



Testimony On Higher Education
House Education Committee
Governor Richard D. Lamm
February 27, 1985

I am now in my 11th year as Governor of Colorado, and never in that time have I testified before a Legislative Committee. I have decided to testify here today because I feel so strongly about the current state of higher education in Colorado.

It is not necessary to reiterate the importance of higher education to our state and our country. Suffice it to say that without excellent higher education, no state can have a thriving, growing economy and no state can achieve the quality of life we all desire.

Does Colorado's system of higher education meet the requisite standards of excellence? I am afraid the answer is obviously "no." A current president of a Colorado college recently described the problems in higher education in one concise but hard-hitting paragraph. The description bears repetition.

"Colorado's system of public higher education is overbuilt. Its facilities are in disrepair. Its governance is complex and confusing. The system is badly fragmented in its organization. Infighting is fierce. Cooperation is rare. Competition for students is intense. Unified leadership is lacking. On top of all this, the state cannot afford to go on supporting this costly problem."

Believe it or not, this list of woes is only the beginning. The criticisms of public higher education could go on almost

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indefinitely. The report of the Higher Education Committee created by House Bill 1360 states, "We are experiencing a spiral of decline in the public confidence necessary to support excellence in higher education." Unfortunately, change within the current structure is virtually impossible, because the current structure encourages institutional protectionism and does little to bring about quality or excellence.

I did not come here, however, to dwell on the problems. Rather, I have come to discuss with you some possible solutions.

First and foremost, I would like to commend Representative Paul Schauer and the other members of the Interim Legislative Committee for their unbelievably hard work in this area. The devotion and the courage shown by this committee is exemplary. Above all, the Interim Committee Report demonstrates the need for major and immediate change in Colorado's public higher education system. I support the goals and recommendations of the committee, as well as its unanimous conclusion that "the General Assembly must act decisively in 1985 to correct organizational, management and financing weaknesses in Colorado." Key among specific recommendations I support are:

1. The need for strong statewide policy leadership in order to provide a coherent statewide higher education policy.

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2. The need to establish by statute clear roles and missions for state institutions of higher education.
3. The need to change the method of financing public higher education.

I believe the General Assembly should give detailed attention to the specifics of the committee's recommendations in these areas. These are all reflected in the provisions of House Bill 1187.

The most controversial of the committee's recommendations are those in the area of governance. The suggested creation of a statewide governing board with institutional managing boards is a workable system. Several states -- Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Florida and Wisconsin -- have moved in a similar direction in recent years with considerable success. House Bill 1187 would be a significant improvement over the current system. I must be honest, however. I am afraid parochial interests will prohibit the bill from passing in its current form. The greatest danger is the bill will be attacked from so many sides that it will be killed entirely and no reform will be enacted during the current session. This would truly be tragic for all of Colorado.

If you come to the conclusion that the single governing board approach will not be politically feasible in Colorado, I implore you to consider an alternative. This alternative would be substantial strengthening of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. In

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order to achieve the changes recommended by your interim committee, the Commission on Higher Education must have much stronger powers in four areas: higher education planning, educational program review and approval, facilities program review and approval, and financing and accounting mechanisms. Let me briefly speak to each of these areas.

A strong planning authority at the state level is essential if we are to have a coherent statewide approach to higher education. The Commission on Higher Education, or a comparable statewide coordinating board, must have strong planning capabilities to deal with problems such as:

- o Academic and vocational programs at all institutions. One analysis of current programs identified 351 different degree programs at the 13 four year institutions in Colorado that do not meet minimum productivity standards.
- o the role and mission of each institution within statutory guidelines.
- o the role of vocational education.
- o the reorganization, consolidation or elimination of institutions.
- o the Auraria campus.
- o the role of high technology in higher education.

In addition to planning, a strong educational program and review capability is required. This is necessary to enable the commission to:

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- review and approve or terminate academic and vocational programs.
- assure that programs are clearly within the assigned role and mission of each institution.
- reduce duplication of programs and provide for centers of excellence. For example, 10 Colorado institutions currently offer bachelor's degrees in business administration and teacher education.
- Update educational programs to meet Colorado's higher education needs for the future.

No program at any institution should be funded without having stood the test of planning and program review and approval based on statewide needs.

Third, a strong facilities program review and approval process must go hand in hand with educational program review. The commission must have the capacity to determine when:

- facilities should be expanded, renovated or demolished.
- new facilities are required.
- proposed facilities are consistent with the role and mission of insitutions.

Again, facilities in higher education should not be funded unless there is a statewide need.

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Finally, the commission will need strengthened fiscal authority. This is necessary for the development of a uniform statewide policy in finance and accountability. Authority here should include development of the fixed-variable financing model, priorities in the funding of higher education, and methods of accountability within the system.

Strengthening CCHE in these vital areas will achieve virtually all of the goals of the Higher Education Committee.

Change within the current structure is unlikely because our current structure encourages institutional protectionism and does little to bring about quality or excellence in Colorado higher education. Change will only come if the Legislature is bold enough to transcend parochial interests. If we together have the will to follow through on the committee's recommendations, I am confident Colorado will have a higher education system of which we and future generations can be extremely proud.

This is the year. The problem is too serious to delay any longer.