

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Will new President Be Courageous?

Dear Dr. Staben:

As a strong supporter of the University of Idaho and its flagship, land grant, national research status within the state, allow me to give you a conditional welcome to the great state.

Why “conditional” you may ask? Because you must understand you have been hired by an impotent board that has not for years served as the advocate for higher education it should. It is a board that has stood by idly as the budget for higher education has been eviscerated by a governor and a legislature that by their actions demonstrate they just don’t get nor appreciate the proper role education plays in securing a decent future for Idaho’s children as the driver of a thriving economy.

Oh, they will claim they do, but the facts conclusively demonstrate otherwise. So you will be working for a board and a governor that report to a legislature that with a few notable exceptions frankly is full of hypocrites. Truth be told, many would admit if they thought it were politically palatable that all education, public and higher, ought to be privatized. You’ve come to a state that is not just suspicious but is downright contemptuous of teachers and public employees.

Right now there is a statewide radio campaign funded by the Joe and Kathryn Albertson Foundation called “Don’t Fail Idaho.” The foundation is run by Joe Scott, who by no stretch of the imagination could be considered a flaming liberal. He is in fact conservative but he understands education is critical to a good future for Idaho’s children.

The facts are damning: only 4 out of 10 Idaho high school graduates start college and only 1 out of 10 get a degree in an economy that needs twice as many college graduates to meet demands.

You will also find one of many reasons students don’t finish college is the cost. Again, the numbers are damning: in 1980 a student at Moscow and his family paid 7% of the cost in tuition and fees; in 1990 it was 13%; in 2000 it

was 20%; and today it is 47%. Much of the increase in student fees and tuition can be directly correlated to legislative evisceration of public support.

If you have real courage, Dr. Staben, you will be an advocate for restoring more state support and reducing utilization on student fees. It is bad enough that predatory banks have swooped down on college campuses offering ever more expansive federally guaranteed student loans. For many middle class and poorer class students these loans have become a modern form of indentured servitude.

Have the guts, Dr. Staben, to call for a restoration of the .4 of 1% property tax that used to help fund education in this state in the years in which it truly was a priority. Understand why in the mid-90's Governor Phil Batt removed the first .1 of 1 percent and then understand what a Faustian bargain then Governor Jim Risch pulled on the taxpayers by eliminating the remaining .3 of 1 percent in exchange for an increase in the more volatile sales tax.

Understand that in the mid-60's Idahoans supported implementing a 3% sales tax believing it would exclusively be devoted to supporting public and higher education. Today, over half of the prospective revenue is not there because Republican governors and Republican legislators keep granting exemptions but don't have the courage to admit they are supporting business subsidies while further eroding dollar support for public and higher education.

A return to a dedicated .4 of 1% would generate over \$400 million annually and (using FY12 numbers) replace the \$222 million now coming from the general fund for higher education and could also replace in total or in part the \$199.5 million derived from student fees and tuition. The "freed up" \$222 million could then be reallocated to other needs.

While you are at it, Dr. Staben, point out to the Board, the governor and the State Legislature, especially the chairs of the House and Senate education committees chaired by two gentlemen who are anything but the champions of education they profess to be, that Idaho has to be about the only state in the union where in three of our four major schools tuition has risen and grown more for in-state students than out of state students. Go figure.

Show all Idahoans who care about quality education across the board that you have the courage to be a true advocate for higher education. If you can

muster real resolve you'll show that the board in "even a blind hog occasionally finds an acorn" moment came up with a true leader.