



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Preface

Before I give my Resignation Letter, I wish to clarify a few things

“A lie is halfway round the world before the truth has got its boots on...”

I wish to share only facts:

- **Fact:** There is no \$27,000 couch. The university bought one couch at \$4,500, and two at \$5,500 each. These were for the president's home and not for me.
- **Fact:** All major trips that I have taken were shared with the Board. International trips had full Board involvement. I have never taken a luxury trip on the university's dime. All trips for the university involve agendas, invitations and meetings throughout the trip.
- **Fact:** I have never taken a \$25,000 helicopter ride. In fact, I have never taken a helicopter ride that the university paid for.
- **Fact:** All flowers for my daughter's wedding were purchased by me. All items for my daughter's wedding were purchased or rented and paid for by me and my wife personally.
- **Fact:** I have never written a single check to myself via the Foundation or the university.
- **Fact:** All checks written to me from the Foundation were reimbursements for university and foundation purchases that have complete documentation and oversight.
- **Fact:** My wife never “profited handsomely” or otherwise.
- **Fact:** My wife's p-card was approved by then Board chair Jerry Walz and had oversight and approvals separate from me.
- **Fact:** My wife bought items exclusively for the university and never for herself or me
- **Fact:** There has never been any purchase of wine for \$800 a bottle from Greece or anywhere else.



- **Fact:** The State auditor has never shared his specific findings with the university nor has he had any conversations with us to understand any contextual issues - nor has there been any due process afforded to us. We know only what was in his letter of concern, but do not know any further details.

Definition -

Defame: to harm the reputation of by communicating false statements about:
to harm the reputation of by libel or slander

And that's a **FACT!**

Resignation Letter

Across the country the average tenure of a university president is a little more than five years. When I came to Western New Mexico University in 2011 the prediction was I would leave within three years. To be fair I had in mind staying up to five years. The University was in a precarious position. The weeds around campus were growing faster than enrollment and the financial outlook was falling quicker than a Peregrin falcon headed for a kill. State funding had plateaued or was declining. Buildings were deteriorating, gas lines were rupturing, and the swimming pool leakage had been creating waterfalls in a nearby building. Faculty and staff morale was low. Town and gown relationships were in shambles with the citizens referring to the University as the citadel on the hill with a moat around it to keep out the people. A new president faced with these conditions could certainly justify looking for more promising and stable opportunities, but I saw the wonderful potential instead of the obvious faults.

On July 1, 2024, I began my fourteenth year as president of Western New Mexico University. During this time, I had multiple opportunities to move into another presidency. Given the conditions that confronted me in 2011, why did I choose to stay? In short, I fell in love with the area, the community, and the University—the faculty, staff, and especially the students—with a vision of what we could accomplish together. On the personal side, my two children of Mexican heritage and my affinity for Mexico after teaching there in my first



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years out of college tied me even closer to the idea of leading a Hispanic Serving Institution. Furthermore, influenced by my upbringing, I have always felt that my vocation was to help improve the lives of others. WNMU's open access admissions, an open door to a high percentage of first-generation students who would not have a chance for higher education except for Western, offered me the opportunity to meet that purpose. With the support of a dedicated Board of Regents and a cadre of campus leaders, I decided to take on the challenge as best I could to transform this institution.

Over those initial years, we cut and revamped the budget by reductions up to 25%, reduced faculty and staff, prioritized programs, embarked on beautifying the campus, revitalized infrastructure, upgraded our athletic and recreation facilities, built new residence halls, began to bridge that moat to welcome the community with a first-rate slate of cultural affairs programs, and overall laid the groundwork for a more effective and prosperous future. It was through this process that I discovered the amazing quality and dedication of faculty and staff. Faculty Senate presidents like Virginia Huegel, Tres Camacho, Andy Hernandez, Emma Bailey, Scott Fritz, Sue McFeaters, Scott Smith, and Phil Schoenberg engaged in the tough but fair leadership of shared governance. Staff Senate presidents including Matthew Lara, Margaret Soucy, Dean Foster, Michael Acosta, Adele Springer and Bart Brown provided proactive support. Abandoning the previous need to use reserve funds for operating expenses, we turned the budget around by keen oversight and discipline from our business office leaders like Kelley Riddle, Cynthia Martinez and Amy Baca. Additionally, the leadership of Jack Crocker, Isaac Brundage, Julie Morales, Magdaleno Manzanarez, Betsy Miller, Scott Noble and Mary Rae McDonald exemplified excellence and have helped make this university great. I am humbled by the positive changes we achieved together.

Today, our enrollment has climbed to over 3,500 students. Our academic programs have moved into top tier national ranking, with Social Work, Business, Education, and Early Childhood consistently being recognized, including being the New Mexico Center of Excellence for Early Childhood Education. Because of our Applied Liberal Arts and Sciences (ALAS) curriculum, the State Legislature designated us the Applied Liberal Arts and Sciences University of New Mexico. Our innovative Nursing program is

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meeting the critical health needs of our area and state, the most recent cohort of graduates scoring a 100% pass rate on the state exam compared with a pass rate in the upper 60% a few short years ago. Our Expressive Arts Department's McCray Gallery has become a mecca for professional and student art exhibitions and our world class Mariachi Plata de WNMU proudly spreads our Hispanic focus and heritage as the only collegiate championship ensemble in New Mexico. We have responded to area and state workforce needs by expanding our Career and Technical Education offerings such as welding, construction, plumbing, pharmacy tech, phlebotomy, and certified nurse assistants. My early commitment to reconnect with the community has exceeded my hopes as the University has become the cultural center of the region. Local and area residents fill Light Hall and the Fine Arts Center Theater for our cultural affairs concerts and lectures. Fiesta Latina has grown into a major international event drawing participants and crowds to further embrace our Hispanic heritage. The Western Institute of Lifelong Learning is thriving on our campus with its enthusiastic group of volunteers providing rich opportunities for intellectual participation for the community and the University. Our students now have access to healthy meals furnished free through our food security program. The WNMU Foundation assets have increased by nearly 400%. We are fiscally stronger than we have ever been with our reserves being maintained at 20% or higher of the budget.

I point out these transformative accomplishments to give credit to what WE have done—faculty, staff, and community. But what I am most proud of is what we have done for our students. At every graduation ceremony I witness a fundamental educational process of generational change that touches me deeply. I ask how many are first in their family to go to college? Over 60% raise their hands. I ask how many have children? Over 50% raise their hands. These students are working moms and dads that must attend part time and who take longer to graduate but have persevered through life pressures not to drop out. So many of these students, including the traditional ones just out of high school, would not have access to obtaining a college degree if it were not for WNMU. Another group of students I take pride in helping is our international students, those recruited for our athletic teams as well as those who yearn for an American education. Not only does it change their lives, but their presence enriches the cross-cultural understanding for all our students.



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For me, it's an honor to be a small part of this success. More than anything it's the students who reaffirm everyday my desire and vocation to make a difference in lives that may be less fortunate than mine.

Of course, not everyone always agrees with my decisions and efforts. We are a university after all, and it is common practice that a president must deal with legitimate questions and multiple points of view among highly educated colleagues with various academic and self-interests. I accept these conditions and know that civil and reasonable pushbacks are a basic way to move forward. Usually, that five-year average tenure of university presidents is created not by internal conflicts and disagreements but by external forces that turn toxic.

I love being president of Western New Mexico University, I love our university more, but I love my wife greater than both. Over the last year and a half, Valerie and I have been smeared with lies, innuendos, and direct attacks on our integrity, ethics, honesty, and truthfulness. This is the second time in my wife's life that she has suffered unfairly as a result of her husband speaking truth to power. Her previous husband, Joe Wilson, appointed a United States Ambassador, challenged the Bush administration about lying to the American people regarding the Iraq war. Not only did they use the media to bash him as a malicious liar, but they also further demonized him by outing his wife, one of our country's own CIA spies, callously endangering her life and the lives of her cultivated contacts. Twenty years later Valerie is again in the uninvited spotlight and fair game.

I am extremely grateful for the continuing strong, unanimous support of our Regents, five remarkable, experienced, and independent leaders who volunteer their time and talent to ensure the university maintains the highest standards of quality and fiscal stability and management. All but the student Regent hold terminal degrees with one being a distinguished lawyer and the other three holding doctorates. Their integrity is unquestionable. Their dedication to the truth - unwavering. I also greatly appreciate the sizeable support for me from a silent majority in the community.



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Thirteen years ago, I fell in love with this university and the community that embraced me and gave me a home. In the process I promised to always put our students first. To do so, I must now take a different path to protect from further harm the institution that has been my obsession and my wife who is the center of my life. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that the path forward for this university and our community is to remove myself from the equation and resign as president.

Obviously, this is not an easy decision. I envisioned many more years leading this great institution. I expect some form of the attack will continue as the retaliation against me and the Board will go unabated. But I hope calmer, more reasonable voices prevail and refocus the conversation on how we can continue to transform and create generational change in the lives of our students. I leave my post not in defeat but with a deep understanding that it is the right thing to do to advance that which I love dearly. To all of you who have supported me, thank you. Know that we will be okay. To those of you who are against me, I hope you someday find peace. My choice is to move beyond the toxic and back to the center of compassion. As I transition into President Emeritus and return to the faculty, I do so with deep pride in our accomplishments, knowing I have made a significant difference in what the institution has become and, I hope, instilled a vision for what it can be. I have been blessed to be the president of Western New Mexico University. May God keep friend and foe in the palm of His hand.

Go Mustangs,

Joseph Shepard, Ph.D.
President, Western New Mexico University