

Davis leaders support UCD plan for growth

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By: Jeff Hudson, Davis Enterprise

UC Davis Chancellor Linda Katehi's plan to counteract state budget cuts by adding 5,000 undergraduate students and 300 tenure-track faculty positions — all in the next five years — drew support from several local elected officials and campus leaders on Wednesday.

At a news conference, Katehi said that “since the state contribution (to the university budget) is going down, a bigger student body will provide more stability. Bringing more students gives us more opportunities. We can talk about new majors, have the opportunity to recruit more faculty and, in the process of doing that, create new pathways for innovation, research and scholarship — and strengthen existing areas. It's a very aggressive but very exciting plan.”

Katehi's proposal — outlined in her speech at Wednesday morning's Fall Convocation at the Mondavi Center — was delivered in a polite and measured tone of voice. But the essence of her remarks was contained in a few toughly worded sentences.

“In my two years as chancellor at UC Davis,” Katehi said, “I have seen our state budget contribution plummet to below 10 percent of our total (university) revenues ... Enough is enough.”

“We will not allow continuous and permanent reductions in state support to define a new status quo for UC Davis where our ability to excel is restrained by limited resources. Dealing with state cuts cannot become a long-term strategy for our campus. I have now become convinced that we need to change course.”

Katehi outlined a future in which new “innovation hubs” at the university will partner with small and large companies to do research that will create new ventures resulting in more job opportunities in Davis and surrounding communities.

Local leaders agree with plan

Yolo County Supervisor Don Saylor, speaking at the news conference, said “I appreciate (Katehi’s) comment ‘Enough is enough,’ and her statement that the university is taking its future in its own hands. I applaud the tone that was set today ... and I pledge ongoing support from Yolo County.”

Saylor noted the university’s “global reach ... the university is the largest contributor and economic engine for the region.”

Michael Bisch, co-president of the Davis Downtown Business Association, said Katehi’s speech was “right on the mark.”

“In times of economic uncertainty, you have two choices,” Bisch said. “You can retract and operate out of fear. Or you can gather your resources and move forward. The course she has set is the right way to go.”

Davis Mayor Pro Tem Rochelle Swanson noted that “like city government and county government, the university is looking at economic uncertainty. It is important that we become more self-reliant.”

Swanson said she believes the addition of 5,000 new undergraduates and 300 new faculty will have a positive effect.

“In the last few years, we have seen an increased vacancy rate for housing within the city, it has been a real hit,” Swanson said. “As the economy has fallen, some people have had to choose to leave school. With diminishing family resources and grant resources, where you used to see two people in a two-bedroom apartment, now you see four people.”

As a result of the higher-than-usual vacancy rate for student rentals, and the new on-campus housing that is coming on line, Swanson predicted there will be enough room for the additional students.

“The seeds are already there,” she said.

Campus plans more housing

This fall, the West Village development (just west of Highway 113 and the main UC Davis campus) opened 197 student apartments — 654 beds in a complex known as The Ramble, and another 123 apartments (192 beds) for students and employees in a related complex known as Viridian. Plans call for an additional 192 apartments (630 beds) in The Ramble by fall 2012. An additional 155 apartments (504 beds) are planned for fall 2013.

Plans for West Village also include 343 single-family homes for faculty and staff. Models are scheduled to be available in 2012.

A second phase of the West Village project — still unscheduled — will include another 822 student beds and 132 single-family homes for faculty and staff. That would give West Village a total of 2,862 beds of student housing, and 475 single-family homes (with faculty or staff owning the homes on land belonging to the university).

On the main campus, the university's 1,200-bed Tercero Phase 3 dormitory is also scheduled to open in fall 2014.

Katehi acknowledged that “we will need to build more” to accommodate the 5,000 new students she wants to bring in during the next five years, “but not as much as you would think.”

Off campus, the owners of the Cannery Park property (the old Hunt-Wesson cannery) are expected to propose new homes at some point. The Davis school district's nine-acre Grande Avenue property also has been approved for 40-some new homes as an “infill project.”

A mix of California, out-of-state students

Katehi said the 5,000 new students will reflect a yet-to-be-defined mix of students coming from within California and those from other states and countries paying higher, non-resident tuition. She noted that UCD has a relatively small percentage of out-of-state students and international students compared to other campuses in the University of California system.

“When I looked at how few out-of-state students we have, I became concerned about our ability to provide a diverse education for our

students. ... But while we will modestly increase the number of our out-of-state and international students, we have to remember that we are a land-grant institution. It is our mission to provide access to an excellent education to California students,” Katehi said, adding that she will “form a number of task force committees” to “develop a couple of models to look at in the next few months.”

Faculty member Linda Bisson, chair of the Academic Senate, told The Enterprise that while “it might seem (like Katehi’s proposal) is aspirational, it’s very doable for this campus,” given the amount of land and infrastructure that the university has available.

“As tough as these financial times have been, we’re not in a super bad place,” Bisson said. “What I love (about the proposal) is the commitment to the region. The innovation hubs she’s enabling, and the interaction between faculty and community to create new jobs in ways we have never been able to before, is really going to benefit the region dramatically. I’m very excited about this.”

Adam Thongsavat, president of Associated Students of UCD, heard Katehi’s speech at the convocation, and described her plan as “a positive thing.”

“It means we’re growing,” he said. “I understand why the chancellor is doing it. Adding students and faculty will make us a very competitive university.”

He added that the future would be more uncertain “if UCD has to keep relying on the state for funding that might be cut.”

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