

Testimony of Michael Daniels, External Affairs Chair of the University of Connecticut Undergraduate Student Government, to the Appropriations Committee, February 14, 2013

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you this evening. I am here as a representative of the undergraduate student body at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, the Senate of the Undergraduate Student Government having last night confirmed a legislative agenda supporting these views. While our Senate was acting, only blocks away from here many UConn students were demonstrating their allegiance and enthusiasm for our University, cheering our men's basketball team to an upset victory over Syracuse. But the disheartening reality is that many of those students and others like them fear that they will not be able to stay here once they graduate, having to leave for other states to pursue job opportunities in places where a UConn degree does not yet command the respect that it should.

Governor Malloy has introduced a proposal which will go a very long way towards resolving these issues. The Next Generation Connecticut proposal contains the investments that will give this state's flagship university the opportunity to be ranked alongside the finest public institutions, like Berkeley, Michigan, and Virginia. It also will help give this state the educated workforce it needs to attract high-tech employers, after far too many years of not creating jobs. This plan would result in new state-of-the-art learning facilities and new residential spaces for additional top-quality students, the majority of whom will be studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, preparing themselves for the jobs of the future. And there will be additional scholarships for the brightest students in these fields, making sure their family's financial background does not inhibit them from contributing to our economic recovery.

This plan would perfectly complement the Bioscience Connecticut initiative, giving us the ability not just to create jobs at Jackson Laboratories, but a thriving industry in the biosciences, linking Storrs, Farmington, and New Haven in our own version of North Carolina's Research Triangle, which came about through similar investments, linking private sector research and their public universities.

Not only would we modernize the Storrs campus, we would expand programs and add student housing to the Stamford campus, allowing us to more fully take advantage of connections with businesses there and in nearby New York City. And we would move from the West Hartford campus, badly in need of repair, to a new downtown Hartford location, where we could both give students the opportunity to learn and work with business and government, but help bring vitality back to our capital city.

To those who reasonably ask whether or not we can afford this, I say that we cannot afford to wait any longer. No later than the 1950's it was clear that New England could not depend on manufacturing alone and needed to invest in research. The UConn 2000 program was a great start, increasing the value of a UConn education and the attractiveness of the Storrs campus. But if we are to fully take advantage of the ability of a state university to drive economic growth, we have to act now, take advantage of low interest rates, and ensure our state is prepared for the growth of high tech employment.

Rarely a day goes by when we do not hear from someone on either side of the aisle explaining that no sound economic development strategy picks winners and loser. But this program is a win-win. It's good for UConn, for members of the business community, and for taxpayers, who stand to see a return on their investment. We've long prided ourselves on the steady habit of Yankee ingenuity, but we've fallen behind. Now is the time to make Connecticut the leader in innovation once more, and we have to take advantage of this opportunity now, for both our generation, and the next generation of Connecticut. Thank you.