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January 29, 2015

Robert G. Brinkley, J.D., Chair
East Carolina University Board of Trustees
2225 Sharon Lane
Charlotte, North Carolina 28211

Dr. Steve Ballard, Chancellor
105 Spilman Building
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina 27858

Dear Chairman Brinkley and Chancellor Ballard,

I would like to praise the two forums led by Robert Brinkley, chair, and the Board of Trustees on Monday and Tuesday, January 26, 27. The board served ECU well in offering students, faculty, and members of the public an opportunity to express themselves directly and be heard regarding the proposed renaming of Aycock Residence Hall. These were invaluable opportunities for us to learn from each other. We greatly appreciate your leadership in making them possible.

The forums helped us to clarify further our thinking on the issues. If I may, I would like to go on record by sharing my views through this open letter. I plan to send a briefer statement to *The Daily Reflector*, for publication.

When Gov. Aycock spoke on campus in 1910, he offered his highest ideals and best expression of how he wanted East Carolina to remember him. His topic, universal education, remains as challenging and timeless today as it was then. When Aycock Hall was dedicated in 1962, Gov. Aycock's work for universal education for "both races and equally for poor children and wealthier" was praised. In honoring Aycock, our purpose was and should be to honor his indefatigable service to universal public education.

To characterize Gov. Aycock on the basis of his earlier white supremacy rhetoric is both one-dimensional and, egregiously, amounts to bottom-feeding on history. Those remarks were not why he was honored then, and they should not dominate our perception of his legacy now. In office, he established over 1,000 public schools, statewide, for both blacks and whites, rich and poor. Illiteracy levels plummeted during his administration and North Carolina rose from the bottom of states in terms of public support for education, to recognition as *the* progressive Southern state devoting itself to universal literacy and learning. Gov. Aycock literally gave his life to advocacy of universal education, not white supremacy.

It would be a mistake to engage in iconoclasm due to misperception. What seems most appropriate is, first, a university statement clarifying what in the Aycock legacy we do affirm – universal education, equal opportunity, democracy, individualism, and the possibility for all to find self-fulfillment. The same statement should disavow unequivocally Gov. Aycock’s advocacy of white supremacy. This is long overdue. ECU does not have to rename a building to make such an ethical statement.

We need positive – not negative – solutions. We need to build a better future by elevating our ideals rather than by trying to remove our past.

Second, I want to endorse, with amendment (hopefully friendly), a proposal made by my colleague in History, Dr. David Dennard. David proposed renaming Aycock Residence Hall, the Laura Marie Leary Elliott Residence Hall, honoring ECU’s first African American full-time undergraduate.

Rather than renaming Aycock Residence Hall for Ms. Elliott – thus making Ms. Elliot the namesake for a “second-hand,” aging dorm, a “hand-me-down” facility that will carry the historical identity of Gov. Aycock for its duration – it would be far more fitting to name a new and grand building on campus, either the Gateway Dorm or the new student union, after Ms. Elliott. We should do this soon. There is no need to wait until construction is complete to assign a name honoring one whose contributions to our campus have been truly monumental.

This should be done ASAP in order to announce most positively ECU's public commitment to diversity, inclusion, and recognition of all on campus.

Ms. Elliott's contributions were priceless, well surpassing any check that might seek naming rights for a building. Our need for money should never trump our values, nor relegate Ms. Elliott's name to a second-hand dorm. Selling the soul of any university by offering naming rights in return for checks written is a far remove from doing the right thing.

Dr. Andrew Best's name should be added to the same new facility, making it the Best-Elliott Residence Hall, thus honoring both Ms. Elliott and the local physician who recommended to Dr. Leo Jenkins that Ms. Elliott enroll at East Carolina as our first African American full-time student. Dr. Best also played a crucial role in the desegregation of our local hospital and community in the early 1960s, making him one of Greenville's most outstanding citizens in the twentieth century. Dr. Best served on the ECU Board of Trustees and the UNC Board of Governors. His contributions were also monumental.

The newly named building would moreover bring East and West campuses more closely together by aptly highlighting the health sciences mission of the university. Combined, the Best-Elliott name would have an enduring, mission-statement value beyond calculation. What better way to affirm our commitment to diversity and send an unmistakable message to everyone that we know where we have been, and where we are heading in the future.

Thirdly, our undergraduates *must* study ECU history in order to understand who we are as an institution of higher education, where we came from, where we are today, and where we need to go in the future.

Socrates and Plato both declared, "Know thyself." Our tomorrow started in our past, in our inescapable historical roots. Progressing toward that tomorrow can only occur by first looking our troubled history squarely in the eye and seeing it for what it was. Through coming to know ourselves institutionally, we will be empowered to face the future and the challenges

it brings. In requiring the study of ECU history, we will also offer ultimate service to our students and their future.

We have already staged lectures and other events on campus celebrating our diversity. Plaques, posters, and exhibits – ephemeral at best – are hardly sufficient. Until we make teaching and ongoing education about ECU an integral component of our way forward, we run the risk of veering off course rather than realizing truly enlightened progress.

Education has always been the heart and soul of our institution. It must be the key to our tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Tucker". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Sincerely yours,".

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