.

Not only are there a number of major projects currently underway at the University that could fall apart if Olum departs prematurely, but the executive committee's action failed to take into account the opinions of University faculty and students as well as a multitude of other individuals and organizations.

Furthermore, when the decision reached by the board's executive committee was announced Oct. 28, no reason was given as to why Olum was being ousted. And none has been heard since.

Granted, presidents of the board's public four-year colleges and universities serve under the guidance of the board. It also is true that only executive committee approval is needed to end a president's employment.

But statements uttered recently by board President James Petersen of La Grande and higher education Chancellor William Davis don't wash. Petersen told the Register-Guard on Oct. 29 that the decision was the best way for the board and the University to make a smooth transition to a new administration.

And when Davis was cornered by a mob of angry students and faculty members outside Susan Campbell Hall on Thursday, he commented dryly, "I support the board's right to make a decision." Davis then added that the executive committee had taken into account student's interests.

Needless to say, the committee has taken into account virtually no one's interests.

Olum has drawn support from city officials, state legislators, labor unions, business leaders and alumni. At Thursday's rally it was revealed by an alumni association representative that chapters around the country have been polled and that more than 100,000 alumni support Olum.

In light of the lack of reasoning behind the state board's decision, external political pressure may be the real reason Olum is being forced out.

It is no secret Olum has publicly taken on and sparred with the board, the Legislature and Gov. Neil Goldschmidt in the past. Goldschmidt, for one, recently questioned Olum's statement that although the quality of University programs was high, faculty salaries were ridiculously low. "You can't have it both ways," Goldschmidt scolded.

The secretive nature of the executive committee in arriving at the decision also raises questions about a hidden agenda and whether Oregon's public meetings law was violated. During the six months the committee mulled over Olum's fate, no one else was consulted. And during the executive committee's deliberations, no minutes of the meetings were kept.

Suspicious and emotions are running high at the moment as exhibited by Thursday's rally and march. The board should reconsider its executive committee's decision if it has any sense for what is best for the University.

If the board as a whole decides that Olum should go, it will be thumbing its nose at not only the University community, but the entire state.



## Letters

### Praise Olum

The University Chapter of the American Association of University Professors was disturbed to learn that the Executive Committee of the State Board of Higher Education has asked Paul Olum to step down as University president 18 months from now.

The reasons given for this decision are mainly procedural, stressing the orderly transition to a new president and the timing of such a transition to coincide with inception of the 1989-91 biennium.

These are not compelling reasons to terminate a man who has been and still is an outstanding president.

Under adverse economic conditions, Olum has presided over the University when:

- 1) There has been consistent improvement in student quality.
- 2) There has been enrollment expansion when enrollments were projected to fall.
- 3) There has been a strengthening of the instructional and research faculty.
- 4) He has brought major

federal funding for the expansion of science facilities on campus.

5) He was chosen by his presidential colleagues to preside over the Pacific-10 Conference.

6) He has vigorously defended free speech on campus.

7) He is a firm advocate of his institution's interests.

8) He has skillfully negotiated with antagonistic groups to develop a plan for a research park in Eugene, and his presence may be a key element in its success.

9) He has been instrumental in the development of plans for an upcoming capital campaign and his involvement is vital for its success.

10) He is mentally and physically in superb condition.

Perhaps the state board was not fully aware of these accomplishments — and many more — when it reached its decision. Had it consulted University faculty, we are sure that it would have extended President Olum's tenure in order to complete such pending projects as an effective provost search, a successful capital campaign, and the launching of the Riverside Research Park.

**Barry N. Siegel**  
President, University AAUP

### Home-rule

This letter seconds the theme of the President of the Chamber of Commerce. The University will not be a better institution of higher education through efforts to centralize control of it in the state board or its staff.

The disagreement is not based on Paul Olum's personality nor his age, in my opinion, but instead upon his defense of the freedom of each university to grow in wisdom and stature and ability to foster knowledge needed for future economic development and intellectual achievements.

President Olum has become a target of the enthusiasts for centralized control in a politically

appointed board and its staff. With L.B. Day's death and my absence from the legislature it must appear to the advocates of centralized political control of the institutions of higher education that Olum is isolated and can be put out of their way by putting him out to pasture.

We need you to stand up for a strong and vital University and for a strong measure of "home-rule" powers in its governance. Future generations of Oregon students, workers and scholars will benefit if you do.

**Edward N. Fadeley**  
Former State Senator

### Superb leader

The unanimous vote of the University Assembly in support of Dr. Olum, published in the Oregon Daily Emerald on Nov. 5, deeply underscores a position taken by the University Alumni Association in an Oct. 30 letter to the State Board of Higher Education.

In that letter, we expressed the "strongest possible opposition" to the state board's apparent decision, stating that we were "confident we shared those feelings with the students and faculty of the University." We also expressed a belief that the board had "greatly underestimated the importance of Dr. Olum to the University — and the commitment of the University community to him."

Our state board consists of people dedicated to public service and higher education in this state. In this case, however, we are convinced they are making a serious mistake. The University Alumni Association joins the faculty and students of the University in asking that our superb president be retained until the 1992 retirement date he had set for himself.

**John Gragg**  
President, University of Oregon Alumni Association

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