



The University of Vermont

Office of the President

February 2, 2009

Daniel Mark Fogel

From: Daniel Mark Fogel, President

To: UVM Community

Re: **Commencement Speaker**

I am writing to inform you that Ben Stein, a renowned economist and public personality, has informed me of his decision to withdraw from our Commencement ceremonies in May.

As you may know, Mr. Stein delivered an excellent Kalkin lecture on our campus last year, focused primarily on economic issues, to which our students responded warmly and enthusiastically. It was on the basis of that experience that I extended him an invitation to be our Commencement speaker.

Mr. Stein has also expressed opinions on subjects unrelated to economics, most notably with respect to evolutionary theory, intelligent design, and the role of science in the Holocaust. Those views are highly controversial, to say the least. Following the announcement of Mr. Stein as Commencement speaker, profound concerns have been expressed to me by persons both internal and external to the University about his selection. Once I apprised Mr. Stein of these communications, he immediately and most graciously declined our Commencement invitation.

We will identify another Commencement speaker in the weeks ahead. In the future, I plan to use a more consultative process to identify Commencement speakers who, as part of their involvement, receive honorary degrees from UVM as part of the ceremony.

In retrospect, I am sorry that I did not anticipate the breadth and intensity of the concerns expressed in this instance. Although I am firm in my belief—profoundly held—that, as a university, UVM is and must remain a marketplace of ideas, I also recognize that Commencement should be a time when our community gathers inclusively, not divisively, in full celebration of the achievements of our graduates, of the families who join us to honor them, and of the institution itself and our academic values as a scholarly, scientific, and creative community.