

**South Carolina Commission on Higher Education
Executive Director's Report
2 May 2013**

As Garrison Keillor would say, it's been a busy week in my new hometown.

Sunday I moved into an apartment on the Congaree River. From there I can see the state capitol and the Commission offices. On nice days I can even walk to work.

Prof. Susan Willey, my wife of forty years (if we make it until next month) is here today. Her support and encouragement were decisive in my acceptance of this position.

She keeps me grounded, demonstrates every day that our faculty work exceedingly hard, and she reminds me constantly that it's all about our students. I would not be here but for her. Please join me in recognizing my best friend.

This Monday was my first official day on the job, so I have an entire seventy-two hours of news to report. My learning curve has been steep, and my progress has been slow.

I am the fifth executive director that Beth Rogers has had to break in, and I think I am already her most challenging case.

Like most things that I have inherited on the agenda of this first meeting, good things have happened for which I deserve absolutely no credit.

A shining example of that is the new CHE statistical abstract that you found at your places this morning. Stephanie Charbonneau is the current editor of this publication, which is in its 34th year. It contains a wealth of information about our institutions and our students.

It is part of our continuous effort to provide data and accountability to our many constituencies. One of the commission's most basic roles is to serve as an unbiased resource that our citizens, legislators, and others can trust without question.

Much of my time has been occupied with meetings. Like most Southern states, South Carolina is a relationship environment. Many people have been kind enough to help get that process going for me.

- I'm starting to make the rounds with our elected officials in the General Assembly. Julie has been instrumental in opening those doors, and I constantly hear that she is so well respected because she represents the highest integrity of the Commission on your behalf.
- I have met with business leaders from the state Chamber of Commerce, and others associated with the New Carolina organization, which yesterday hosted its "Summit on the Future of Education in SC." CHE will be part of these and other important discussions.
- Last evening I enjoyed a delightful conversation with Ken Wingate, your former commissioner and chair, who shared his thoughts and insights about how CHE might best move forward.

In my conversations thus far, there has been a recurring question: Is higher education in South Carolina a structure for knowledge, learning, and discovery, or is it a platform for economic development and job creation?

Some people are fiercely committed to one view, others to the alternative. Most recognize that the dichotomy is false, and that our higher education enterprise must serve multiple masters.

But embedded in this polarity is a legitimate question about where we strike the appropriate balance among these different demands and expectations.

Too much emphasis on higher education's traditional role as a repository of learning, and we risk becoming the calcified ivory towers that our caricatures portray.

Too much emphasis on quick-fix jobs and commercial pay-offs risks marginalizing the long-term benefits of what we do to raise the quality of life and prosperity in South Carolina.

How we resolve this problem plays directly into the issue of how we demonstrate our accountability to our students and citizens about how we spend their tax and tuition dollars.

That bottom line will never go away, so we need to be thoughtful and strategic about how we define these parameters and our core values.

In my remarks to the Commission last month, I said that I was looking forward to the opportunities and challenges of advancing higher education in South Carolina. Apparently some people took the "challenges" part of that statement literally. Among some of the many issues that have been put on my plate are:

- merger talks between two of our institutions in Charleston;
- proposed elimination of the high school graduation exit exam;
- questions about the state's tuition residency statutes;
- and the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (about which we will have some informal conversations in an experimental lunch-and-learn format after this official meeting).

On top of these, I knew when I began the week that there were three issues that required my immediate attention:

- the search for a new academic affairs director;
- the future of Smart State;
- and Senate Bill 535—also referred to as the Clemson Enterprise Act.

As you are aware, an unfortunate sequence of circumstances has impeded the Commission's responsibilities in the academic affairs realm for some time. We are all grateful to Renea Eshelman for her willingness to step into this void and keep the ship steady during a difficult transition.

My highest immediate priority is to recruit a strong scholar-administrator to provide permanent, creative leadership of this essential division.

I am pleased to announce that Dr. Robert Sheehan, provost of Coastal Carolina University, has agreed to chair this important search committee.

On Smart State, I have begun substantive conversations with its board chair, Regan Voit, the research university presidents, and legislative leaders about this dynamic research program, which has not received any new state funding in nearly five years.

South Carolina would be unwise, in my opinion, to divert its investment in cutting-edge research that will drive the global industries of the future.

The Smart State initiative is at a critical juncture in its evolution, and I believe CHE should continue to be a key player in that process. We will work with all available partners to ensure the program's continuation and expansion.

The Clemson Enterprise proposal represents a bold vision of what a future public university might look like. It would segment parts of its assets and talents into a division that would more closely resemble a private enterprise.

While we can all applaud the creative potential of this proposal, it also carries significant risks. A thorough discussion about the benefits and limits of this proposal deserve the Commission's full attention.

Jim Barker was the very first president in the state to send me a letter of warm welcome following my appointment last month. The very next week he announced his retirement from the Clemson presidency.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I will presume that these actions were unrelated, but we will in a moment have an opportunity to hear from him directly.

Thank you, Madam Chair. That concludes my report.