

Senator Dalton Collins Remarks on SSR-113-10

I have presented the legislation before you today because the constituency I represent has a concern, a concern that has to date not been answered effectively by members of the university administration. The students I represent have heard rumors of a land swap that is due to take place in the very near future. This deal would affect 15 acres of the 30 acre woodland area located to the southeast of the building in which we hold this meeting. These woodlands are prized by the students at this Institution. They are a valuable asset to the quality of campus life. The hiking, biking, and observation that take place in this area are irreplaceable facets of campus life for many members of the student population. This area is a place of pride in our environment, region, and university. The opportunities for study offered by the natural area are a few among the many unique amenities which sets East Tennessee State University apart from others in the region.

Page 3 of the University Master Plan published this year highlights 3 words. Two of these come to mind when I think of this proposed land swap. They are “Relationships” and “Efficiency.” These two ideals were missing from the plan Dr. Collins laid out to me in a meeting held on a Friday afternoon some two weeks ago. While this plan establishes a superb business relationship with Carnegie, it slights the students – the very ones with whom relationships should be the most cherished. After all, without the students, there would be no need for this land,

these buildings, any faculty member, or staff person at ETSU. The focus of this deal is the relationship with our benefactors, but without the students, there is no one for these donors to benefit. The administration's relationship with the student body should be maintained as long as our requests are reasonable. Secondly, "efficiency" is highlighted. This plan is not efficient. It does not take an economist, a surveyor, or a trained cartographer to see that trading this fifteen acre plot of "undevelopable" land plus an estimated \$450,000 to Carnegie – which promises to develop it – for a 3.6 acre plot is not efficient. It is the opinion of many of my constituents that this is not only an irresponsible move on the part of the University, but it may border on reckless. The students may have drawn the wrong conclusion on this matter; this is very much possible as the student body has received ZERO official information on the matter.

On the very same page of the very same plan I have previously mentioned, Dr. Stanton is quoted as saying, "I am exceedingly proud that the university has been able to plan effectively, identify a variety of sources of funding, and proceed with implementation of plans to meet our expanding needs. Effective planning takes time and draws upon the careful consideration of the various stakeholders on campus and the expertise of professionals." With this being said, the proposed land swap is absent from the master plan. Instead, inside this 137 page document there is listed, in detail, how the wooded area will eventually be used by the

University for the construction of residence facilities by the Department of Housing and Residence Life. By Dr. Stanton's own words, he says careful planning is a necessity and the careful plan which bears his signature has no mention of the bartering of land for the purpose of which it is intended. Dr. Stanton also calls for a consideration of the stakeholders on campus. For as much as I can recall, the just over 15,000 stakeholders which comprise the student body have never had a chance to be considered because we have never been educated on the matter.

The arguments I have heard from administration are that we are land locked, held to our current perimeter by land not controlled by the University. I have been told that it is imperative to the University to obtain the 3.6 acre lot for future development. Even though, according to the existing master plan, the 3.6 acre lot is not a recommended site for land acquisition. However, according to office of University Effectiveness's fact book published in 2009, campus housing was operating at 99.19% capacity for the Fall 2009 semester and greater than 100% capacity for Fall 2007 and Fall 2008 semesters. This shows a heavy demand for on-campus, university provided housing options. This shows a need for the retention of this property for the future use of the Culp Woods acreage for housing development on behalf of the university. Giving this land to Carnegie would only serve to diminish the buildable acreage controlled by the University.

Finally, let me be frank, I have spoken to zero undergraduate students in favor of this land swap in the manner it was presented to me. I have found overwhelming support for the retention of the area by the University for academic and recreational usage. It is clear to me what the students want at this point and time. They want the Culp Woods to remain in their pristine condition. However, more importantly, they want to be educated on the matter. They want to know what is going on with THEIR university. They feel as if they have been cheated, swindled and misled. They feel as if the communication gap between administrators and students is widening instead of narrowing. They want to know about THEIR school. The students want a public forum on the matter. They want to know about this acquisition and deposition of property before it happens. They want to hear what the powers that be have to say on the matter. Therefore, I ask you, the student representatives, to join the student body in asking for a public forum to be held on the matter before the Winter Recess. I also ask for your support of the other parts of the legislation which ensure that this situation will not occur again in the future. These parts assure the student body that their voice will be heard. A vote of yes for this legislation is imperative. The current and future condition of our campus is at stake.