

STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT BOB KERREY

New School Board of Trustees Meeting

May 6, 2009

It has been nearly eight and a half years since I ended my career in the United States Senate to begin my term as President of the New School. Two weeks from Friday will mark my ninth commencement ceremony and the completion of my eighth full academic year. On that day we will celebrate the graduation of more than 2840 men and women, the largest class in our university's history. These students are smart, they are motivated and they are prepared to make a difference in the world.

I will let others judge the value of our efforts and the importance of our accomplishments. That is not the most important issue before us today. The most important issue before us today is the status of my service going forward.

To understate the case this has been a challenging semester for the university and my family. There have been moments when I reached the limit of my willingness to continue serving as your president. There have been moments when my tendency to fight and to directly engage in confrontation, argument and disputes have been counterproductive.

On the other hand all through this semester and with the help of this board I have engaged the faculty and academic leadership of the New School in a discussion that ended in my proposal to you that we create historic new authorities of the provost's office. I participated in an inclusive process for selecting an interim provost, and have reached agreements with our faculty and students that will improve the quality of transparency and shared governance.

This engagement will continue going forward. Tensions remain but there are many reasons to be confident about our future. One reason is our success in exceeding our target for spring enrollment and retention. Another is a relatively strong student application pool for the fall. Still another is the willingness of administrative and academic leaders to tighten our belts so we can offer a record amount of financial aid. Finally the success of our faculty recruitment efforts – and the fact that we are able to afford to add more faculty - gives me confidence I can continue to lead this university through the June 30, 2011 when my current contract ends.

To be clear with all of you: I do not intend to ask for an extension beyond that date. At some appropriate time in the near future you and I need to begin the process of a search for a new president and transition to new presidential leadership. I will do all in my power to make certain that this transition is successful.

I will also do all in my power to make certain that the work I do in my remaining years as president produces results consistent with the vision we have for this university. Let me spend a few moments describing that vision.

Our vision is directly connected to the quality of our faculty as well as the range and quality of our academic programs. With good faculty – especially the fulltime faculty we have been adding to our university – our students acquire new knowledge and necessary skills including the capacity to think critically. Without good faculty we cannot and will not succeed.

Our vision is to build distinctive undergraduate programs at Lang College in the liberal arts, Parsons in art and design, and Mannes and Jazz in music. Our vision has led us to more carefully and closely align our graduate with our undergraduate programs. The dramatically improved relationship between Lang College, Parsons and the New School for Social Research is but one example of the real benefits of this vision. Milano's joint programs with Lang College and their joint efforts with Parsons to design community solutions to community problems are two others.

In addition to working with the board to establish a process for orderly transition there are a number of important projects that will command my attention during my remaining time at the New School:

The first involves the planning, fundraising, and implementation of the Fifth Avenue building, now fully supported by our provost and the other academic leaders, and called University Center. This project has as its objective constructing a building at 65 Fifth Avenue that will replace the existing building at that location and the Seventh Avenue building that houses our fashion program. The best way to see the need and importance of this building is that it replaces two run down and inefficient buildings with a center of activity for students and faculty, and sets the stage for a second phase project on that site.

The second involves the continued development of cross-university academic programs. Not only do we need to take the last step towards lowering the barriers that Parsons and Lang students face when they attempt to put together a schedule that includes courses from the school other than the one in which they are enrolled, but we need to follow through on the development of specific programs in environmental studies, international affairs, online, a bachelors of arts in design and design education.

Each of these could and should enroll 400 to 500 new students over a 5 to 7 year period. We envision these programs developing in ways that are very much connected to efforts to measure and improve the quality of Lang College and Parsons where pressure on enrollment growth tends to push us to trade financial necessity for qualitative preference.

The third project is directly connected to our academic quality. The most important component of this project is building the provost's office so that Tim Marshall can use the new authorities of this office to better manage the hiring of faculty, the review of faculty, the development of new curricula, and the review of existing programs. We intend to present new budget rules to the board in September that allow us to do multi-year planning. We intend to complete the work on the faculty handbook especially as it pertains to employment status. And we intend to continue to improve the participation of our faculty and students in the academic and administrative decisions of the New School.

The fourth project is the evaluation of the quality of our administrative services. We need to make certain we are doing everything possible to streamline and simplify our rules for the benefit of our students, faculty and staff.

This has been an important year for the New School. We are stronger than we were last fall and better prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

As I inform you that my term as President will end no later than July 1, 2011, I hope you understand how much I have – for the most part – enjoyed the past eight and a half years. We have raised a quarter of a billion dollars of private money for academic initiatives and facilities improvements. We have more than tripled the number of full-time faculty. We are in strong financial condition. We are continuing to hire faculty while others are not. We have extended tenure beyond a single division. And we have transformed ourselves from a holding company into a real university.

That said there is much more to do. I remain enthusiastic about doing my share.