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**BEFORE THE HIGHER EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
OHIO HOUSE FINANCE & APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**REPRESENTATIVE SHAWN WEBSTER
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY
OF
BRUCE JOHNSON, PRESIDENT
INTER-UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF OHIO**

APRIL 4, 2007

Chairman Webster and members of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on House Bill 119.

In November 1996, the Ohio Board of Regents published a document called *The Challenge is Change: Ohio's Master Plan for Higher Education*. Chapter 2 of that document was entitled "Current Realities: Fewer Resources and Greater Expectations."

Reviewing that document, I was struck by the similarities between then and now.

The 1996 Master plan outlined a vision of higher education characterized by high-quality learning experiences accessible to all Ohioans, research that creates productive partnerships with Ohio business and industry and drives economic growth, education and training that fosters leadership and citizenship, and strengthens Ohio's workforce, and services that address broad needs of the state and its diverse region and communities.

Then, as now, there was clear recognition of the need to improve quality, increase educational attainment statewide, and increase accountability for results. There was recognition of the need to embrace collaboration, technology and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. And, of course, there was recognition of the reality of having to live with constrained resources.

The language we use today to describe our vision for higher education, and for the role our colleges and universities play in serving the public good, is not much different than ten years ago.

Ohioans today expect all citizens of our state, including non-traditional and disadvantaged students, to have access to a high-quality, affordable college education.

They expect postsecondary learning experiences to be relevant and rewarding – and to prepare graduates to compete in a global economy.

They expect flexible educational options that fit their work schedules and family obligations.

They expect Ohio's colleges and universities to be a ready resource for the ongoing technical training and lifelong learning required for success in today's workplace.

And they expect university research to support the state's economic development efforts and pay dividends in the form of innovation for competitive advantage, high-skill, high-wage jobs, and economic activity.

And We, the collective We, all of us, the Universities, the Higher Education system, the P-12 system, the General Assembly, the Governor and Chancellor, the business community, and the taxpayer – WE have an obligation to meet and exceed their expectations.

What is different today is the competitive pressures are greater, the stakes are higher, and the pace of change we are trying to adapt to is blindingly faster.

What's also different today is that we have a unique, even historic, opportunity to realize our ambitious vision for higher education. The key to that opportunity is the so-called "compact" that is at the heart of the proposed biennial budget for higher education.

Governor Strickland is to be commended for putting on the table the concept of a compact, an idea that has long been discussed but not actively pursued.

The proposed compact is a major step in the right direction. It has the potential to bring state government and higher education together as partners in a joint venture of supreme importance to our state.

The state's public universities are excited about the prospect the compact represents for stimulating fresh and more strategic thinking about how to maximize higher education's value to the state and its citizens.

The challenge we face in putting the compact to work is, like with many bold ideas, working out the appropriate parameters and mechanics of the partnership.

The view of Ohio's public universities is that a formal compact between state government and higher education is the right idea . . . at the right time . . . but that as proposed, it does not reach quite far enough

Our response is not to reject the idea – instead, we propose expanding it.

From our perspective, the scope of the partnership the compact envisions needs to be more ambitious. As currently framed, it focuses exclusively on costs and affordability. As important as affordability is, it is just one dimension of the value proposition higher education represents for the people of Ohio.

We believe a more effective compact would stimulate conversation on vital issues and objectives that extend beyond costs and affordability. Those additional areas would include access and success, achievement and quality, system-wide alignment, and, of course, accountability for results.

Let me elaborate briefly on each of these areas.

Access and Success. As others have testified before this committee, there is nearly universal agreement – both within and outside the higher education community – that Ohio must significantly increase the number of students who attend college and earn a degree.

This is a vital competitiveness issue for our state, and one the governor recognized when he established his bold goals for increasing over the next ten years the number of Ohioans enrolled in college by 230,000 and raising the graduation rate by 20 percent.

Achieving those goals will require focused efforts to raise aspirations and enhance recruitment, particularly targeting disadvantaged and historically underrepresented populations.

To be successful, we'll need to continue to improve academic preparation and enhance our efforts to support student success, expand the use of distance learning and other technologies that can increase access, and improve transfer and articulation within the state's higher education system.

State funding for instructional support must be commensurate with our ambitious growth goals and the efforts needed to realize those goals.

Achievement and Quality. To fully serve the citizens of Ohio, the state's colleges and universities must respond aggressively to a number of quality imperatives.

We need to help students acquire globally competitive competencies – that is, the knowledge and skills they'll need to succeed in an increasingly technical, innovation-based economy. We must give them access to world-class faculty, state-of-the-art technologies and cooperative learning experiences. We must prepare them for a lifetime of change and a lifetime of learning.

More than ever before, our institutions must have a laser-like focus on student achievement.

We must continually evaluate and improve our student learning assessments to assure that our academic programs meet the highest standards for innovation, quality and relevance – and to assure that students who start college, finish college with a rich education and a strong foundation for their future.

Alignment. To improve student success and overall system performance, we must do a better job of aligning of high school and college standards (and) expectations. We must ensure that P-12 standards, curricula and testing are aligned with higher-education admission and success requirements, which will help reduce the need for high school graduates to take remedial-level coursework in college. (Ohio Core)

The higher education system also must be aligned with critical state needs in the areas of workforce development and economic development.

For example, we need a focused, determined effort to increase the number of STEM graduates – globally competitive students ready to work and succeed in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical careers that are critical to Ohio's economic future.

We need to continue to attract and retain world-class faculty and nationally prominent researchers to help enhance research funding and productivity, improve the quality of our undergraduate and graduate programs, attract more and better students, and promote community and economic development.

And we need to continue to forge innovative partnerships with the private sector to enhance our academic programs, our research portfolios and our community service and outreach activities.

Accountability for Results. The real value of fully developed compact would be to refocus future budget discussions along more strategic, goal-oriented lines. For that reason, the compact needs to identify specific goals in each priority area, outline a plan for achieving those goals, establish clear metrics for success, and include a commitment to fully fund each area.

Such a compact would be built upon an essential and binding reciprocity between higher education and state government.

Universities, for their part, would accept accountability for achieving access and success goals, for measuring and improving the quality of the educational experiences they provide, for achieving optimal economic benefits from strategically focused research, for serving business, industry and community needs, and for delivering maximum value through enhanced efficiency, productivity and collaboration.

The state, in turn, would accept accountability for fully funding all of our mutually agreed upon priorities, for providing greater predictability and stability of funding, and for strategically focusing state dollars in a manner that supports individual institutional missions as well as broader state goals.

Viewed together, these priority areas of access and success, achievement and quality, alignment with critical state needs, accountability for results, and yes, affordability, represent a useful strategic framework for investing in Ohio's future.

Ohio has no more valuable resource than its colleges and universities for creating knowledge, spurring innovation, creating jobs and keeping Ohio nationally and globally competitive. We appreciate the fact that the Governor's budget acknowledges these vital roles higher education plays in strengthening the state's economy.

We have a unique and historic opportunity to do something really special here. The Governor has put the right mechanism, in concept, on the table. It needs to be expanded in scope, it needs to be extended to a longer-term commitment, and it needs be fully reciprocal in nature.

I believe we have both the political will and the imaginative wherewithal to hammer out the necessary and appropriate details.

My closing message to you is this: Our shared vision for maximizing higher education's capacity for fueling economic growth in Ohio is attainable. The state's public four-year universities stand ready to work hand in hand with you and your colleagues in the Ohio General Assembly to do just that.