

**JOINT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE,
EXCELLENCE, AND TRANSPARANCY**

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Testimony by Donald L. Evans, Former Chairman of the Board of Regents,
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Good morning, my name is Don Evans and I had the privilege to serve on the Board of Regents for the University of Texas System from 1995-2001, and as Chairman from 1997-2001.

I want to thank Co-Chairs State Senator Judith Zaffirini and State Representative Dan Branch, as well as the other joint committee members for your extraordinary public service, your focus on higher education, and allowing me the opportunity to share some of my thoughts and experiences as a member of both public and private sector governing boards. I particularly appreciate the bipartisan spirit of this committee, as we all understand that when it comes to the education of the citizens of Texas, we are all on the same team.

Today, there is a national discussion around higher education reform and Texas is at the center of it. Participants in this movement include higher education systems across America, active non-profit organizations focused on higher education, dedicated members of academia at some of the finest universities around the country, many public bodies, as well as the public at large.

Having served on numerous boards throughout my career, I have observed some best practices that have proven to yield positive results.

In applying those best practices to the field of a public higher education system, I have a few observations:

- First is the importance of fostering an environment of trust, transparency, collegiality and a deep sense of humility for the responsibility for which the board has been entrusted. One must have great respect for the scope and complexity of the enterprise. The board must set the tone because that is where the ultimate authority rests. On all the boards on which I have served from the public sector, to private companies, to the Cabinet of the United States; I realized how much we were able to accomplish within an environment of trust, optimism, humility, and collegiality. I recall during my time on the Board of Regents, two of which my dear friend B. Rappaport was Chairman, this tone and environment was particularly evident. Collectively and with mutual trust and respect, the Board was able to effectively address the important issues of the time.
- Second there should be a formal and robust plan for on going board education, as there are many complex issues never before considered by board members who have likely spent their careers in other fields. A board should encourage a healthy exchange and debate of the different points of view always with respect and admiration for the parties involved. Boards should welcome the opportunity to learn from those that have dedicated their careers

and lives to the noble calling of providing the best in higher education.

- Third, the board must be made up of conscientious and committed members that protect their freedom to exercise and honor their responsibility to provide independent judgment. This independence reflects the highest levels of accountability for the board members and keeps the governing board focused on the mission, heritage, and charter of the institutions. Boards must be held accountable to serve the public interest, to be good stewards of the people's resources, and uphold the public's trust while operating in the policy framework set forth by the state legislature and University system.
- Fourth, as it relates to board communication, the board must always have real time, relevant and accurate information. The board must be well informed and should expect no surprises.
- Fifth, we talk about the ultimate goal of transforming lives so that those who come through our education system will all go on to achieve their dreams and help build a more peaceful, free, productive, and prosperous world. I have noticed when a life is transformed there is often a story of a teacher or many teachers that impacted or transformed that life. The teachers and professors are the ones that are changing lives and boards should

be laser focused creating an environment to attract, retain, and motivate the best and brightest.

- Sixth, a board should have broad oversight over a annual rigorous personnel review program that provides each employee with frank and honest feedback as to their progress and performance. Employees are entitled to this process and feedback, as it is critical to their career path and development. This is also fundamental to any successful enterprise.

- The final point I would like to make is the one I think is the most important for the board: the selection of and support of the leadership that manages the day-to-day responsibilities and operations of the enterprise and leaders that will likely continue serving long after directors have retired. In the case of The University of Texas System it is the Chancellor and the Presidents of the 15 institutions. It is the board's responsibility to select, assess, and support these leaders and hold them accountable for results and performance.

In my view, since the beginning, the Board of Regents has a track record of selecting extraordinary leaders and that was certainly my experience while serving on the Board. I commend Chairman Powell and the current Board of Regents for their support of the current leadership of the system, specifically Chancellor Cigarroa and the system Presidents. I have had the pleasure to work with the Chancellor for the past 11 years

and he has all the qualities to lead and, in my judgment, is the gold standard for a Chancellor/CEO of the one the largest systems of higher education in the world. His track record of many years in medicine, academia, and leadership have well prepared him for the assignment, but it is his commitment to being a humble servant to the people of Texas that makes him ideally suited for the position and he sets precisely the right tone.

And there are many others that display this same impressive professional pedigree. I have the pleasure of working with many of them including President Bill Powers, for over 10 years, who has displayed optimistic, decisive and exemplary leadership particularly in this challenging economic environment. Others current Presidents I have worked with include Ricardo Romo, Juliet Garcia, David Watts, Rodney Mabry, and Diana Natalicio. They are outstanding leaders and I am confident that they along with the other Presidents will effectively work with Chancellor Cigarroa to execute the board's "Framework for Advancing Excellence" throughout the entire UT system, which in my view will be a beacon for those focused on improving productivity and comprehensive reform in higher education for the 21st century.

While it is important we acknowledge there are relevant concerns with the public university system as a whole, we must not lose the unfettered optimism we so proudly exhibit as Texans. We're Texas, we lead, we love to compete, and we will continue to be admired and respected for

our competitiveness, performance and leadership in the field of higher education. Thank you again for inviting me here this morning.