



## PRESIDENT'S WEEKLY PERSPECTIVE

*Let truth and error grapple. Who ever knew truth to be beaten in a fair fight?*

- John Milton

As we begin our second week of the Spring 2017 semester, our campus community gets down to the important business of teaching, learning, researching, healing, and serving. Still, national conversations and conflicts are coming to our campus. I stated last week the need to “reaffirm our commitment to UNM’s role as a public research university.” This role will be on display this week when a controversial speaker, invited by a chartered student organization, will come to our campus. If his previous record is any indication, he will use the platform to personally denigrate specific members of our campus, to sow division and to attack many values that we hold dear. I was asked to ban this particular speaker, as were campus leaders at other universities. But upon careful review, I have chosen instead to protect the values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights and in the University’s mission, rather than shy away from a fight between truth and falsehoods.

Let me be absolutely clear: I firmly reject hateful, racist, and misogynist rhetoric and ideas. My decision to allow speakers of any persuasion on campus in no way implies an endorsement of the content of their speeches or their opinions, but rather stands as a reaffirmation of the role of the university as a public square for the competition between truth and lies. We must protect that role of the university especially at a time such as this, when truth and lies compete for public attention. Universities are precious institutions, and cannot best fulfill their role in society by the administration declaring some speech as true and banning other speech; that risks becoming another flavor of the authoritarianism that is always the bane of democracy. We must beware of that kind of urge in ourselves, in others, and in acting university presidents. Instead, we must simultaneously protect truth, free speech, and the institutions that undergird democracy—including the university.

I have met with a group of students who are very concerned about the visit and its aftermath. I have assured them that the UNM campus police department is making every effort to protect the physical safety and the right of everyone to gather and speak. They did, however, raise larger concerns that require all of us to be involved. Some of the students told me that they have already faced discrimination and, at times, were subjected to bigoted and racist comments. They are justifiably concerned about speakers who seem to clear a path for hateful behavior, and are worried about what might come after the visit. It is imperative that all members of our community, especially our faculty and staff, take such concerns seriously. Given the important climate of free speech that is necessary for the university to play its crucial role in American society, I could not promise the students that the University can protect them from hearing hateful speech. But I did assure them and the campus community that all harassing or discriminatory actions will be investigated and, if found to violate our campus policies, perpetrators will be dealt with swiftly. Taking a somber lesson from the unfortunate events that occurred this past Friday at the University of Washington, where police had objects thrown at them and an individual was hospitalized after being shot, anyone found to violate our campus policies will be dealt with appropriately.

In my first report before the UNM Board of Regents on Friday the 20th of January, 2017, I quoted from an [article](#) by President Theodore Roosevelt who wrote: “The right to say wise things necessarily implies the right to say foolish things. The answer to foolish speech is wise speech and not force. The Republic is founded upon the faith that if the American people are permitted freely to hear foolish and wise speech, a majority will choose the wise. If that faith is not justified the Republic is based on sand.”

I believe my job as your acting president is to make sure that the fight between truth and falsehood is a fair fight. I call on all members of the campus community to come together carefully and courageously to assure that truth prevails via dialogue. Here is a [link](#) to where science can help in this fight.

## 2017 Legislative Session Centers on Solvency

The first week of the legislature has primarily focused on state budget solvency for the remainder of this and next fiscal years. UNM's [legislative priorities](#) prioritize the solvency of the NM Legislative Lottery Scholarship, maintaining a performance- and outcomes-driven funding formula, and the funding mission-critical capital projects. To further our ability to advocate for higher education related legislation, UNM is rejoining the [NM Council of University Presidents](#) (CUP). Now, more than ever, it is critical for us to be a part of discussions surrounding the mutual needs, concerns and issues New Mexico's four-year institutions are facing in order to meet the state's higher education goals. To keep informed throughout the session, the Office of Government Relations [website](#) ([govrel.unm.edu](http://govrel.unm.edu)) and [listserv](#) provide the most up-to-date information on legislation impacting UNM and higher education.

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Acting President

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There is so much more that happens on the UNM campus than can be conveyed in a weekly message. To find out about the latest stories and events, please visit the [UNM Newsroom](#), the central source of news and information for the UNM community.