

Testimony of Ray M. Bowen  
Join Legislative Committee on Oversight of Higher Education, Governance & Transparency  
September 21, 2011

Senator Zaffirini, Representative Branch and members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Oversight of Higher Education Governance, Excellence & Transparency, my name is Ray Bowen. It is an honor to appear before you to day. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you at this hearing.

I appear before you as a private citizen. I speak for myself and not for any other group or organization

I would, with your permission, like to explain why I am giving testimony. I am a former President of Texas A&M University. Approximately nine months ago, I retired from Texas A&M after serving as President for eight years and as a teaching faculty member in Engineering for an additional almost nine years. Prior to my time at Texas A&M, I served elsewhere as a President, a Provost, a Dean, a Departmental Chair and as a faculty member. I am a fifth generation Texan and a proud Former Student of Texas A&M. I hold an undergraduate and a graduate degree from A&M.

I am an avid supporter of Texas A&M University both financially and emotionally. I celebrate every success and worry over every failure, real or perceived. I am not an unhappy former employee. A&M treated me especially well during my days as a student, as a President and as a faculty member. I am a beneficiary of the generational obligation long accepted by Regents, System Officials and University Officials to make Texas A&M better for each subsequent generation. I am here today to express my concerns about the future of Texas A&M in particular and higher education in Texas in general.

I have spent my adult life in higher education at both public and private universities. I do not think it is immodest of me to assert that I have long term knowledge of higher education; its successes, its failures and how it has changed in response to the needs of our citizens and the nation. I have been around long enough to observe, in many settings, the role of our universities in creating an educated citizenry, creating a qualified workforce and creating knowledge, through research, that is critical to our long term economic welfare and national security.

I share the view held by many that this generation of college graduates are our best. They are especially bright and have never been better prepared to lead successful lives and serve our nation. I consider myself blessed to have spent time in the classroom with this generation of young people.

My main point during this testimony is a request concerning governance; primarily with respect to the selection and appointment of Regents. Before I give this request, I would like to comment briefly on issues which surround the ongoing higher education controversies. In the past six months, by my count, there have been almost four hundred articles, most in Texas publications, which related to the so call "Seven Breakthrough Solutions" promoted by the Texas Public Policy Foundation and, as reported in the media, adopted in varying degrees by the

Governor and the Boards of Regents of Texas A&M and the University of Texas. (See [www.alliancefortamu.org](http://www.alliancefortamu.org))

As many have observed, these simplistic, not original, cookie cutter proposals to improve the complex teaching research enterprises that make up higher education in Texas bear little relevance to the broadly shared goal of making our universities affordable places of opportunity.

While I see little merit in the "Seven Breakthrough Solutions", it is my opinion that our universities should and do recognize the need to change. Thus, suggestions for improvement from knowledgeable sources should always be welcome.

During the course of my professional activities, I interact with a large number of university leaders from all over our nation. They know they must change to remain relevant to their missions and to meet the global challenges our nation faces in this technology driven world. Interestingly, I find little resistance to change as I interact with faculty and university administrators. They simply want their voices to be included among those that provide advice to the governing bodies of our universities. I think an objective assessment would identify many areas where productive change has already occurred.

Simply stated, everyone understands there are always areas of improvement and that status quo is not an option for higher education any more than it is for any other enterprise in our state and nation.

The current higher education controversy is, in its most fundamental form, a debate over governance. It is a debate over the roles played by the Boards of Regents of our systems and of our universities. Everyone agrees that our universities must be transparent, they must be accountable, they must be accessible and they must be affordable. It is governance that creates high level policies that implements these characteristics. It is governance that puts in place knowledgeable system and university administrations that implement these policies. More generally, it is governance that is responsible to put in place policies and institutional leadership that follow and achieve the diverse missions of our universities.

In a most fundamental way, the complex set of activities required to successfully maintain and enhance higher education in Texas flow from its governance structure. The individuals serving on the Boards of Regents are selected by the Governor. The laws of our state give the Governor broad latitude when making these choices. The results are sometimes good. Sometimes they are not.

The state education code prescribes that Boards of Regents are "expected to preserve institutional independence and to defend its right to manage its own affairs through its chosen administrators and employees." I call special attention to the word "independence" in the education code.

It is expected that Regents conduct themselves in the most profession and ethical manner possible. It is expected that they would become knowledgeable of best practices at systems and

universities nationally and task the system and university administrations to implement these practices. It is expected that they would fiercely protect the independence of their universities while holding the system and university administrations responsible take actions that enhance the education of current and future generations of students. It is expected they would hold the system and university administration responsible to establish long term visions for their institutions consistent with the institution's mission. It is expected that they would be unselfish servant leaders daily setting good leadership examples for the students, faculty, other employees and former students. It is not anticipated that they would supplant the roles of the Chancellors, Presidents and other administrators through micromanagement.

It is not rocket science to characterize what constitutes a good Regent. Without trying to relive controversial actions associated with current or past regents, I simply would like to respectfully suggest that the Joint Oversight Committee review how our Regents are currently selected. I encourage you to examine models used in other parts of the country and to solicit the advice of knowledgeable experts about the Regent selection and appointment process. Your speakers earlier today represent a wonderful start in the process I am advocating. Our current experience cries out for a process that results in the selection and appointment of independent, knowledgeable, ethical, diverse, broad gauge individuals that understand their roles and bring experiences that will aid our universities achieve their missions.

Thank you. I would be honored to answer any questions at this time or in the future.

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