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School Alumni Press Officials To Quit Posts

By **Liz Valsamis**

Daily Journal Staff Writer

A group of University of West Los Angeles law school alumni has offered to stand behind a \$1-million line of credit in exchange for the resignation of the school's president and the reversal of recent tuition hikes.

The move is the latest in a string of troubles for President Robert W. Brown and other administrators, who students accuse of mismanaging the law school's finances, resulting in two tuition increases and culminating with a unanimous no-confidence vote by a 12-member faculty committee.

The law school enrolls about 425 students in its law and paralegal programs.

"The faculty, staff and students have such positive energy and are willing to really work to make this university a resounding success," said student Marc McCulloch, who has led a protest against the administration.

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"The main stumbling block to all this positive energy is the very person who should be responsible for the success of the university and that is President Brown. We expect when he's out of the way that this university will flourish."

The letter of credit was offered by a group of alumni led by Edmond Nassirzadeh, a real estate and litigation lawyer.

In a letter to the university's board of trustees, said he and other alumni would stand behind a \$1-million revolving line of credit to sustain the university through the next academic year in exchange for the resignation of Brown and Chief Financial Officer David Wolf.

In a telephone interview, Nassirzadeh refused to say how many alumni have joined him in the effort.

"There's plenty of us," he said. "We don't want to see the school go under," Nassirzadeh explained. "We want to have the school continue its mission."

Nassirzadeh said the credit line was conditional because the alumni have not seen the school's financial records.

Wolf could not be reached. In a telephone interview, Brown said addressing the merits of Nassirzadeh's letter would not serve the school's interests.

"I think most people know the struggles the institution has been through and there have been a lot of people who've played a prominent role in rebuilding the

University of West Los Angeles and now a few people are trying to take that away from us," Brown said.

Brown said that when he arrived at the school, it was under threat of losing its accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Inc. that allows the school to offer federal student loans.

Paul Coony, chairman of the University of West Los Angeles' board of trustees, said Nassirzadeh's offer would be reviewed by the board.

"It needs to be presented to the board members in terms of the ordinary process through our meetings, and we'll consider it," he said.

"When the faculty first raised the issue, we responded to the faculty that the board has confidence in President Brown and in the CFO, David Wolf," Coony said.

Coony said that he plans to meet with students Wednesday to discuss their concern regarding the tuition hikes.

"We are dedicated to working with our constituents, the students, the staff, the faculty and the administration," he said. "Those are our responsibilities. I believe that the trustees are fully committed to that."

On April 15, the faculty committee sent a letter addressed to the students of the school revealing that on March 24, the 12-member Faculty Senate of the School of Law had notified the board of trustees of its no confidence vote.

"The faculty and staff have, for some

time, been extremely concerned about the management and direction of the University," the letter read, which was signed by the associate dean of academic affairs Andrew H. Kopkin.

"I'm aware of the offer that has been made by Mr. Nassirzadeh and I think it's a very good opportunity for the university," Kopkin said. "And one that I hope will be taken with utmost seriousness by the board of trustees."

McCulloch, the student who has led the protest against the administration, said the price of his law school education has gone up \$9,000 since his December 2003 enrollment.

Two tuition hikes have brought the hourly credit fee to \$695, a \$110 increase over the last two years.

McCulloch blames the increase on the sale of the West Los Angeles campus, a 3.8-acre property near Los Angeles International Airport, the school's only asset.

At the time, the school was on the verge of losing its federal student loan accreditation.

But Brown said the school needed to sell the property to survive and that the sale was considered a good deal that provided the resources to help rebuild the school.

"[The school] is perched and primed to be in a positive position for the future," he said. "It's a classic turnaround situation."

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