

BRIAN J. FLAHERTY

REMARKS OF
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Community College Management Consolidation Forum
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Good afternoon Senators Bye and Linares, Representative Haddad, Representative Staneski, and members of the Committee, I am Brian Flaherty from Watertown, and I am pleased to offer some comments this afternoon on the management consolidation at Connecticut's community colleges. I do so from my perspective as the current head of policy at the Connecticut Business & Industry Association, as well as a former member of the General Assembly and the erstwhile Board of Governors of Higher Education.

During my service in the General Assembly, from 1989 to 2003, I worked closely with the men and women throughout the higher education system; work that I was honored to continue with the Board of Governors. In all, this period of nearly three decades was marked by many major changes—hopefully which history has deemed as improvements.

- The General Assembly moved from passing line-item budgets for UConn, CSU and the Community/Technical Colleges to enacting the current block grants that give each constituent unit the flexibility to deploy and manage their own budgets.
- We also gave more power to the constituent unit boards of trustees to better determine the direction of their institutions.
- When campus buildings literally began to crumble, we passed a landmark “books and mortar” rebuilding program across the state, first at UConn and then at CSU and the Community College campuses.

Our work was not without trial and error. Some institutional mergers were enacted, some were shelved, and for our final act, the Board of Governor presided over its own elimination.

To be sure, the most enduring accomplishments were those achieved on a broad, bipartisan basis. Through it all, *we were at our best when our focus was on the students.*

Then, as now, there was no shortage of challenges facing our state's colleges and universities.

Thankfully, then, as now, there is no shortage of talent within the four corners of this state to meet those challenges.

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This morning, Connecticut went to work and went to school, just like each day before. And this new year comes on the heels of a 2017 that saw net job growth of 7,700.

Manufacturing drove Connecticut's jobs turnaround—with 4,100 of those jobs—and we need more.

This committee and this General Assembly face a new legislative session which must focus on jobs: training for them, filling them, and creating a climate that sustains and grows them—so that when the year closes, we have retooled the “talent pipeline” that Connecticut relies on to fill the jobs that grow and sustain families.

Community colleges are career builders. Historically, there has been no institution of higher education more nimble and more able to focus and adapt to Connecticut's workforce needs than our community colleges.

From my perspective, this management consolidation meets the test of focusing on the students.

- It addresses structural deficits and collapses administrative structures without closing programs or locations.
- It relies on achieving administrative savings and efficiencies rather than cutting programs that graduate the students our members will employ, or the services that help them to graduate career ready.
- It aligns enrollment, sets a core curriculum with common degree programs and courses between campuses, and eliminates barriers to credit transfers that might still exist between the legacy colleges
- Importantly, it keeps the 12 foundations and advisory boards that many of our members rely upon to ensure the agility of the colleges to respond and tailor their programs to local and regional priorities.

Change, I can tell you, never comes easily, and the process to achieve positive change for our community college system will touch all 12 campuses and all who depend on them. It will be no simple task. But this retooling is necessary, achievable, and—as evidenced by today's hearing—all stakeholders are watching and have a charge to keep.

Our roles are separate, but I believe our goals are the same.

Policymakers, governance bodies, administrators, faculty, staff, students, employers, and all others each have important roles to play, and no single group can enact the change, spark the progress, or ensure the accountability that we all need.

I admire and thank you for the work that you do, stand ready to assist any way that I can, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.