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Office of the President

August 8, 2012

TO: SLU LAW Faculty and Staff
CC: Saint Louis University Board of Trustees
FROM: Lawrence Biondi, S.J., President

I write to you today to let you know that there will be a change in the leadership at the School of Law. Effective immediately, Annette Clark will return to the faculty, and Mr. Thomas Q. Keefe will assume the responsibilities of dean of the law school for the 2012-2013 academic year. Dr. Manoj Patankar, vice president for academic affairs, will begin the search for a new dean this fall.

At 11 a.m. today, there was a scheduled meeting between Prof. Clark and Dr. Patankar, at which time Dr. Patankar and I had intended to terminate Prof. Clark's appointment as dean of our School of Law. It was also my intention to send you a direct communication today regarding these leadership changes.

Prof. Clark did not have the courtesy to honor this regularly scheduled meeting, and instead emailed a letter of resignation to Dr. Patankar and me, in which she resigned as dean effective immediately.

Her emails to Dr. Patankar and me, and to the faculty and staff of our School of Law, demonstrate a lack of a clear and comprehensive understanding of the duties and obligations, autonomy and authority, of a modern-day dean at a large and complex university.

Because this is a personnel matter – per University policy – we will have no further comment except to say that I strongly disagree with many of her interpretations of the facts. Moreover, her assertion of a lack of support for the law school could not be further from the truth.

I believe this is a critical time for our School of Law. We are faced with a declining number of students applying and enrolling in our law school (a problem many law schools across the U.S. are experiencing); fundraising for the move to our new law building in downtown St. Louis; much discussion about our decline in the national rankings of American law schools; challenges from many law alumni and corporate and civic leaders on how we best educate our law students so that they can get jobs after graduation; and many other factors.

We all need to more effectively analyze our strengths and weaknesses and examine more carefully the law education we deliver with fresh eyes and with less concern about rankings and more attention to how we teach our students. The move to the Joe and Loretta Scott Law Center gives us a real opportunity to focus on how we can differentiate a SLU law education from that offered by other schools; not only in our future physical location, but also in determining and fulfilling a number of academic niches and very distinctive assets.

To those ends, I believe bringing in someone with a fresh perspective is imperative, and I am pleased that respected Belleville attorney Thomas Q. Keefe Jr. has accepted the offer to serve as dean of the law school for the 2012-2013 academic year. Since graduating in 1978, Tom has been one of the region's top trial lawyers. He is annually named by his peers as one of the five best personal injury lawyers in the State of Illinois.

Tom and his family have a long and impressive history with our law school. Tom, his father, four brothers and two of his children have attended SLU's School of Law. Tom has also supported our law school with two endowed professorships and a scholarship. He loves Saint Louis University and our law school, and he believes in the school's mission and vision, now and for the future.

As many of you know, Tom owns a thriving law practice in Belleville and has repeatedly been named one of the top lawyers in all of Illinois. As an active practicing lawyer, he will bring perspectives that will be helpful as we examine our future and how best to produce graduates who meet the needs of law firms in St. Louis and around the country.

He is not only a highly respected attorney, but he is an energetic, dynamic and engaging person; reflective and insightful; positive minded and a team builder. I have every confidence that he will be a strong leader for the law school in the coming year. He and his wife, Rita, are also known for their philanthropy to educational and health care-related causes, such as the Land of Lincoln Legal Aid Society, Women's Crisis Center and Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center.

This change in leadership in no way slows our determination to move our law school into its new home in downtown St. Louis. I am committed to this project, and Tom has agreed to enthusiastically and wholeheartedly engage in fundraising for the renovations to the Scott Law Center. Tom knows many of our alumni personally, and I have no doubt that he will play an essential role in these fundraising efforts.

While I realize this change comes just weeks before classes begin, I am confident that you and the many fine faculty and staff of our law school will work to make this transition as seamless as possible. I know that Tom Q. Keefe is looking forward to meeting all of you in the days ahead, and I would ask each of you to give him your support.