

Dec. 11, 2017

Dear UA Colleagues –

In the coming days, a conference committee will convene to begin the reconciliation of the two tax reform bills that recently passed the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. I continue to engage with our congressional leaders urging them to protect the interests of the university.

In a recent [letter](#) to Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Congressman Don Young, both of whom will serve as members of the conference committee, I urged them to work with their fellow conferees to protect the education tax provisions slated for elimination in the House version of the tax reform bill. Specifically, I advocated for retention of the student loan interest deduction, employer provided tuition assistance, university employee tuition assistance, graduate-level tuition assistance, and the lifetime learning credit.

Collectively, these provisions help our students reduce costs and they most certainly improve access to higher education for thousands of Alaskans. Eliminating them will decrease educational attainment in Alaska and impede the development of the highly-skilled workforce we need to move Alaska's economy forward.

I know the choices facing our elected officials are difficult. Yet it is critical that the final version of the bill preserves each of these important higher education provisions. I will continue to advocate for the university's position and make the case that in today's environment of increasing college costs and rising levels of student debt, we should do everything possible to encourage Alaskans to complete their educational goals. This will help them in terms of their incomes and other important aspects of their lives, and it will help our state develop and diversify our economy.

Sincerely,

Jim Johnsen