During his first month as chancellor of the UT System, William H. McRaven has crisscrossed the state to learn more about the 15 institutions that comprise the system he now leads. He and his wife, Georgeann Brady McRaven, were our guests on campus in late January, when I introduced them to a number of our students and faculty.

Some of us got to hear directly from Chancellor McRaven about the critical issues and legislative priorities he sees for the UT System and for our University. I am pleased to share with you his most recent communication on those same points.

Sincerely,

President David E. Daniel
The University of Texas at Dallas
When I decided to accept the offer to be Chancellor of The University of Texas System, both Georgeann and I knew that it would be the opportunity of a lifetime. After being here a month, I am more excited than ever to be back in Texas to help lead this great institution.

The past month has been an exhilarating whirlwind of campus visits and compelling conversations with students, faculty, staff and community and business leaders. I've spent a considerable amount of time fully immersing myself in all facets of the UT System. I even set up a twitter account and a blog – talk about a fish out of water – because I want to use every avenue possible to engage with the UT community.

And in the midst of it all, the 84th Texas Legislature kicked off, so really, I had no choice but to hit the ground running. A complete list of the UT System's legislative priorities is posted on the UT System website, but I'd like to highlight a few issues that are most critical to the success of our students and institutions at this time:

• The last time we received funding from the Legislature for construction on our campuses was in 2006. Since then, System-wide enrollment has grown by 27,000 students – the size of an entire university. Several of our campuses – UT Dallas, UT Permian Basin, UT Tyler and UT Pan American (soon to become part of UT Rio Grande Valley) – have seen double-digit percent increases in enrollment in the last five years alone. If we were to address the top facility priorities at each UT institution, the total price tag would be about $2 billion. Facilities are aging, and we need to replace or upgrade them with 21st century classrooms, labs and study centers.

• In 2009, the Texas Legislature created the Texas Research Incentive Program, or TRIP, to help the state's emerging research institutions – four of which are in the UT System – join the ranks of top-tier research universities. TRIP serves as an incentive for philanthropic donors because the state matches the private gifts, which are earmarked for research initiatives at each institution. TRIP has been tremendously successful in attracting philanthropic gifts to our state's emerging research institutions, but there is a backlog of more than $120 million in gifts eligible for a state TRIP match.
And there is no more important research than that conducted by our institutions eligible for the Texas Competitive Knowledge Fund (TCKF), which benefits UT Austin and other universities that have reached a high level of annual research expenditures. The TCKF originally provided an eligible university with $1 million for every $10 million the university expends on research and has provided qualifying UT institutions with almost $80 million in the last two years to ensure excellence in both instruction and research. We are respectfully asking that the Legislature continue to provide these incentives to the universities and to our generous donors.

- The Hazlewood Act, named for former Texas Sen. Grady Hazlewood, is a heroic piece of legislation that exempts qualified veterans, their spouses and dependent children from paying tuition at public institutions of higher education in Texas. Currently, the cost of the exemption at institutions across Texas is $169.1 million (UT System institutions account for $42.1 million), and in the next five years, this figure is expected to rise to almost $380 million statewide. Unfortunately, the Hazlewood Act has not been fully funded by the Legislature, and in its current form, Texas higher education may not be able to sustain the cost over the long term. We want to provide our veterans with the education they deserve, but we need the resources to do so.

- The Texas Workforce Commission estimates that Texas will need more than 88,000 new engineers and computer scientists over the next decade to stay economically competitive. At UT, we are asking the Legislature to help "jump start" the hiring of faculty needed to educate this future workforce by appropriating $10 million in each of the next two years, to be matched with philanthropic support. To learn more about the UT System's investment in addressing this critical statewide issue, please read about our Engineering and Computer Science Education Initiative.

I will give these priorities my strongest focus and support during this legislative session. And I will work with my fellow chancellors and my team at UT, and with the friends and supporters of higher education from all around the state, to communicate our issues and requests to the men and women who represent the great state of Texas. Our legislators have my admiration and respect, and I look forward to working with them.

Also in the coming months, I look forward to visiting all of our institutions and meeting with you, our friends and supporters. The impact of your relationship with UT is beyond measure, and I hope that I soon get the opportunity to thank you in person.

With sincerest gratitude and appreciation,

William H. McRaven,
Bill McRaven