

Talking Points

(As Prepared)

Florida Board of Governors - State University System of Florida

Dean Colson, Chair

January 19, 2012

I want to start by saying how much I am looking forward to my term as chair of this Board. We have a great Board. Amazing talent. I have served on several different boards and can say that the level of commitment demonstrated by the members of this Board is truly remarkable. Like a family, we may not always agree on every issue, but most of the time we work well together and I can say without hesitation that I have the utmost respect for each of you.

As you know, we were scheduled to meet today at FAMU, but the meeting location was changed at the university's request. The board of trustees and the administration of FAMU have a lot on their plates and hosting our meeting would have only been a distraction. I appreciate FAMU's board of trustees chair Solomon Badger for taking the time to address our Academic and Student Affairs Committee yesterday to provide an update.

I know that everyone in this room is deeply saddened by the death of Robert Champion – such a young and talented student. What a needless death. Our prayers and condolences go out to the Champion family.

I want to thank President Barron and the incredible staff from FSU for stepping up and hosting the meeting. We appreciate the warm welcome that we have received on this visit. President Barron, I'll turn it over to you for any welcoming words.

Thank you, President Barron.

It's my first meeting, and I want to make a few remarks. I don't believe that any of us like long speeches, and I prefer that we use our limited time together discussing and debating the important issues confronting higher education in this state. I respect, encourage, and enjoy a robust debate.

As we know, the 2012 Legislative Session kicked off last week here in Tallahassee. I look forward to working with members of the House and Senate as well as Governor Scott during this Session all of whom care deeply about higher education. In his opening remarks, House Speaker Dean Cannon spoke about his commitment to higher education and building a System that will ensure the future prosperity of our state rather than continuing down a path that he described as "aggressively racing to mediocrity." Speaker Cannon spoke about the constitutional role of this Board, but he also said that we are unsure about how to exercise our authority or execute our mission. Speaker Cannon has asked Chair Bill Proctor and the House Education Committee to engage this Board and the presidents of the universities in a dialogue about the System of higher education in Florida. I welcome this dialogue. I know that this Board stands ready to work with Speaker Cannon, Chair Proctor, and the other members of the House – as well as President Haridopolos and members of the Senate, and Governor Scott – in addressing the challenges for higher education.

I want to touch on a few topics that are important to me.

First, I want to say something about quality. We live in a state where we need to increase access to higher education. We need to increase the number of graduates. And, we all know that we need to increase the number of our STEM degrees. But, something we also need to talk about is that we need to increase the quality of our universities.

From the outset, I should say that I am very much in favor of working with the Florida College System to address the quantity and access issues. This Board needs to continue our dialogue with the Board of Education to make that possible. Kathleen

Shanahan, the Chair of the Board of Education, I know will welcome that dialogue and I am sure Commissioner Robinson will as well.

What I also want to work on is developing a road map for our universities to become great. I believe that is one of the purposes of Chair Proctor's meetings with each of our Presidents. Our research universities need to be given the tools to recruit the very best faculty in the world to teach in our universities and to conduct research in our state. Likewise, our universities that are more focused on teaching need to become the very best teaching universities in the country. While we have some work to do, we have a head start in a lot of areas. For example:

We're doing pretty well as a System on SAT scores. UF is #18 and doesn't have far to go to get into the top 10. FSU is in the top 50. UCF is not far below the top 50, but we've got work to do if we want to get five of our institutions into the top 50 and have a top 25 program at each university.

I'm also impressed with the progress we have made on graduation rates – we highlight our graduation rates of one of our key System achievements in the annual accountability report. Our System is in the top ten nationally for overall graduation rates and the top six nationally for minority graduation rates. That accomplishment is a reflection of the hard work of everyone – the students, the faculty, the administration, and the boards of trustees – all had a hand in getting students through the pipeline and out contributing to our state's economy. While we are moving in the right direction, we still have work to do. Half of our institutions have six-year graduation rates below 50%. That has to improve.

We're also doing well on R&D expenditures. Florida ranks 4th in the country, and the SUS has grown faster over the last 10 years than any other state in the top 10. However, individual universities need to ramp up R&D efforts because only UF and USF have R&D expenditures that compare to the top 50 public universities in the country.

On the faculty side, I want to talk about the number of national academy members and faculty salaries. As a system, we are falling behind and are falling behind other key states. We have 38 faculty in the system who are national academy members. Although UF has 23 national academy members, that's barely in the top 25 in the country. The top 10 public universities have an average of 76 - and a minimum of 32 - national academy members, so UF would need to hire at least 9 more top scholars to break into the top 10 – and that means paying these highly sought-after faculty members premium salaries. Right now, the average salary for a full professor at UF is \$122,000 – that salary is not even close to the average salary of \$145,000 for the top 10; in fact, \$122,000 is the average salary for full professors at institutions ranked between 26 and 50. It's not surprising that our institutions don't have more national academy members. But we have to move both of these numbers if we hope to have 75 faculty members system-wide who are national academy members by 2025.

We won't reach our goal of becoming the top System in the nation unless we improve in all of these areas – SAT scores, 6-year graduation rates, R&D expenditures, national academy members, and faculty salaries. To achieve that goal, we have to ensure that we maintain quality and access.

The annual report that we approved yesterday outlines where we are today, and the strategic plan that Frank Martin worked so hard on tells us where we need to go. I need to single out Dr. R.E. LeMon and Jason Jones and the rest of the team for their terrific work on these reports.

Let me change subjects for a second and say something about financial aid. In the last 5 years, state support per student has dropped from 70% to 54% for the System – a loss of \$521 million. Over that same time, tuition has increased by 51% and now comprises 46% of the funding per student. Yet, our tuition is still really low when compared to the rest of the country – only 6 states have lower tuition rates. It appears obvious to me that in these economic times, tuition increases may be the only potential source for new revenue for our universities. I accept that because I don't see an

immediate alternative and because I don't want to stand still, or worse, participate in a race to mediocrity. But, I want to make sure that we don't lose sight of the students in this process. Our #1 focus is students, and we must continue to be aware of the impact of tuition increases on students, especially middle-class students who do not qualify for Pell Grants. This issue is tied to another real problem that students across the country face in these tough economic times – increasing student loan default rates. I firmly believe that we will not reach our quality goal or the degree production goal that is part of our strategic plan if we fail to tackle financial aid.

Finally, I want to talk about governance. The events of the past year across the System have forced me to better understand the significant responsibilities provided to this Board in the Constitution. Think about what we're charged with doing: we must "operate, regulate, control and be fully responsible for the management of the whole university system." Those responsibilities are weighty. Recent events have also forced me to acknowledge how we have delegated many of our duties – this Board's responsibilities – to our boards of trustees. Speaker Cannon is right when he says that the responsibility for ensuring a successful higher education System was given to this Board by the constitutional referendum that voters passed in 2002, but he also realizes that currently we are limited by the extensive delegation of powers that took place in 2003.

I would encourage this Board and our staff to think about whether we are currently playing the role that was intended for us when we were constitutionally created. I have spoken with the Speaker, and he has encouraged this re-evaluation. To be clear, I have no desire, nor do I recommend, assuming the duties of the boards of trustees. Many decisions must be made by the local university boards of trustees. Those local boards have weighty responsibilities under the Constitution as well – the Constitution provides that the local boards must administer the universities. But, on the other hand, I believe that in certain situations this Board must be able to weigh in to provide the leadership that the Constitution envisioned for us.

Most importantly, this Board needs to be engaged when things go bad. We have a bully pulpit and we should use it. And, we should not forget that the authority in the Constitution was given to us, and we should not hide behind what may have been a too broad delegation of powers to avoid the tough issues.

And I have no doubt that the members of this Board are willing to tackle tough issues. Certainly the last 90 days has proven that to be the case. It makes me so appreciative of the leadership that we enjoyed under Ava Parker who made sure that we made difficult decisions in a thoughtful and deliberative way. On more than one occasion the past few weeks, I have wished that Ava was still sitting here.

I said at the beginning that I don't like long speeches, but I felt that I needed to take some time this morning, at my first meeting as Chair, to say a few things that were on my mind. I believe that we can develop the best system of higher education in the country if this Board works cooperatively with the Legislature and the Governor and reaches out to the business community for its ideas and assistance. The Legislature and the Governor have shown great interest in our universities and in higher education over the past year, and we should welcome that attention. And, of course, it is critical that we need to visit with and listen to our faculty and students.

I cannot imagine a finer group of people to tackle these issues than the 16 of you, the Chancellor, and the wonderful people we have in the Board office who make us look so much smarter than we are.