



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

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To the Editor:

Last week the Legislative Division of Post Audit, the investigative arm of the state legislature, unveiled an important and compelling report that any homeowner across the state can relate to. The audit concluded that years of financial neglect have left our six state university campuses in a dangerous state of disrepair.

Last year the Board of Regents comprehensively examined 537 university buildings across the state. This study identified a deferred maintenance backlog of \$584 million that will grow to nearly \$800 million within ten years if not addressed. After reviewing the Board's 2004 study, Legislative Post Audit noted that Board's original estimates "could be on the low side."

Two out of every three buildings that the State of Kansas owns can be found on the six state university campuses. The 537 buildings studied in the Board's 2004 report exclude auxiliary facilities such as residence halls, student unions and parking garages. These 537 buildings represent 20 million square feet that are sited on 2,250 maintained acres. To put this amount of space into perspective, 20 million square feet is the equivalent of 350 football fields. The replacement value of these buildings, including utilities and infrastructure, is \$3.9 billion.

Experts agree that it takes \$74 million a year to adequately maintain our state university campuses. However, only \$7 million was available last year. Unfortunately, this is not just a recent trend. It has taken years, if not decades, of neglect to reach today's state of disrepair. While the 1996 "Crumbling Classrooms" initiative did provide a much-needed band-aid for the wound, Post Audit pointed out that the initiative did not provide new state dollars for maintenance. The initiative essentially charged building repairs to a credit card whose balance won't be paid off until the year 2012.

What does all this mean for hard-working Kansans? This means that duct tape is being used for building maintenance instead of mortar. This means that steel awnings have been installed to shield people from large pieces of limestone that are crumbling off buildings. This means that 80-year old hot water pipes, located inside building walls, are bursting and causing millions of dollars in damage. This means that your investment in our valuable state university infrastructure is not being protected.

In summary, this important audit echoes what the Board of Regents and many state legislators have said for years, that a dangerous university maintenance backlog exists and that new state funding hasn't been found to fix the growing problem. Routine maintenance projects aren't exciting and they don't generate bold newspaper headlines. However, any homeowner knows that routine maintenance and repairs only get more expensive the longer they are put off. Hard working Kansans and their families expect their investments to be protected and they expect a high quality higher education system that will prepare them to compete in the global 21st Century economy. The important assets found on our state university campuses must be protected. Duct tape can no longer fix this growing problem.

-Donna Shank

Donna Shank, of Liberal, is the Chair of the nine-member Kansas Board of Regents.