

UNC Board of Governors- Year in Review (647 words)

North Carolina has a proud bipartisan tradition of building and sustaining public higher education — a cause that benefits all North Carolinians.

As a native of the Old North State, I've been both a beneficiary and a dedicated defender of that tradition. During my time as Mayor of Asheville, a member of the Boards of Trustees of Western Carolina and Wake Forest Universities, and now as Chair of the University of North Carolina's Board of Governors, I've worked to uphold the values and institutions that strengthen our state.

Two years ago, I became Chair of the Board during a period of upheaval as we lost a president and Board Chair and welcomed a new president. Our mandate was to help stabilize and provide a shared vision for our great University and its more than 230,000 students; a mandate that means putting commitment to the public ahead of any individual interest.

It took political courage from far-sighted leaders to create the Board of Governors nearly 50 years ago in an effort to free our state's public institutions from undue political influence. The independent governing board that emerged was designed to provide oversight, accountability, and guidance to our extraordinary System of 17 diverse and exemplary institutions.

It has always been a challenge to maintain the balance of freedom and accountability that has enabled the System to grow into one of the best public higher education systems in the nation. But the Board of Governors long understood it was not designed or expected to manage the day-to-day operations of the University or to choose sides in political controversies.

Today, however, that challenge seems greater than ever before. As a Board, we must return to that balance of freedom and accountability, refrain from any desire to intervene too directly and focus on our responsibility to improve an already excellent System by setting clear policies and expectations, and empowering our President, chancellors, faculty, and staff to meet them.

Accountability is especially important in a public system, but so is a governance structure that allows our campus leaders to use their considerable talents to navigate the many changes facing higher education today.

Under the leadership of President Margaret Spellings, a lifetime public servant and national education leader, and this Board of Governors, the System has aggressively responded to these changes. Our efforts have made our 17 institutions more accessible, more affordable and more focused on preparing students to meet the evolving needs of our state and nation.

We've made real progress on behalf of students and taxpayers: a bold strategic plan called *Higher Expectations*; a visionary statewide commission- *My Future NC*- to improve our

state's pathways from Kindergarten to college graduation; and strong advocacy in the General Assembly that produced the University's strongest budget in a decade.

But as we celebrate our progress, we must remember that the job is not about us — our views, our ideologies, or our individual interests. It is about the people of this great state, people who deserve the benefits and opportunities of a world-class University System.

For over 200 years, our System has served North Carolinians by educating and uplifting this great state. This important work happens far from our Board's meeting rooms. It happens when a professor at UNC Pembroke trains nurses to serve southeastern North Carolina; when researchers at NC State and NC A&T create breakthroughs that power our economy; when physicians at UNC-Chapel Hill and ECU deliver cutting-edge treatments to families across North Carolina.

As a governing body, our job is to enable and promote this progress. We must operate as a united Board, focused on providing oversight, ensuring accountability and setting System policy while allowing our President, chancellors, faculty and staff to do their job. That's the higher expectation our citizens have for us, and I'm confident our Board members can rise to meet it.