

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce
May 7, 2013

Thank you, Chandler, for that kind introduction. I think it is fitting that Mr. Howard introduce me today at a breakfast honoring partnerships between higher education and the business community. Chandler Howard is not only a tireless proponent of the value of higher education and the importance of educational access, he is also a champion of civic involvement and social responsibility. The work of the Liberty Bank Foundation is known throughout central and eastern Connecticut, and Chandler leads the way in modeling what it means to be an engaged citizen in one's community.

Chandler is very familiar with public higher education in Connecticut; he attended Housatonic Community College; he is past president of Charter Oak State College; and his daughter Kate graduated from Eastern in 2004.

In addition, Chandler graciously gave his time during the 2010-11 Academic Year as Eastern's Business-Executive-in-Residence. He came to our campus a number of times to speak to our students about what they could expect in the workplace after graduation and how best to prepare for their own success. Again, Chandler, thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I have been coming to Middlesex Chamber of Commerce monthly breakfasts for almost seven years now, and I have had the privilege of sitting on the dais over this time with an outstanding group of business leaders, local officials and fellow educators. I am honored to be with them again today, this time as your speaker. (Recognize your CSU colleagues, Dr. Roth, Dr. Herbst, Dr. Wasescha, the Mayor, etc. If you feel it appropriate, you may want to mention Dr. Gray's appointment.)

I am always impressed with the monthly speaking guests at this breakfast—ranging from U.S. Senators and Congressmen to our Governor to prominent members of the business community—and I am honored to join that group. I have been equally impressed with this amazing attendance each month. (spread arms to convey the crowd) What a showing of our state's economic community!

It says Middlesex County on the sign behind me, but this chamber's members come from all across our state. Thirty years ago, the Middlesex County Chamber had 282 members. Today, it has 2,400. The Middlesex Chamber is regarded as one of the most successful chambers in the United States, and that success and the attendance here today is a tribute to the leadership of Larry McHugh.

The relationship this chamber and its member businesses have with local schools is not only the subject of today's awards program, it is truly inspiring.

Two weeks ago, the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce's Business and Education Partnership Advisory Council, the Middlesex Consortium of Schools, and Wesleyan University's Center for Community Partnerships held the Eighth Annual Career Fair Expo for high school students here in Middlesex County. More than 225 business and career professionals from 106 companies and organizations participated at the April 25 event, led by Jennifer De Kine from the chamber and Eastern alumnus Tom Serra. More than 1,300 students from eleven high schools learned about careers. Congratulations to all of you!

Seven years ago this month, as the chairman of the Connecticut State University Board of Trustees, Larry McHugh put his trust and faith in me by appointing me to be the sixth president of Eastern Connecticut State University.

Larry distinguished himself as the chairman of that board, and as you know, continues that record of leadership as the chairman of the Board of Trustees for the University of Connecticut. His enthusiasm and his loyalty to Middletown, to our state, and to the students he has taught, coached, or advocated for during a career now in its sixth decade is an inspiration to us all.

As successful as Larry McHugh has been in the business world, he is also all about family. Larry's granddaughter will be a junior in the fall at Eastern and I know his counsel had a lot to do with where she chose to go to college. Larry, thank you for your leadership and for being part of the Eastern family.

Thank you for being a friend and a colleague these past seven years, for inspiring all of us to see the sun shining in our lives and over our state, and for inviting me to speak to this esteemed assembly today.

I am honored to have this opportunity to speak with you about how the business and higher education sectors can better partner in Connecticut for the benefit of our students and our state. I have three thoughts to share with you today. First, I want to talk about the evolving role of higher education in our state and nation. Secondly, I want to reaffirm the key role that the business sector plays in ensuring that higher education fulfills its proper role. Finally, I want to talk about the work that the business community and higher education play together in advancing the American democracy.

Five hundred years ago, only the wealthy men of Europe received an education—of any kind. Even 50-60 years ago, while a college education was available to more people, including women and the thousands of GIs returning from World War II, we still had the notion that “managers” were thinkers and went to college, and the “doers” in our factories and businesses—“labor”—were fine with just a high school diploma.

Times changed. Only 15 percent of our population went to college in 1937. By the 1970s, more than 25 percent of our nation's citizens went to college. Between 1973 and 2008, as technology blossomed, the percentage of jobs in our economy that required some level of college education more than doubled, from 28 percent to 59 percent.

As our workforce has continued to shift from assembly plant factory jobs to more sophisticated work, the educational requirements of the workplace have continued to increase. The Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce projects that 63 percent of jobs in our country will require some form of college degree by 2018.

In Connecticut, with our large financial services and information technology sectors, the figure is even higher—68 percent of future jobs in Connecticut will need a two- or a four-year degree.

We are certainly fortunate to have a strong, diverse set of higher education options for students in our state. We have 12 community colleges offering associate degrees in everything from CNC machining to nursing.

Our four state universities provide affordable, accessible undergraduate education to more than 35,000 students each year.

We have some of the finest private colleges in the world in Connecticut. And our flagship land-grant institution, the University of Connecticut, serves the research needs of our state and serves as a statewide resource that all of us benefit from.

If we can agree that some form of higher education is needed by all our citizens for their own livelihood and the future of our state and national economies, how can the business community help higher education officials ensure that we are teaching the right skills and in the right occupational areas?

One thing you can do is help us advocate for a broader education for today's college students. Right now, based on our experience and what your peers across the nation are telling us, the focus of our students and what we are teaching them needs to change.

Each spring, when almost two million young Americans walk across the stage to get their college diplomas, the majority of them have majored in only four areas: business, engineering, health sciences, and computer science.

No wonder so many college students are taking specialized majors – 70 to 80 percent of college freshmen list their reasons for attending college as earning more money, finding a job, and preparing for a career. This focus with the immediate, unfortunately, is based on a labor-market model that presumes job specialization is the key to success. This model doesn't work in a modern economy where adaptability is the key.

Today's technological world – where knowledge doubles every 18 months and industries are created in less time – requires workers with the transferable skills they need to be ready for as many as 11 different jobs in a lifetime.

As David Kearns, the late Xerox CEO once noted, “The only education that prepares us for change is a liberal education. In periods of change, narrow specialization condemns us to inflexibility.”

I am not here to tell you that we need to turn all of higher education back into the liberal arts colleges of old, where the classics were taught in their original languages and students had to learn Greek and Latin in order to succeed in college. What I am saying is that we need to listen carefully to the data that employers are providing us at the national level. Here is what your fellow employers said in a national survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities only four months ago.

The figures in this recent survey are very similar to those found in surveys conducted by AAC&U in 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2010. Across our nation, employers consistently are saying that they want colleges and universities to focus less on specialized, occupationally specific skills in favor of broader intellectual competencies.

The latest data are compelling: 95 percent of employers responded that they want employees who can innovate. Fully 93 percent of respondents said that problem-solving, research and analytical skills; the ability to work independently or in teams; and oral and written communication skills are more important than a student's major. More than 90 percent of employers cite the importance of ethics, intercultural skills, and an interest in lifelong learning. Employers also believe that college students should have the opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-life situations while still on campus.

I am guessing most of the people in this room who own businesses or hire employees would agree with this assessment. At the same time, educators need to understand the current economic conditions that each of you may face.

All of us—not just business professionals and politicians, but every man and woman on the street—is looking daily at the stock market, at the monthly job reports, at mortgage rates, at any sign that our economy is engaged in a sustained rebirth. Many businesses are trying just to survive, to meet this week's payroll. Knowing that their current employees can operate a lathe,

fill in an EXCEL spreadsheet, or take someone's blood pressure is first and foremost on their minds.

In such an economic climate, talking about higher level intellectual skills may seem out of touch. Nonetheless, we need to find a way for educators to help our businesses balance the long-term vision shared by employers across the country with the very real, immediate workforce needs of our state's economic community.

Let me give you a micro example of how we can do that. At Eastern, we are providing students with a broad, liberal arts education while also offering occupation-specific skills training. It is happening on my campus with the hands-on commitment of one of state's major employers.

Almost three-quarters of our students gain valuable applied experiences in off-campus internships, paid co-ops, or other forms of experiential learning. But some of our students find those opportunities difficult to take advantage of.

On-campus job commitments, lack of transportation and other obligations make off-campus internships a difficult proposition for some of our students. The solution? Bring the companies to campus. We now have a dedicated on-campus "Work Hub," where students gain valuable work experience without leaving campus. Our first WorkHub client has been CIGNA Insurance. Now finishing our second year with CIGNA, we created a secure workspace and computer network that is staffed by 8-10 of our business and computer science students, supervised by CIGNA managers.

The students earn an hourly wage while working on computer databases and other information technology systems for the insurance giant. A year ago, CIGNA hired most of the students when they graduated; we expect similar results this year. We are also expanding our WorkHub client list to include Webster Bank and local nonprofits.

We believe this model, where students take liberal arts courses and gain broad intellectual skills and then apply those skills in focused, occupationally specific settings is the best way in which we can help Connecticut's business community, and it is a concrete way for businesses to be involved with the college education of their future employees.

I want to share one other example of how higher education and businesses are working together here in Connecticut. It not only shows how we can serve the immediate workplace needs of the business community while also emphasizing some of the broader intellectual skills I have been discussing, it also demonstrates what can be done when we bring a wide spectrum of educators and industry representatives to the table.

I am referring to the Connecticut Health and Life Sciences Career Initiative, a consortium of five community colleges (Capital, Gateway, Manchester, Middlesex, and Norwalk) Charter Oak State College, and Eastern Connecticut State University. In the fall, using a three-year, \$12 million U.S. Department of Labor grant, the consortium will offer targeted certificates, associate degrees, and industry-recognized credentials to support veterans, dislocated, and other under-employed workers in seeking careers in health and life-sciences.

A minimum of 15 new certificate and degree programs will be developed; 675 students will be able to earn as many as 10,000 college credits for prior work experience and on-the-job learning; and recruitment and placement services will help graduates find meaningful jobs in the health and life science industries. Internship placements provided by industry partners will also be an important element of the program.

Eastern's role in this consortium is to provide a summer research component, where students will learn lab skills, but also pick up important problem-solving, analytical, and other

broad competencies. Again, we are talking about a combination of occupationally-specific skills and a broader intellectual context, with a central role being played by our business partners.

I am proud to be with you on the day when Middlesex County acknowledges its own business and education partnerships. I hope I have shown how, when we work together, business and education can find ways to meet the short-term training needs of business and industry, as well as the long-term educational requirements of today's modern, global economy. It is not a matter of having either a trained workforce or an educated citizenry. We need both.

So far, my remarks have focused on the public, collective good and the partnership between the business community and our higher education system in maintaining a strong state economy.

But let us never forget the private, personal impact of an education. Horace Mann, the noted 19th-century scholar who changed the academic landscape in Massachusetts and across our country, described education as "the balance wheel of the social machinery." Our nation is full of success stories of men and women who have achieved upward social mobility as a result of their education.

Yet it is ironic that in Connecticut, next door to where Mann founded public education, we have the largest academic achievement gap in the country.

This is the gap in academic performance of K-12 students that exists between urban and suburban students, and African American and Latino students and white students. The chief factor in predicting academic success, however, is not where these students live or the color of their skin; it is about family income. Students who live in poverty have an uphill battle in succeeding academically, going to and graduating from college, and participating in the American Dream. In our inner cities—Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, and elsewhere—we are faced with the reality that whatever we do positively in the classroom is countered by generations of poverty in urban neighborhoods.

Drugs, violence, lack of job opportunities, lack of positive role models, and an atmosphere of despair and futility place far too many students on the path of failure. This is not a path they chose, nor a path their parents wanted them to inherit.

But in truth, poverty in this country is often inherited; breaking that generational cycle must be everyone's responsibility.

Once again, there is a critical role for our business community to play in improving the social condition of an entire class of Americans. Who better than you knows the power of gainful employment? No one in Connecticut has more capacity than the people in the room—businesspeople and educators alike—to make a difference in the lives of those living in poverty.

Improving the lives of low-income families is a moral imperative and a matter of social justice, but it is also an economic necessity. National data shows that 2/3rds of the workforce in Southern New England will be minorities by 2020.

If we don't do a better job of educating Latinos and African Americans, we simply will be unable to sustain our economy.

Stated in the positive, if Latinos and African Americans in Connecticut graduated from college at the same rates as Caucasians, they would realize \$8 billion in additional personal income a year and we would generate 100s of millions of dollars in additional state income tax revenue. In so doing, we will also relieve taxpayers of welfare, unemployment benefits, public health care and other social costs associated with having a poverty class. One of the realities you face is that some of these social costs are passed on to businesses, especially small businesses, in the form of taxes or fees used to support those less fortunate in our society. If we can provide an

affordable, accessible college education to the latest generation of the economically disenfranchised, we can give them the tools they need to become productive taxpaying citizens.

As entrepreneurs, the people in this room carry a great deal of leverage, and coming together each month in this ballroom attests to your strength of numbers. When you advocate for higher education, you can support a seminal social change in this country. Breaking the poverty cycle will benefit all of us. Not only will it help you preparing tomorrow's workforce, it will preserve the economic vitality and quality of life in Connecticut.

A strong middle class, a vital economy, a socially mobile citizenry—all are important to preserving our freedoms and ensuring the social order we cherish. We have seen what the lack of a strong middle class has done in other nations—social unrest if not outright insurrection is often the result. Strengthening the economic status of all Americans is the best insurance we have of maintaining our freedoms.

In closing, I truly believe that there is no better or more important investment that we must make as a state and a nation than to support our public higher education system. Education was the pathway for me out of the housing projects of Newark, New Jersey 50 years ago. It remains the pathway to success for today's students, and the best chance we have of ensuring a viable workforce for the future.

With your guidance, direction, and advocacy, we can prepare that workforce, so that our graduates can become your employees, can raise their families here in Connecticut, and can serve their local communities in the same way that you do as engaged civic leaders in your own towns. Let us continue this important work together. Thank you so much for having me with you today!