



Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors

14 EAST FARM ROAD, OFFICE 110 • UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND • KINGSTON, RHODE ISLAND 02881 • WWW.NERASAES.ORG

March 10, 2021

Dear Glenda, Moses and Tom,

NERA met yesterday and discussed specifically the Agricultural Research Infrastructure Advocacy effort. As the NERA Executive Committee reported to ARIA on January 15, 2021 and as was confirmed by the NERA membership, there is general concern about the prospects of the effort being successful. Here, we share the concerns expressed by the Association.

NERA appreciates that the APLU intends to seek support through the Research Facilities Act, an extant opportunity. While the advocacy materials indicate that a blanket waiver of match will be sought and that strategies to ensure equity of access of funds across all schools, 1862 to 1890 to 1994, small to medium to large, will be advocated for, NE institutions are struggling with the strategy of “we’ll work through the details of how to do that later.” While our institutions do not oppose the ask, it is hard for our institutions to prioritize an ask which may or may not provide much needed support for their programs. Further, have all of the possible avenues for funding infrastructure been explored? What are the strategies to ensure transparent, fair and equitable means for spreading opportunities to address the deficits created by deferred maintenance? The trust issue continues to be a sticking point.

Moreover, the NERA directors note an evolution of the Sightlines/Gordian narrative, from deferred maintenance to replacement. The concern here is that \$11.5 billion fixes what we have, \$38.1 billion replaces. The infrastructure strategy must stand up to the test of whether it will truly address the nationwide deferred maintenance needs or be diverted in part or whole to enable the construction of new, exciting, state-of-the-art facilities to the exclusion of more prosaic but none-the-less crucial, roof replacements, electrical up-grades etc. to protect and prolong the life of our existing infrastructure. Are we short-changing ourselves by defaulting to a number that does not achieve what we seek? And what is it that we are specifically seeking? The talking points note “We need new facilities...” and not much more. If new, then shouldn’t we be focused on \$38.5 billion instead of \$11.5 billion?

Northeastern government affairs staff are asking directors, “what does this mean for our campus” and “how does this fit into the university’s priorities?” For widespread support, the effort must float all boats higher on the incoming tide. Further, Federal lobbyists on several Northeast campuses have shared skepticism about the chance of success. While supportive of the effort, these experts have cautioned directors about spending political capital on an initiative that does not appear to have congressional champions. NERA has asked, who are the congressional champions and why isn’t the APLU’s paid lobbying group, Cornerstone, working those channels? It is unlikely that this initiative will be opposed by our institutions or delegations but a lack of opposition or tepid support will be insufficient for success. A strong contingent of geographically and politically diverse champions must be engaged.

The Northeast seeks guidance on how best to support this initiative. We appreciate that the initiative requires widespread support and thus we seek your counsel on addressing specifics on the funding mechanisms that ensure equity, the specifics of what we are seeking (beyond "We need new facilities...") and a list of congressional champions from which Northeastern government affairs staff could work. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Matt Wilson (WVU), Chair-NERA

Jody Jellison (UMASS), Past Chair-NERA

Eric Wommack (UD), Vice Chair-NERA

Mark Hutton (UME), Officer-at-large-NERA

NERA Executive Committee

CC: Doug Steele