

## "Lessons Learned, Observations Made, and Challenges for the Future"

Dr. Willie Larkin

The time has gone by so quickly. I had three personal goals when I assumed the role of Chair of the Auburn University Faculty and Senate. Number one, I did not want the stress and strain associated with this job to cause me to have a heart attack. Luckily, it did not. As far as I know I'm very healthy and look forward to being so for many years to come. Second, I did not want to lose any of my closest friends. I'm proud to report that I have the same number of friends I started out with and have picked up a considerable number of additional ones during the course of the year. Third, I definitely didn't want to get so wrapped up in the duties and responsibilities of being Senate Chair that it caused me to have problems in my marriage. I'm happy to report that Vivian is still with me. And, for her love and support during this past year, I would like to give her a bouquet of Red Roses. Thanks for your encouragement and good advice. We still make a great team at Auburn University and in the community.

Additionally, I would like to quickly express my thanks to several other people for their contributions to the Senate leadership team's success throughout the year. Most importantly, I want to thank everyone who voted for me last year—thus giving me this incredible opportunity. I will cherish this experience for the rest of my life. I'd be remised if I did not thank Dr. Debra Cobia for her service as secretary. She's a remarkably talented, organized, no non-sense person who kept me focused and on task at all times. Plus, she did an excellent job of running the meetings of the Rules Committee. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the Rules, Steering, Senate Executive Committee, and all other standing Senate and University Committees—with a very special thanks to all chairs. I'd also like to thank all Ad Hoc Committee members and Chairs for their outstanding work—you all did a marvelous job and I appreciate your commitment to making Auburn an even better place to practice our craft of teaching, research, extension and public service. I'd like to thank Bill Sauser for serving as my Parliamentarian. He helped us have smooth and successful Senate and Faculty meetings. I want to

thank each person who spoke at Senate and/or faculty meetings. The questions you raised, challenges you put on the table, the debates, the motions, resolutions, made us all think more deeply and critically about what's best for all of Auburn University. Furthermore, I appreciate the cooperation we've received from the Central Administration. I honestly believe that Dr. Richardson and his administrative team have begun to open up and we're now beginning to practice the true principles of shared governance and not just talk about them. I even thank the press for covering the Senate and reporting accurately my comments and other discussions that were generated through vigorous and respectful debate. I'm even grateful for all the unsolicited e-mails, telephone calls, regular mail, and personal visits to my office. All of these communications culminated into making me a better leader. As a result, I think that my inclusive style of leadership and open approach to communication made it easier for more voices to be heard this year in the shared governance process.

At the risk of missing some people,, I want to especially thank the following support staff persons: in the President's Office—Beth Weed, Susan DeLeon, Dannis Christian; in the Provost Office, Margaret Manley and Linda Spencer; in the Board of Trustees Office, Sherri Williams; in the Outreach Office, Gail Gauntt; and on the first floor in Samford Hall, Kristen Johnson and the Senate's Administrative Assistant Ms. Lakeeta White. All of these wonderful ladies assisted me at one time or another in performing my duties as Chair.

Finally, I'd like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Conner Bailey. He and I formed the "Salt and Pepper" team and have forged a solid Senate Leadership Collaboration and became very good friends in the process. We've always been open and honest with one another and that goes a long way in accomplishing shared goals, advancing the agenda of the faculty/senate, while serving other Auburn University stakeholders and constituency groups in the process.

In closing, please allow me to extend several challenges. I would like to challenge the faculty to be balanced in its approach to shared governance. The balance is this, if we are bold enough to put forth resolutions calling for the resignation of AU Board of Trustee members and criticizing the administration, we should be just as willing to bring

resolutions before this body that praises the Central Administration and the BOT when they do things that are for the benefit of the University and its constituents. That's just fair from where I stand. I have no problems challenging the Board or Dr. Richardson when they fail to live up to the true ideals of shared governance, but I think there must be a fair approach to praise and criticism.

Next, I want to challenge the University's Administration to continue to consult with and involve the faculty through the Senate's Executive and various Senate and University Committees. This involvement should take place before major decisions are made. I believe we are moving in that direction and hope to see this trend continue. One last comment to the administration, I believe that the greatest challenge facing Auburn in the very near future and over the next 5 to 10 years will be matters centered around diversity. Although this will continue to be a challenge for us, I firmly believe that we have the infrastructure and people in place to meet these challenges head on. The remaining questions to be answered are, do we have the commitment, vision, resolve of character, and courage to do what's right? My response is a resounding "YES WE DO."

I encourage the Board of Trustees to not be so sensitive about criticism and to realize that it's the nature of the business when you're a public servant. In my opinion criticism is not a sign of disloyalty, instead—a sign of love for Auburn. I further hope that the Board will proceed with a national search for a permanent president near the end of 2005. And, I hope the BOT will consult the "SMART" recommendations that have been put forth from the Senate's Ad Hoc Committee's presidential search report chaired by Professor Larry Gerber. Needless to say, I look forward to joining the Board as the Faculty Advisor and providing significant advice to support their important work over the next year.

To all Auburn University Alumni and supporters, let me encourage each of you to please work harder than you've ever worked before to help us secure our future by exceeding the Capital Campaign Goal of \$500,000,000.00. Together, we can all make it happen.

As I close, I am confident that the Faculty and Senate are in capable hands with Dr. Bailey and I look forward to supporting him and his team of leaders over the next 12 months.

Once again, I thank all of you very much for your encouragement and support, and now graciously and officially turn the gavel and control of this assembly over to our new leader, Dr. Conner Bailey. War Eagle and God Bless us all!!!