

DRI officials fear university takeover

By Associated Press

Members of one of Nevada's top environmental research organizations fear that the pending exit of its president will lead to a takeover by the state's largest universities.

Longtime Desert Research Institute President Stephen Wells will leave this summer for another job in New Mexico. Organization officials say they are concerned state leaders will try to fold the institute's resources into one or both of Nevada's universities, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported.

"Our faculty are nervous," Wells said. "I've encouraged them to be very candid about what their feelings are, and I would say most people want to stay as an independent institution."

Nevada System of Higher Education Chancellor Dan Klaich said there are no plans at this time to overhaul the institute. Klaich did question the potential merits of a takeover during a faculty meeting, but he said that those were theoretical.

"Change makes folks nervous – especially change in leadership," Klaich wrote in an email Friday. "At an institution like DRI where there has not been a change in almost twenty years and where reorganization was discussed during the budget cuts, it is natural that some are concerned."

DRI Faculty Senate Chair Dana Trimble wrote in a March 23 email addressed to Klaich and Board of Regents Chair Rick Trachok that the senate would like to formally end talks of mergers, even in the abstract.

"It's always something on the table – the merger discussion is

always happening,” Trimble said. “We worry about it because we’re a very small institution and we feel very vulnerable.”

DRI supporters said the presidential search should be top priority and that questions about the institute’s future can wait.

UNR officials said Friday that the school is not involved in any discussions about a merger.

“DRI is a valued partner in research and graduate education,” UNR President Marc Johnson said in an emailed statement. “The productive collaboration between DRI and UNR has extended over many, many years.”

UNLV officials did not respond to requests for comment.