

February 5, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: Presidents
Trustee Chairs
Faculty Association Chair

FROM: H. Martin Lancaster

SUBJECT: Recent Political Statements

The 1999 session of the North Carolina General Assembly has begun. It is obvious that the needs of community colleges rank high among the concerns of many who will shape the state budget and legislation in the months to come. In opening day speeches and in presentations before the North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry (NCCBI) Legislative Conference, legislative leaders made specific and encouraging references to community colleges.

In his speech following his election as President Pro Tempore, Senator Marc Basnight (D-Dare) included community colleges in many of his comments about meeting higher education needs. He emphasized how community colleges will allow our sons and daughters to share in the promising future our state offers. "We must be able to say to them you work hard and study and do your part, we will do our part so that you can get a good education. We will make it possible for you to go to a state university or a community college so that you can gain a share of the prosperity that North Carolina is now enjoying." He noted the challenge of growing enrollments, citing that "more than a quarter of a million students will enroll at our universities and community colleges by 2005."

In his acceptance speech as Speaker of the House, Rep. Jim Black (D-Mecklenburg) noted that community colleges play a tremendous role in educating and training our citizens, but added the schools are in trouble. Black feels the community colleges need and deserve help in several areas. "Faculty salaries in our community colleges are among the lowest in the nation. Equipment for training is old and obsolete. We must rescue this important segment of our education system." He added, "I have said many

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times that the community college is the only place where one can be ‘born again’ in education. A student who does not do well along the way in kindergarten through 12th grade can catch up at a community college. In addition, our community colleges are the place to go for job retraining -- a service that more and more of our workers, and perhaps even ourselves will need in this ever-changing world. But we expect our community colleges to provide these necessary job skills with obsolete equipment and low faculty wages. We are making progress, but we can do better.”

On Tuesday of this week, at the NCCBI Legislative Conference, legislators again had the community colleges on their minds as they made presentations before the business community. Lt. Governor Dennis Wicker, as well as several members of the legislative leadership, all pointed to community college needs and possibilities.

Our Board Chair, Lt. Gov. Wicker, presented a proposal he offered last session. Citing a study which suggests an employee needs fourteen years of formal education to succeed in the workforce, he is again proposing tuition-free community college for our students.

Senator Howard Lee (D-Orange) serves on several committees critical to education. In his presentation he cited the growth curve for community colleges and the expected significant increase in enrollment. He specifically recognized the pressure to respond to critical salary requirements. “The system must meet the needs,” he said. Senator Lee lamented the “lack of updated equipment and dearth of technology” at some of our community colleges. “If we are to prepare our students for entrance into the workplace, this must be a top priority.”

Senator Beverly Perdue (D-Craven) is co-chair of Senate Appropriations. Her comments were interrupted by the only spontaneous applause of the day when she stated, “We have been absolutely wrong in the way we treat our community colleges.” Citing her own personal experience learning Spanish at her local community college, she emphasized education must be a “lifelong experience” and community colleges offer the key to that experience. Noting there has been extensive talk about support for the community colleges in the past with little action she added, “We talk the talk, but we don’t walk the walk.” Senator Purdue then suggested the legislature and business leaders do for community colleges what has been done for public schools in improving their ranking, facilities and services.

Republican leadership also made presentations in the afternoon. Rep. Leo Daughtry (R-Johnston), former majority leader, made no specific references to community colleges. He did, however, call for increased spending in education. Sen. Patrick Ballentine (R-New Hanover) called community colleges the “true training ground for our workforce.”

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Several NCCBI committees offered strong statements in support of community colleges, particularly in the area of salaries, equipment, continuing education parity funding, and new and expanding industry funding. One of the highlights in their 1999 Agenda presents a combined statement on items expressed in several separate recommendations: "Support the improvement of workforce preparedness through our system of community colleges. Support increased funding for community colleges including an increase in faculty salaries and additional funds for equipment."

This is indeed great talk about our needs and our future. However, activity in the coming months will determine if, as Sen. Perdue suggests, the legislature will also "walk the walk." Your continued communication with legislators is critical.

HML/ab

CC99-045
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