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Despite fiscal constraints, UI committed to excellence

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As state cuts to the UI's budget continue, the impacts are becoming more visible. It is critical that the state is also committed to supporting the UI's mission.

I have both appreciated and been in service to the University of Iowa for what I would consider my entire life. Born and raised in Iowa City, I have felt the impact of this great university for as long as I can remember. I have a son who graduated from the UI in 2016 and a daughter completing her senior season as a UI student-athlete. Both are fifth-generation Hawkeyes.

During my 24 years of service to the university, I have witnessed and been a part of great challenges and even greater institutional accomplishments. As university architect, and now the senior vice president for Finance and Operations, I have had the honor of working with the many experts who ensure our campus operates in a way that makes excellence in the classroom, in research, and in our hospital a reality.

Every one of our UI graduates competes for meaningful and productive employment in a market that forces comparisons with the institutions we call peers and competitors. What UI graduates take from their experience here matters deeply to them and to the economy of our state. In a national environment of state disinvestment in higher education, Iowa is especially affected. When combining state funding support with tuition dollars over the last 25 years, Iowa is one of only 11 states in which the total has dropped during that span and fifth from the bottom. This same study (CATO Institute) reveals that the total in many states has grown significantly; leading to a national narrative that tuition is "too expensive," thus creating harmful student debt.

In fact, when compared to the UI's (Board of Regents-established) list of peer institutions — those against whom UI graduates compete for meaningful jobs — the university's in-state undergraduate tuition is roughly \$4,000/year cheaper than the average of our peers. Given this way-below-market cost, nearly half of UI students graduate with no debt at all. At a time when a degree in higher education is more important than ever, there is hardly a better deal than that offered by our institution. The great challenge, however, is that the university's below-market tuition rates are not supported by but challenged by constantly waning state funding support. Over the last 10 years, the state of Iowa has cut nearly \$60 million from the UI, and the trend continues (all while we have offered more programs, more options, and more support to more students). In any business, this model is not sustainable.

The UI is well known for "punching above its weight," and every UI graduate benefits from this. We maintain our standing as a top Research 1 institution in spite of diminishing state support, lower-than-peer tuition, a small population, and hills and puddles instead of mountains and beaches. We rank 31st among public universities, we maintain courses of study and research that

rank as the very best, and even garner a notable reputation on the athletics field while “doing it right,” with student-athlete graduation rates above 90 percent. There are still many areas in which we expect to improve, but it is often forgotten that we do so much, so well, with so many constraints.

From my experiences on the operational side of the university, one of the ways we do this is by being efficient and striving to be even more efficient. The UI sets the mark, within our peer/competitor field, for operational and administrative efficiency. Where there is more to save, while maintaining short- and long-term quality, we are doing it. However, as state cuts continue, the effects are becoming more visible, both on campus and to those who benefit from our university. We will absolutely remain steadfast in our commitment to punch above our weight to advance, even further, our excellence in student success and life-changing research, but it must be done together by recognizing the real and long-term value the University of Iowa brings to the state of Iowa. Without it, where will we, our children and the future of our state be?