

QU putting itself on right track by keeping Conover

HERALD-WHIG VIEW: In asking president to remain, trustees will ensure stability, continuity, brightening university’s future

MEMBERS of the Quincy University Board of Trustees showed impeccable judgment in choosing Phil Conover to remain as the school’s president through the 2018-19 school year.

Trustees opted to ensure stability and continuity for students, faculty, staff and supporters the next two years while the university continues its financial recovery efforts and a board committee searches for a permanent replacement.

And in accepting the challenging assignment, Conover further exemplifies his commitment to one of the most valuable assets in West-Central Illinois.

QU found itself facing an uncertain future a year ago when the school discovered an unexpected \$5 million budgetary shortfall for that fiscal year, which came on the heels of a \$1.4 million operating deficiency in fiscal 2016. The disturbing disclosure necessitated emergency action by trustees to identify the causes of the financial crisis and formulate plans to address it.

Clearly, one of the best decisions by trustees was to coax Conover out of retirement last December to serve as interim chief operations officer. With outside consultant Tom Ponto charged with overseeing financial issues, Conover worked tirelessly to re-engage students, faculty and staff who said they had often felt left out of the school’s day-to-day affairs.

During his first months on the job, Conover met one-on-one with every member of the faculty and staff, and had regular informal meetings with students. He listened to concerns, solicited suggestions and asked for help in improving the educational experience at QU.

Most important, he provided a calming influence both on and off campus during a chaotic and apprehensive time.

When QU President Robert Gervasi, the target of a no-confidence vote by faculty last fall when the depth of the financial crisis was revealed, left to take a similar position at Ohio Dominican University last spring, trustees wisely asked Conover to step in as interim president.

Conover has since been instrumental in establishing new educational agreements with local community colleges, a new strategic plan that includes more focused marketing efforts, and multiple student recruitment

initiatives to boost enrollment and reduce discount tuition rates that had been negatively impacting the school’s bottom line.

Moreover, the 73-year-old Conover, who has compiled extensive educational and civic credentials during his career, has assisted the university’s financial recovery fundraising campaign that has generated \$4.2 million toward its five-year, \$7 million goal.

Clearly, the importance of QU to Quincy and the region cannot be overstated, which makes Conover’s decision to remain actively involved for two more school years even more significant.

A three-month study by the Rural Economic Technical Assistance Center through the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs in Macomb showed that QU has an annual economic impact of \$53 million on the geographic area encompassing Adams, Brown, Hancock, Pike, Scott and Morgan counties.

Combined, university operation and employment accounted for more than \$36.7 million in annualized economic output in the six-county region. Meanwhile, QU spends \$1 million annually in building improvements and construction projects on campus facilities.

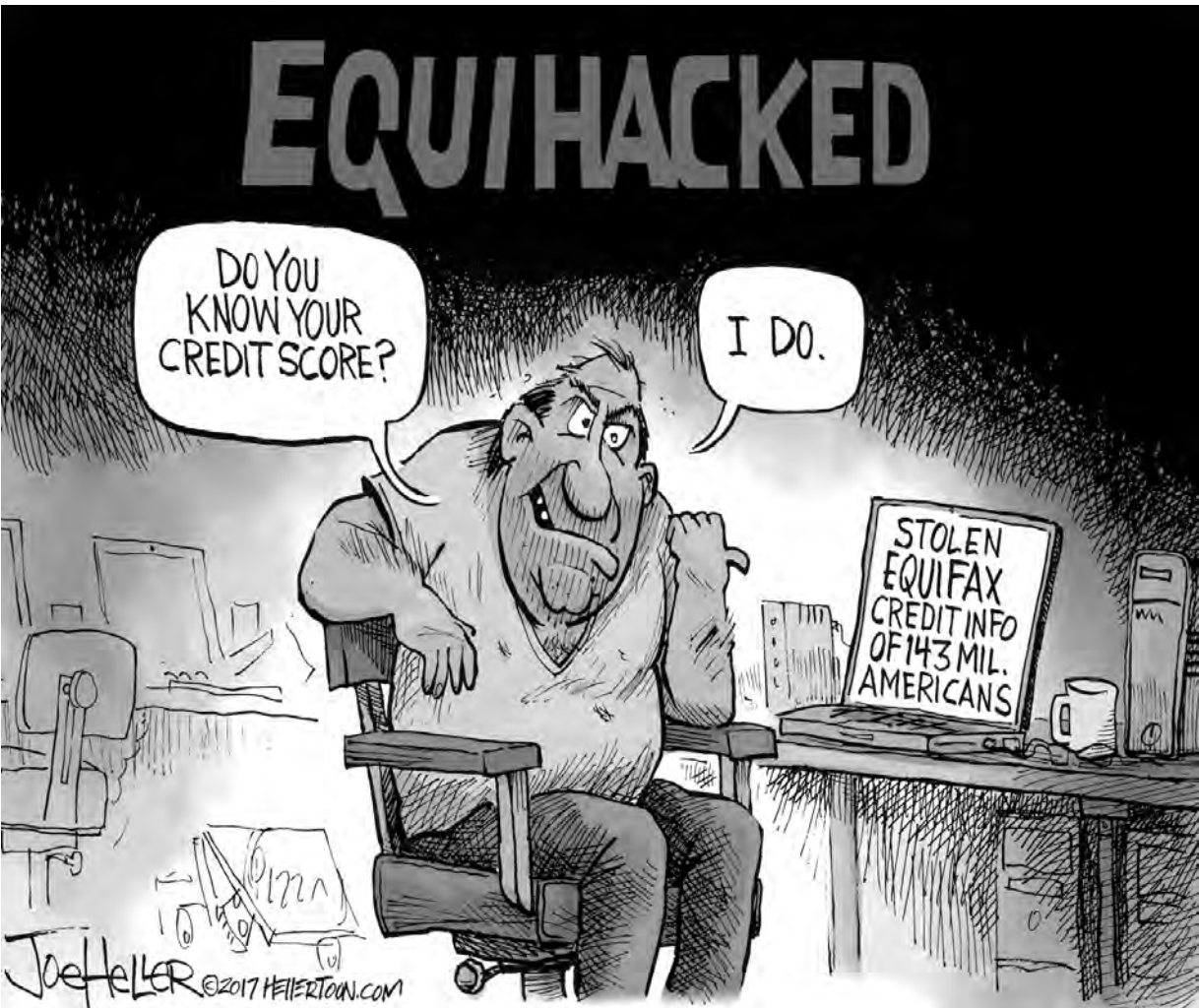
In addition, the study showed the 900 students enrolled at QU in 2016 spent an average of \$3,371 each off campus for transportation, food, drink, dining, recreation and other expenses, or about \$3.03 million overall.

The study also showed that 65 percent of students graduating from QU in 2016 found employment in Quincy or the six-county region. The average salary and benefits of those 157 graduates was \$40,000, or nearly \$6.3 million combined.

Admittedly, considerable work remains and difficult decisions must still be made for QU to get its financial house in order so it can continue to play a vibrant and consequential long-term educational, employment and economic role for Quincy and the region.

However, Conover has demonstrated during the last nine months that he is fully committed to working collaboratively to ensure that QU — established by Franciscan friars in 1860 — not only will survive its current predicament, but will emerge even stronger.

While we extend our appreciation for what Conover already has accomplished under trying conditions, we also look forward to the promise his much-needed leadership will provide.



Disasters unite us in common problem, offering common goal

I once had a very close friend named Charlie. We spent every day together, much of the night, too. I got to learn about his family and old neighborhood, and he got to learn about mine, and then one day I saw him no more. I went my way and he went his, and it has been many years, but I remember him still. We had been in the Army together.

What provoked this thought is Houston and its devastation — and now Florida and the Caribbean. We have been repeatedly told and shown how people have pitched in to help one another. The poor helped the rich, and the rich helped the poor, and people of all races rescued each other.

The storm, the flooding — the utter disaster — gave people a common problem and a common goal. It also reduced them to common socioeconomic status. After a while, people in trouble all look the same — wet, dirty, tired, often dazed. The storm throws them together and reduces them to the essential: people needing help, people looking to help. People. That’s it. People.

The Army did the same for me. I was 23, an erstwhile claims guy for an insurance company who had been plodding through college at night, six credits a semester. At Fort Dix and later Fort Leonard Wood, I got thrown in with country boys who had never had a toothbrush (the Army gave them false teeth) and tough city



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Washington Post

kids who strutted the barracks by day but cried for their mothers in their sleep at night.

We all had the same goal, which was to get through training. We all dressed alike, ate the same food, showered together and, over time, became a single unit. I mostly hated the Army, but I mostly loved those guys.

Now the Army is for volunteers only. Now affluent kids go to schools and colleges with similar people and, afterward, work is usually not much different. They don’t know anyone who never used a toothbrush or cries in the night for his mother. These folks do not, in short, know America.

We are a segmented society, living in our individual bubbles. It has become even worse recently, with people able to choose their news according to their predilections. Conservatives watch Fox News and read Breitbart. Liberals watch MSNBC and read HuffPost.

In civilian life, I never would

have met Charlie, not to mention get to know him. We were of different religions, different tribes from different parts of New York City. He was a washing-machine repairman. I was more or less a college kid. We had little in common, yet we became the best of friends.

I cannot seriously propose reinstituting the draft. I have to be realistic. This generation of gluten-avoiders is not going to happily share a latrine with strangers. But maybe some sort of national service would work — something lasting a year or so. Other nations do that — and they’re not the goose-stepping ones, either. Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Norway have versions of compulsory service.

Often the virtue of national service is described in the work done — public service projects of one sort or another. Fine. Spiff up the slums. Do some social work. But to me, the overriding virtue is education — learning about fellow Americans, getting past skin color or regional smugness, stereotypes that the rich have of the poor and the poor have of the rich. We need a national service that throws us all together. That way Americans can get to know Americans and learn that we are all Americans. A common plight and a common goal is how Houstonians got to know Houstonians. A different plight and a different goal is how I got to know Charlie.

{ YOUR VIEWS }

Preventing suicide is everyone’s business

To The Herald-Whig:
Over 42,000 Americans commit suicide each year. That translates to an average of one death every 12.3 minutes.

It is important to know what you can do to reduce the risk of someone taking their own life, including being aware and then taking action.

It can be scary when you learn that a friend or loved one is thinking about suicide. For people with depression and suicidal thoughts, asking for help

is not easy. If someone comes to you asking for help, the most important thing you can do is to listen and encourage them to seek help.

Each of us needs to become aware of the risk factors and warning signs that can lead to suicide. We need to realize the importance of having a caring conversation and to share information about help being available.

Suicide prevention is everyone’s business. Life is precious and sometimes precarious. Taking a minute to reach out to someone can change the course

of their life.

Remember, you can save a life. Help is just a phone call away through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800-273-TALK (8255). Information is also available to young people and to adults at the Adams County Suicide Prevention Coalition website, acsuicideprevention.org. The coalition’s information can also be found on Facebook and Instagram. Knowledge is power.

Chuck Johnson
Administrative coordinator
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{ SUBMIT LETTERS }

The Herald-Whig welcomes letters about issues or events of general interest. Letters:

- of 400 words or less are given preference.
- may be edited for both length and clarity.
- must be signed.
- must include the writer’s address and telephone number for purposes of verification.
- will normally be limited to one per individual per month.

Letters that are unreasonable, libelous or that deal in personalities or personal disputes will not be accepted.

Letters may be sent to The Herald-Whig in three ways:

- By mail, to: The Herald-Whig, 130 S. Fifth, Quincy, IL 62301
- By email, to: letters@whig.com
- By fax, to: 217-221-3395