

Remarks to the Nov. 18 joint FAC/BOR meeting:

I'm pleased that we have been able to organize this second joint FAC/BOR meeting. This not only satisfies the requirement in section 185 of state statutes for biannual meetings, but it moves us closer to finding common ground upon which we can jointly build public higher education in our state.

We have to recognize two areas of difficulty that have to be overcome. The first is the decline in high school graduates and the subsequent decline in CSCU enrollments, the increase in costs, especially in the area of fringe benefits, along with a decline in percentage terms of state funding, resulting in projected budget deficits for upcoming years.

The second is the context of conflict inherited from a previous CSCU administration surrounding consolidation of the colleges and the negotiation of contracts. The contract issue has now been resolved, and we hope to be on our way to addressing the serious issues arising from the consolidation, in particular shared governance and faculty morale, and the continuation of all campuses at their current locations.

But we are not here too discuss our differences, but rather to see how we can in the near term find common ground on an issue of mutual concern: the full funding of public higher in the state. Here the context is surprisingly favorable. The state has a multi-billion dollar budget surplus and the rainy day fund is full and over overflowing, though we understand that this latter will likely be preserved for an even rainier day than we now face. And within the system we have an increase in the unrestricted net position.

The governor of our state is a former special category faculty at one of our universities, the federal secretary of education a former Connecticut teacher and educational leader. In our system we have new leadership, with a president with significant higher education experience in our state – a first for CSCU in over a decade, and a new Chair of the BOR recognized for her accomplishments in regional development and community outreach. Additional new leaders have come on board at the levels of CSCU, CCCC and the BOR.

But the above only provides the context both favorable and unfavorable. It will be up to us to figure out how to work together to achieve full funding for our half of public higher education (UConn, of course, being the other half). I consider it important that in order to do so we change the traditional narrative, from one of immediate or proximate financial crisis requiring us to do more with less, to, -- while recognizing the objective obstacles we face --, one of pursuing the funding needed to enhance the qualitative experience of students, faculty, and yes, even administrators for the success of all.

I hope that today we take needed further steps in that direction.... I think we've had a very good initial discussion, with clarification of a number of issues. I suggest that the Chair and co-chair of the FAC, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the BOR, coordinate with the CSCU President and CFO for further research and a specific proposal for steps to take to achieve full funding for public higher education. We can look as a precedent to the 2020 project for the four universities then part of the CSU System which funded a decade of significant building and facility improvements. We should look forward to a similar project but focused on teaching and learning, combining our commitment to liberal arts values with innovations to meet new needs. For FAC members and alternates, we will reconvene at 2:15 using the second webex link sent to you for the FAC meeting.

David Blitz, Chair, FAC