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Ms. Joan Rabin
Chancellor's Council
UCSB
Santa Barbara, California 93106

Dear Joan:

I heard that Walter Capps has been nominated for the National Professor of the Year Award given by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. Assuming that this information is correct and that comments from those who know Walter are of some benefit, I venture to write an analysis of his skills as a teacher.

I came to know Professor Capps while I was Governor of Nebraska. He is a native of Omaha and on a trip home we were introduced to each other by a mutual friend. That I expected the meeting to come to nothing is another example of my almost infinite capacity to underestimate the magic of unanticipated moments of discovery.

In that moment when we met, I discovered a remarkable human being and I declare this at the outset of my evaluation of Walter. It should be clear that I am prejudiced in his favor and would probably support him for practically any of this world's aware. I like and respect Walter Capps as a man, husband, father, and teacher. I am thankful and grateful for our meeting.

The meeting itself, I believe, is a good illustration of why he is a good teacher. He remains almost child like in his curiosity and shows by example that exploration into the unknown can be fun. The work and sacrifice that are requirements of intellectual disciplines become apparent only after students like myself say: "I think I'm going to enjoy this".

It seems to me that fear of the unknown and the ability of the mind to seed our souls with rationalizations telling us to do something easier contribute most to our unwillingness to make the effort needed if we are to learn. There is something about Professor Capps that is so non-threatening that we manage to cross the danger point before we know it.

When I was a boy, I was afraid of graveyards at night. Try as I might I could never walk through one in the dark without hearing every beat of my adolescent heart. In Walter's care we do not avoid these mental graveyards. Though our pulse may quicken a bit, we find that we are where we see worlds we did not know existed.

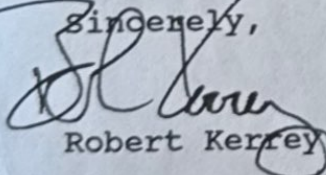
As a boy I also once visited a county fair in Seward, Nebraska. My memory tells me that I was thirteen years old. A friend convinced me to join him in sneaking to the back of the tent where we were told a girlie show was taking place. We knew we were in forbidden territory as we crawled on our stomachs and squirmed under the tight canvas floor of that tent. We were frightened not only about possibly being discovered, but also because of what we might see.

As we looked up onto the stage where a full grown and completely naked woman danced to the song "Kansas City", our world in one terrifying moment got twice as big. It seems to me that Walter's rare gift is that he enables young people to overcome their fear and to lift up a tent or two.

I suppose that the list of those recommended for the National Professor of the Year is long and impressive. I suppose that "competition" is intense. I cannot state that Walter is most deserving and would not even maintain that he deserve it at all.

What I believe is this: If I ever hear him introduced as Walter Capps, 1987 National Professor of the Year, I will say that the title is a comfortable fit.

Sincerely,



Robert Kerrey