Statement by Interim Chancellor Denise Eby Konan
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa
Regarding the Proposed UARC Contract
December 5, 2005

On November 18, 2004 Chancellor Englert requested that the Board of Regents approve the establishment of an Applied Research Laboratory and the designation of the University of Hawaii at Manoa as a University Affiliated Research Center (UARC). At that time, the BOR approved the UARC, provisional on the successful negotiation of a contract and completion of consultation with key stakeholders including the Manoa Faculty Senate.

The University of Hawaii at Manoa has negotiated a draft UARC contract with the U.S. Naval Sea Systems Command. In its present form, the proposal would establish an applied research laboratory that is integrated into the research infrastructure at the UH Manoa campus.

The UHM administration has also engaged in extensive consultation with multiple stakeholders. Universities are places that thrive on debate. Knowledge and the advancement of society are based on the free exchange of ideas. Such has been the campus discussion over the UARC.

Those opposed to the UARC view it as an institutional relationship with the U.S. Navy that would promote military research on campus. Publication restrictions and the potential for research to become classified were of concern. There is a concern about making a significant investment into establishing a military affiliated center when other core parts of our mission are neglected.

Others back the UARC, arguing for the academic freedom of faculty to seek research funding. The expansion of funded research has supported the University even as tuition revenues and state funding remained stagnant. There is a concern about a slippery slope if barriers are put up on faculty research that may be controversial or unpopular. While most of the UARC supporters will not use it as a funding instrument, they realize how difficult it is to maintain a stream of competitive funding to support research programs, equipment, and staff.

Polls of faculty across schools and colleges reveal distinct divisions among the faculty around this contract. The UARC enjoys strong support from faculty who rely on extramural funding to sustain their research programs. It has mixed to negative reaction among liberal arts faculty.

Few faculty have expressed an interest in actively participating in UARC-funded research. Those who have are renowned researchers engaged in other projects. For them, the UARC provides bridge funding among other more competitive sources of funding. Additional staff, equipment, and facilities would need to be secured to support
UARC research. Should projects become classified, they would be moved off campus following policy.

The proposed UARC is unique as it integrates projects into existing facilities and permits dual use of UARC-funded personnel and equipment. The Naval UARCs at other universities are located in self-contained laboratories, with independent facilities and staff.

As this UARC proposed a new model for the relationship between the U.S. government and a university, negotiations were time-consuming and difficult. Were a UARC to be established, a complex management structure would need to be put into place to assure necessary safeguards for national security interests within the context of an open academic campus environment.

Against this backdrop, the Manoa Faculty Senate conducted a deliberate review and weighed the considerations involved. An ad hoc committee compiled input from across campus. The review included a detailed legal analysis of the particular conditions of the proposed contract. At the core of the debate was an examination of Manoa's mission and how to promote our future as a research university.

While the faculty senate 31-18 decision reflects divisions on this issue, the collective wisdom clearly does not support the advancement of the contract that is being proposed. Faculty input is advisory and not binding. However, to advance the UARC when our faculty, our undergraduate student body (ASUH), the Kuali'i council, and others are opposed would undermine the governance of our campus.

I am firmly committed to the ability of individual faculty members to pursue defense-related research and funding. Academic freedom is a cornerstone of our university. It is my obligation, and the imperative of the University, to maintain a collegial environment that is free from threat and intimidation. Faculty will continue to engage in naval research at our university.

The UARC was negotiated in good faith and I am grateful to Vice Chancellors Ostrander and Cutshaw for the work they have put into this project.

Nevertheless, the proposed UARC with the U.S. Navy is not supported by our campus. The contract remains problematic and it would be difficult to implement an integrated UARC on our campus. The proposed UARC would involve very few of our researchers. Due to the potential for research to become classified and to the significant research space constraints on the UH-Manoa, UARC-related research would more appropriately be located off-campus.

Advancing the proposed UARC is not in the best interest of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Thus, I do not recommend proceeding with the contract and will not send it forward to President McClain and the Board of Regents.

On the Web at: http://www.manoa.hawaii.edu/mco/