Dear Colleagues,

As you know, while the House and Senate are in session, I make frequent trips to Columbia to meet with our local delegation and members of the legislature who are key to deciding the funding for our institution. As you may have seen in the newspaper, after a flurry of excitement and considerable lobbying on behalf of our local delegation to increase the amount slated for USC Aiken, the Bond Bill died on the House floor.

The defeat of the Bond Bill followed on the heels of the Governor’s communications signaling her concern for borrowing money to support the bond. The defeat of the Bond Bill is, of course, a disappointment for Higher Education, for S.C. has not issued a Bond Bill since 1999 and funding it would have helped universities to address growing infrastructure and deferred maintenance issues that are accumulating across the state. For USC Aiken, our request was originally for both the air-conditioning/heating system replacement for the Penland building and additional funding to help us complete the pedestrian bridge project. While both projects are worthy, the pedestrian bridge project is a health/safety issue for all who cross Bell Parkway on foot, and we felt it stood a good chance of being funded if the Bond Bill made it out of the House. The failure of the Bond Bill removed the 1 million dollars in state money slated for the bridge.

Under the heading of good news is that the Parity dollars that were in the House Ways and Means Subcommittee Budget made it through the full House and will proceed now to the Senate. We requested $600,000+ in recurring dollars to move us closer to the median for funding per student received by other comprehensive institutions in the state. What emerged from the Subcommittee was $399,840 for Parity for USC Aiken, and that was left in place by the full House.

Other highlights that emerged from the House vote include:
- no specific deferred maintenance allocations were included in the House Budget,
- no state employee pay package was included in the state budget,
- and lottery funds (for technology) were removed.

The removal of the Lottery Technology Funds is troubling, for we fund a number of technology initiatives with these dollars (which amount to approximately $300,000.00), including our new safety technologies (voice over alarm system for emergencies, emergency 911 pinpoint initiative), as well as technology improvements for classrooms. The loss of the Lottery
Technology dollars will be particularly hard on all comprehensive institutions in the state, if it is not overturned as the process continues.

Additionally, the House passed a series of provisos that are of concern to us. These include:
  a. modifications to how we calculate and spend the 4% student tuition waivers (which can impact our ability to grow enrollment)
  b. and, a specific statement that USC Aiken must bring up the retention and graduation rates in two years (achievement tied to future funding).

There are also some discussions and language associated with the organization of higher education under the CHE that is ongoing. We are watching all of these carefully and working hard to build coalitions, educate, and lobby effectively on the impact of all of these proposals to our institution. While continuing to provide information to members of the House, our next step is to focus our attention on the Senate in preparation for the Senate to take up the budget. I want to reiterate what I’ve said frequently in meetings, our local delegation is very supportive of USC Aiken and I’m certain they will continue to assist us throughout this process. If you see any of our state representatives, please tell them how much we appreciate their support and how important both parity, the pedestrian bridge, and the lottery dollars for technology are to sustaining a bright future!

We are not even half-way through the process, and I remain optimistic that we will make some forward progress this year. Needless to say, we will continue to work diligently on helping the legislature understand the good work we are doing, and why supporting USC Aiken is a wise investment for S.C. taxpayers. Stay tuned…it is going to be an interesting and lively session.

Best,

Sandra J. Jordan
Chancellor