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Opening Remarks for the Board for State Academic Awards Confirmation Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Looney, Representative Janowski and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee.

My name is Michael Nicastro and I am honored to have been nominated by Governor Rell to serve as a member of the Board for State Academic Awards and it is also my honor to appear before you this afternoon.

Currently I am the President & Chief Executive Officer of the Central Connecticut Chambers of Commerce headquartered in Bristol, a city that for the majority of my life I have called home.

I was raised in Bristol by parents who were a part of the "Greatest Generation" and who sacrificed so much in their lives to see that I and my siblings had more than they, as children of the Great Depression never enjoyed. While they are both gone now I try to live the lessons that they taught us each day. Especially the idea that when you receive you must also give back.

Educationally, I attended Bristol Central High, received my Bachelor's Science in marketing from Central Connecticut State University and a Juris Doctor from Western New England College, School of Law.

Professionally I have enjoyed a long and successful career in banking and information technology. At the end of 2008 I retired from my position as Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer of Open Solutions Inc. located in Glastonbury. I joined Open Solutions in 1994 as an original member of the executive management team. From that initial employee base of 10 we worked hard over 14 years to grow the company to over 2,000 employees worldwide and service clients across the globe. To this day, Open Solutions is one of Connecticut Innovations' greatest success stories and I was very proud to be a part of it.

In addition to the many activities that my role as the leader of 3rd largest regional Chamber in the state requires I am also a member of the board of directors of the Hartford Stage Company, an executive board member and trustee of the Connecticut Rivers Council, Boys Scouts of America, a board member of the Tunxis Community College Foundation, an advisory board member of the Institute for Technology & Business Development in New Britain and a number of other non-profit and for profit boards.

When I was asked by Charter Oak State College President Ed Klonoski to join the Board for State Academic Awards I was not only honored but excited as well. Coming from an Information Technology background the concept of a virtual collegiate education along with that of distance learning is well known to me.

In fact, during my tenure with Open Solutions we launched "OSI University" as an effective and robust form of remote training and education not only for our clients but for our ever growing body of employees as well. Utilizing the latest in virtual teaching tools we were able to reach clients and employees across the globe with programs that improved their use of our technology solutions and resulted in higher levels of efficiency and simplified deployment. This made for better employees who in turn were better positioned to further their careers on a personal level. In fact, OSI University became so advanced that it received a certificate of accreditation from the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET), a non-profit association dedicated to quality continuing education and training programs.

So for me joining the board that works with Charter Oak State College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium was in many ways a continuation of the work I have had the pleasure to be a part of in the past.

Since my interim appointment by the Governor last year I have had the opportunity to attend a number of board meetings. It is a pleasure to be a part of such a dynamic and diverse board that is engaged and cognizant of the importance of its role for the college and consortium. It has been my experience thus far that our discussions are not superficial and the difficult questions do get asked.

As we emerge from these difficult economic times it is clear that all of our original concepts and models of business are radically changing. As such the need for our workforce to be well educated is becoming ever more critical. Unfortunately that change is coming very quickly and for many residents time is of the essence and a traditional collegiate or educational timeline will not help them attain the skills that could put many back to work and make us more competitive as a state.

Without question the educational product that both Charter Oak and the Distance Learning Consortium provide helps us to get there faster. Both of these organizations will continue to be a significant contributor to our economic competitiveness both now and in the future. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to serve with the Board for State Academic Awards to help make that happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this afternoon and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have regarding my nomination.