

Opening Remarks by Naomi Cohen

Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

March 20, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, Senator Fasano, Representative Camillo and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Naomi Cohen and I am appreciative of the Governor's nomination as a member of the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the opportunity to meet with you as you consider my appointment to serve.

Over the last two years, the Board of Regents has experienced growing pains as it has worked to unify seventeen individual colleges into one system. On occasion our efforts have fallen short of the expectations that the Board shares with the Legislature and with the Governor. In other instances, the merger has been demonstrably successful in creating new opportunities and partnerships for our students and for a skilled Connecticut workforce.

The Regents' structure affords us a rich menu of opportunities for cross-agency communication and collaboration with public and private entities. These partnerships are particularly important as we learn what competencies our state's employers are seeking and work with our colleges and universities to craft appropriate program options.

As the Board works to integrate policies and procedures for our 17 institutions, we have been analyzing and formulating protocols that make us one system,--- more efficient, more responsive to student needs, and more resilient in addressing Connecticut's needs for an educated citizenry.

Among our initiatives in creating one system have been

- a strategic plan that focuses on access, affordability and student success
- a seamless course transfer process from two-year to four-year institutions
- review and redesign of remediation policies
- coordinated fiscal policy-making and oversight

- shared technology opportunities
- streamlined academic approval protocols
- strengthened policies to protect students from sexual misconduct
- uniform protocols for presidential searches
- planning for the future with our Transform CT 2020 initiative

The resume provided to you describes my background. I am fortunate to have served in elected and appointed education positions at the local, state, regional and national levels. Those experiences have rewarded me with a perspective and an appreciation for the responsibilities a Regent must assume.

As a co-chair of the Legislature's education committee and as chair of the community/technical colleges Board during the last months of its transition to the Board of Regents, I never stopped learning that education issues are complex but that collaboration among and between constituencies is a recipe for success.

As a member of the National Assessment Governing Board and the Board of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, I learned that standards matter in assessing what students can do and should know.

As Vice-Chair of the Education Commission of the States Steering Committee, I learned that a plethora of education issues are common to most states while at the same time unique to each state.

From the at-risk elementary school students I have tutored over the past fifteen years, one thing is crystal clear. Student achievement is a pathway to success in life.

As a Regent for the past two years, I've observed first-hand that systemic change is hard, that unique differences exist between universities and colleges that require creative strategies as we become one system, and that building one system demands collaboration with staff and faculty, students, the Legislature, the Administration and Connecticut's Business community.

My thanks to Governor Malloy for the opportunity to use my background and passion for education to help foster a dynamic educational infrastructure that benefits students, families, employers and communities.

Being involved in the public policy arena is in my DNA. Past experiences have taught that being part of strategic solutions is why I want to continue serving. I promise to work hard and thoughtfully to fulfill the responsibilities of a Regent.

Honoring that promise will be rooted in the story of an extraordinary student I met last spring. At the Manchester Community College graduation, this student speaker told of serving in Afghanistan. One of his assignments was to conduct house to house searches. He had a printed card that explained why the search was being done. In one house he realized that the adults could not read the card, and the 8 year old in the home had to read it to them. He said, "That's when I knew that education was important to me and to the whole world." And that was my Ah-Ha moment which vividly reaffirmed just why I really want to continue to be involved.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination.