

Opening Remarks by Dr. Robert A. Kennedy

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

February 16, 2012

Good morning, Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Robert A. Kennedy and I am pleased to appear before you as a nominee for the presidency of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, appointed by Governor Dannel P. Malloy.

I accepted this interim position and began working in Connecticut in September. Prior to my time here, I was the President of the University of Maine for six years, beginning in 2005. The University of Maine at Orono is part of the larger University of Maine system, and during my time there, I championed inter-institutional collaboration, and enhanced partnerships between academic institutions and companies in various sectors. Those collaborations spurred economic development, provided new academic opportunities for students, and improved the efficient use of resources. A project I am particularly proud of during my tenure at the University of Maine is the Student Innovation Center, which helps students, faculty and staff explore and foster entrepreneurial and business development ideas. Services offered include assistance with locating

funding, public relations and marketing services, networking with alumni, entrepreneurs and industry experts, and the use of space within the center for student companies and projects.

The 17 Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (ConnSCU for short) that make up the Board of Regents system serve approximately 96,000 students, which makes us the largest higher education organization in the state. The size, scope, and geographic reach of our colleges and universities are some of our great strengths, and a cornerstone of our ability to offer an affordable and accessible education to Connecticut's traditional and adult student population.

In September, when I came to Connecticut, I immediately began to set up day-long visits with each of the 17 campuses within the Board of Regents system.

These visits proved to be extremely informative, and I truly enjoyed meeting with the students, faculty, staff and campus leadership so early in my tenure. I

appreciated their candor and their honest assessment of where we are currently, and where we need to go.

For example, I was struck by the continued concern about an adequate number of counselors on the campuses, as well as stories from students explaining why they had to stay an extra year to get into the final class they needed to graduate. After hearing this on campus after campus, I made it clear that the savings gleaned from the elimination of 24 central office positions would be redirected back to the campuses for faculty and direct student support service positions.

I have a great deal of enthusiasm and hope for this newly merged entity, but I don't kid myself that reorganizing the way our system works and delivers education and training to our students is going to be easy. But it is necessary. For example, we're addressing why the state universities have access to school-sponsored emails – a critical way for professors to communicate with students in 2012 – and yet, community college students do not. In that same vein, we have extremely talented professors across our campuses who are more-or-less on their own when it comes to patenting their work. As a result, the often confusing and time-consuming process to protect their property either doesn't happen correctly or doesn't happen at all. We're exploring a partnership with UConn to help us in this regard. And in addition to the position eliminations, which will save us at least \$4.3 annually, we're also examining the contracts we inherited from both systems

with an eye toward efficiency and savings. The federal lobbying contract that the state university system had is a good example. At one time it made a lot of sense to have a federal lobbying firm for \$100,000 a year, but now, without the possibility of earmarks and in these tough fiscal times, that \$100,000 can be better used on faculty or direct student support services. In addition, we're reviewing the contracts within the IT divisions to better assess their necessity and possible overlap.

Those are examples of the smaller issues with which we're dealing. But clearly the reorganization was proposed and passed for a much bigger reason, which is to increase the educational attainment level of Connecticut's traditional and adult student population. Governor Malloy has said that his goal is to make the ConnSCU system the best public education system in the country, and I take that vision very seriously. In 1990, Connecticut was #1 in the educational level of its workforce. Fast-forward 22 years, and our state has dropped to the bottom half of states in the rate at which young adult educational attainment is improving. When you drill down and look more closely at 16 out of the 17 ConnSCU institutions, the numbers tell a parallel story.

- For the full-time, first-time class entering a Connecticut State University (CSU) in Fall 2004:
 - 19% graduated from that CSU within 4 years
 - 46% graduated from that CSU within 6 years

We know what some of the impediments are to finishing a degree more quickly – transferability of credits, and holding down jobs for example, but we don't know all of the impediments, and our challenge will be to drill down and find out more.

- For the full-time, first-time class entering a Connecticut Community College (CCC) in Fall 2006:
 - 3% finished their degree from that CCC in 2 years
 - 11% finished in 3 years
 - 16% finished in 4 years

While there's no doubt in my mind that we need to do more, it's important to understand that about 60% of community college students attend on a part-time basis.

In this 21st century global economy, that's just not good enough. We need to do more to help our students succeed in whatever path they choose. I've outlined four strategic priorities that I believe should guide the work we do:

- We need to make the process of transferring between a community college and a state university seamless.
- We need to agree and operationalize college readiness and provide a mechanism whereby students can prepare without using federal financial aid eligibility. Perhaps that means providing preparation programs that are not course-based and are offered each term.
- We need to encourage students and faculty to innovate, learn and teach in settings that foster entrepreneurship.
- We should prioritize enhanced collaboration and partnerships between the state's higher education system and the private sector, as well as other sister state agencies.

While the consolidation of the state's university and community college system with Charter Oak State College is currently the law on the books, its full implementation will take some time. But I've been pleased with the words of encouragement I've received from employees in all three constituent units.

People are beginning to understand that the mission of this merger was not to make 17 institutions the same, but to make the opportunity that higher education affords us more accessible and easier to navigate than it used to be. Connecticut has a lot going for it; we just need to connect the dots and focus on cross-silo, cross-agency and cross-industry partnerships. I am committed to doing so while I am the President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education.

I'd like to thank Governor Malloy for the trust he's placed in me, and all of you for reviewing my appointment today. With that, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.