FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUSTIN -- Today, state Senator José Rodríguez sent a letter to the University of Texas System's Board of Regents and Chancellor Cigarroa requesting reconsideration of the ban on alcohol at the World Middleweight Championship boxing match between Julio César Chávez, Jr. and Andy Lee.

The text of the letter is as follows:

May 1, 2012

Board of Regents
University of Texas System
Ashbel Smith Hall, Suite 820
201 West 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Regents:

On Thursday, April 26, 2012, I requested that the Board of Regents immediately review the events surrounding Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa's decision to cancel the World Middleweight Championship boxing match at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). In addition, I requested that the issue be placed on the agenda for your May 2-3, 2012 meeting to give me an opportunity to address you and to provide an opportunity for public input.
On Friday, April 27, 2012, after Chancellor Cigarroa reconsidered his position and decided to allow UTEP to host the fight, I spoke with UT System officials and reiterated my request to have this issue added as an agenda item for this week's Board of Regents meeting.

As this item was not placed on the meeting agenda, I am writing you today to share my observations and concerns regarding the events surrounding the initial decision to cancel the event, the stipulations that have been placed on UTEP if they host the match, the lessons learned from this incident, and how we, collectively, can ensure that an incident such as this does not happen again in the future.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the ramifications of Chancellor Cigarroa's actions will be felt in El Paso for years to come. Although consistently ranked one of the safest large cities in the nation, as a result of the attention this issue has received, El Paso's reputation has suffered. In addition, the initial decision to cancel the fight would have cost the city and UTEP millions of dollars in lost revenue.

As I have expressed to Chancellor Cigarroa, this situation could have been avoided had he or UT System officials consulted with El Paso's elected leaders and local, state and federal law enforcement regarding any security concerns. It is critical that we all work together, especially when making decisions that will affect an entire community.

Now that Chancellor Cigarroa has reversed his decision, UTEP and El Paso can move forward.

Although I appreciate that the Chancellor heeded the advice of the local leaders and law enforcement, I do have serious concerns regarding the ban on the sale of alcohol during the event. The increased law enforcement presence and extensive media attention will likely minimize any concerns related to alcohol consumption at the event. In addition, UTEP routinely limits the amount of alcohol that may be consumed at its events (e.g., maximum of two drinks per person). My concerns are as follows:

- With an alcohol ban at the venue, many attendees will likely consume alcohol before arriving at the Sun Bowl.
- There may be an increased number of "tailgates" in the areas surrounding the university.
- Ticket sales will likely suffer as a result of the ban.
- It is my understanding that the revenue from alcohol sales goes to UTEP and not the promoter. If this is the case, UTEP will lose a substantial revenue source that the university could have used to fill gaps in their budget. Simply put, this ban limits the ability of UTEP to raise revenues at the local level at a time when the state has slashed funding for the university.

The addition of conditions like the ban on alcohol sales or requiring Dr. Natalicio to send a letter to the entire UTEP community "appraising them of the date and time of the event, and provide assurances that law enforcement agencies have addressed any security concerns" resulting from the fight, brings attention to the issue of local control.

Ultimately, the ban on alcohol sales perpetuates the idea that our community is unsafe or that El Pasoans and other attendees cannot be trusted if alcohol is available. It also suggests that our local leaders are not allowed the discretion to make their own determinations when it involves the safety and security of our community, as it is my understanding that the Chancellor or other UT System officials are not typically involved to this degree in these types of decisions.
As you're likely aware, UTEP has hosted world-class championships in the past, and in fact, two weeks ago, the campus hosted the nationally broadcast WBC Super Bantamweight World Championship fight at the Don Haskins Center. In addition, the annual Sun Bowl football game and major concerts are regularly held at the campus’ stadium.

With regard to these past events, I do not recall any similar conditions being put in place by the Chancellor or UT System officials. I am also not aware of any such conditions being placed on similar events at other UT institutions, including the ESPN Friday Night Fights hosted at the Frank Erwin Center on Friday, April 27, 2012; the revenue generated by sales of alcohol from this fight will undoubtedly benefit UT Austin.

Finally, it is my hope that you, as members of the Board of Regents, take a "lessons learned" approach and review the current procedures for evaluating safety and security of any event at UT institutions. In particular, it is vitally important to put in place a process for consulting with local officials and law enforcement with regard to events like this one. As I mentioned to Chancellor Cigarroa, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) has the structure in place to coordinate information between law enforcement agencies at the local, state, and federal level. This type of coordination amongst law enforcement as well as local leadership has been critical to our success in maintaining El Paso’s status designation as one of the safest large cities in America and can serve as a valuable resource to the UT System.

In conclusion, I ask that the Board and Chancellor reconsider the ban on the sale of alcohol at this event. I look forward to receiving your comments and working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

José Rodríguez

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