MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 20, 2011

TO: University of Alaska Community

FROM: Pat Gamble, President

SUBJECT: The Fisher Report

Early in my appointment to the President’s Office, thanks to the professional interest and strong support by the Rasmussen Foundation, I commissioned an external institutional review of the University of Alaska (UA) system. Today I am releasing the Fisher Report for general distribution. It is not a quick read, nor is it a blueprint to be followed dogmatically. Dr. Fisher is a university president emeritus and a noted author on the subject of university leadership. He and his team of experts have given us not only the benefit of years of experience, but the benefit of their extensive institutional research as well. This is not a report card. In most subject areas the report suggests where we fit in relation to other peer or near peer universities for illustration purposes. Where we markedly differ, it asks “why.” Dr. Fisher’s intention is not to be prescriptive. The report does not contain a checklist. The Fisher report does not, however, shy away from issuing a prescription where the symptoms are compelling.

The Fisher Report presents us with a timely opportunity to get our thinking better organized before we begin work on updating the UA system strategic plan. It includes observations and suggestions that, when combined with other analyses such as the 2008 MacTaggart/Rogers study of the UA System, allows us to establish trends, reinforce or dispel previous conclusions, and set the stage for new directions. Let the reader beware. Some will surely identify faults…perhaps an assertion that is obviously not too applicable here in Alaska, and so on. But do not make the mistake of letting a few off-target fragments obscure the credibility and value inherent throughout the whole report.

Dr. Fisher touches on a wide array of programs and issues in varying degrees of detail, both positive and negative. It is my intention to engage our leadership and governance talent all across UA to identify and address the report’s fundamental themes. We will methodically evaluate these themes and link our subsequent actions to desired outcomes through good planning. In other words, our responses will not be designed to address each critique per se, many of which are simply illustrative or symptomatic data points. We will want to break out high order strengths, challenges and problems. Dr. Fisher’s report will enable us to identify more clearly actions that could lead to the desired effects we seek from following our strategic plan. There is a great deal of complexity that characterizes much of what Dr. Fisher’s team points out and not much to be had in the “low hanging fruit” category…quick reactions just waiting for a snap judgment/decision. This will make our work more challenging, but also more valuable as we pursue affordable ways to build value for our students, credibility with our communities, and the highest return we can on Alaska’s investment in our university.

I encourage readers to jot down notes and send them to me at ua.president@alaska.edu. Better yet, join us in the series of public meetings we will announce in conjunction with our strategic planning process. More information on that will follow in the coming weeks and months. Now, please enjoy a good think piece.