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A REALITY CHECK

Bud Webb
South Carolina General Assembly

Let me give you a little bit of a reality check today. Before I do that, let me tell you where I am coming from, because some of you may walk out of here after the meeting and say, "Thank God I do not live in South Carolina or work at Clemson University under those kind of conditions." We may be a little bit different, but I wager you that it is not that much different in South Carolina than in your state.

So, where am I coming from? I spent over twenty years in an undergraduate teaching-research position. I have written my share of publications. I have been the publish-or-perish route, so I understand that part of your responsibility. I spent about eight years as a department head. I spent about eleven years as dean and director of the cooperative extension service and I spent about fifteen months as vice president not only for agriculture, but for university research throughout the university. So, I think I have a pretty firm footing and background in the land grant system. I have some very strong opinions.

Now, I top that off with one year in the legislature. Obviously, after having been there for one year, one still knows all of the answers. When I go back next year, I might not be as smart. Let me start by telling you, at least for those people from Clemson and those people from South Carolina, how you are viewed in general by the legislature.

First of all, you are viewed as the most overpaid and underworked group of individuals in the world. No questions asked. We talk about twelve hours of teaching per semester as being a full-time job. Our Provost came up with some numbers that the average faculty member at Clemson taught an average of seven or eight hours a semester. Members of the legislature take that literally. They think that is how much you are working. I do not know how you overcome that, but that is the perception; thus, that is the reality. Let me give you a specific example. We have a representative who has appointed himself to be the guardian angel for higher education in South Carolina. When we debated just the higher education portion of the state budget this year, he put 43 amendments on the desk--at least one dealing with each institution of the state. We have 33 state-supported institutions in South Carolina. After some six or eight amendments were soundly defeated, thank God he withdrew the rest so that we didn't spend the entire day there.

But, let me tell you what he said about Clemson. He put an overhead up on the screen that said Clemson had 450 faculty who did not teach a single course. He said we could solve all of our problems if we would require half of all of those people to

teach just two courses and be in the classroom six or seven hours a week. Teach two courses, and we could fire the other half of them, and everything would be okay. I never was able to confirm how he got his numbers, but he obviously included all of our county faculty. He included all of our faculty in research and education centers around the state. He had absolutely no concept of research, or scholarship as you or I would view it. But, that is what he said on the floor of the House about Clemson University. I told him the only saving grace for Clemson was what he said about our biggest competitor, which is the University of South Carolina (USC). When he got to USC and this is a direct quote he said, "It is undoubtedly the most grossly mismanaged institution in this state."

I was walking across campus last week and I ran into one of my old friends on the faculty of the Clemson College of Engineering. He asked me how things were going in Columbia and I told him very well now that we are not in session. And I said, "How are things going on campus?" He hemmed and hawed a little bit so I said, "Well, I guess that part of your problem is that you are still messing around doing research and working with graduate students." He looked at me sort of funny. It was just like I had slapped him in the face, that I could question him working with graduate students and doing research. I said, "You must understand that the perception in Columbia is that if faculty would quit messing around and writing research proposals and trying to get external dollars, and quit messing around with graduate students, then you could teach all of those undergraduate courses and everything would be fine."

That is reality, folks. Many of my colleagues in the legislature do not appreciate scholarship, they do not understand why you and your counterparts need to be involved in research and dealing with grad students. They do not understand that you do not have a good undergraduate teaching program unless you have faculty who are active in research. I could go on and on.

I am going to talk about tenure. A retired county director who is in the legislature introduced a bill year before last to abolish tenure in South Carolina. Why is tenure an issue in our legislature and, I would guess, in yours? You must understand that the makeup of legislatures tends to be different now from what it used to be. The majority profession in the South Carolina House of Representatives is business people, no longer lawyers. Lawyers are still second. But they are business people, and they do not understand why you need to give someone a lifetime contract or a thirty-year contract and that almost nothing can happen to void that contract.

My argument to you and my challenge to you would be that you and I are to blame for how tenure is viewed by members in the legislature in my state and in your state. Most of you are not as old as I am. I will not go back to my 42 years I have been involved with land grants but let us go back 25 years. *I honestly do not remember an instance where tenure has been an issue relative to academic freedom.* How do we

use tenure? Universities have used tenure to protect nonproductivity and misconduct. That is the only way we have used it. So, if I could leave you with a word about tenure, it would be “be careful how you use it.”

Our mission is also not understood by most people in the legislature. You tend to think in terms of educating students rather than training students. Legislators do not understand that our objective in a land grant university is let students learn how to learn and to prepare them for a lifetime learning process. Why is it viewed that way in South Carolina? We have one of the strongest technical education systems in the region. There are sixteen technical schools that do a fantastic job. They contribute significantly to the economic growth in our state. If you are an industry coming into South Carolina, the state will fund one of those tech schools to offer special schools to train your workforce for whatever training they need to move into your new plant or your expansion. Legislators see new constituents being brought in and provided very specific benefits to new industry that they helped recruit to their hometown. That is a direct link for them. They see the immediate payoff for that, but they do not see the long-term benefits of teaching students how to learn and be prepared for lifelong learning. I do not know how you deal with that, but it is a reality that we have to deal with. There certainly is a place for technical education and training a new work force, but what you do at a land grant university is also very important.

I want to talk about what we need to do and what the land grants need to do. This is the “gospel according to Bud Webb” and please understand that it is my personal view of what the land grant university in the 21st Century must do to be successful. First, we have to have an expanded outreach. I do not think there is any question about that. The entire university must be involved in some kind of outreach program. I do not know how many of you have ever attended one of the Council on Outreach and Technology Transfer (COTT) meetings. COTT was formed with the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). I went the first time assuming that it would be dominated by land grants. Much to my surprise it was not, and is not, and will not be. If the land grants stay wedded to agriculture and turn engineering, business, health care, lifelong learning and all of those other things over to the other institutions, they will go down the tubes.

People outside of agriculture look at the success of the land grant system. My oversimplification is that it is a model that takes the resources of expertise on campus and transfers technology to masses through a network of professionals around the state. Business people will admit and grant to you that the model has been extremely successful. We are the best fed, lowest cost, most diverse educational system. Anyway you want to measure agriculture, we are right up at the top, as Dr. Wefald said. No question about that. But, people in South Carolina asked me when I was director, and now ask current Clemson administrators, if that model was so successful for agriculture, why don't you apply that same model to the entire state? Why don't you respond to the small businessman, the entrepreneur with your ideas?

In South Carolina, you can count on one hand the number of people out of the 124 members of the House who have any direct link with agriculture. The university cannot survive politically in that environment and write everyone else off. Agriculture and the cooperative extension service need to be the gate keeper. They need to be the backbone of the total outreach of the university. But, unless we can get our counterparts across the university involved, we will default to all of those non-land grant state universities--and they will clean our plow. It is happening in South Carolina today. For the University of South Carolina, there is no area that is off limits. USC recently hired a new vice president for research with the specific objective of achieving Research One institution status. As I said, there are no areas that are off limits to them. So, we can sit back in our traditional model or we can be out there on the cutting edge.

I am not saying this just because I am talking to you as policy educators, but I think there is no question that the land grant university should take the lead in public policy education in the future. There is probably no area where your elected officials need and want assistance more than they do in the public policy area. Some of you may serve on boards or other places where you feel a sense of responsibility. That can be overwhelming. Serving in the House of Representatives for the State of South Carolina has been an overwhelming responsibility for me. I am in awe of the General Assembly's responsibilities. We sit there and talk about cutting taxes or raising taxes--decisions that impact almost every citizen in the state of South Carolina. As a rule, members of the legislature need and want assistance in setting public policy. Perhaps I use a different definition of public policy education. I am talking about public policy with a very broad scope.

What are some of the issues that we are going to have to handle that people in public policy could help us with? One of the major issues facing South Carolina at the present time is how do we provide adequate infrastructure to continue the economic growth and development of this state? There are some real public policy issues in that question. Do we toll existing interstates? Do we toll the new bridge? We recently authorized the state to borrow the money to build a new bridge across the Cooper River just north of Charleston. We have two projects in South Carolina that are going to cost almost a billion dollars--a billion dollars! These projects are the Conway bypass to get people in and out of Myrtle Beach, and the new Cooper River Bridge. How do we finance that? Our governor has said there will be no increase in taxes in any way, shape, form or fashion. We have a majority of the legislature that realizes that we really ought to go ahead and bite the bullet and put some additional tax on gasoline in South Carolina to pay for some of this infrastructure instead of borrowing a billion dollars. But, 70 percent of them signed a pledge last year that if elected, they would not vote for any tax increase during their term of office. *Now, that does not say that we will not put on fees and assessments and all of that!* Those are issues that we are going to have to deal with--that we need help with.

One of the major issues in South Carolina that the legislature is going to have to face in the next few years is the issue of gambling. The thing that is on the front burner right now is video poker. We had some counties that voted to ban video poker machines. The Supreme Court overruled the ban so we went back this year and tried to fix it. Those counties could ban video poker machines again effective November 1, but an injunction has been filed and so as of November 1, every county will still have video poker machines. I am not going to talk about gambling from a moral standpoint. That is another issue. You cannot legislate morality, people that want to gamble are going to find a way to gamble. It may be on a parlay card or football, or it may be going across the river to Georgia to play the lottery. So, I am leaving the moral aspect completely out of it, and I am looking at it strictly from an economic standpoint.

I personally am opposed to video poker. From what I have been told and the evidence I have seen, it is undoubtedly one of the most addictive forms of gambling in the world. We had a woman who left her ten-day-old baby locked up in her car in Jasper County while she played a video poker machine for seven hours. When she came out, the baby was dead. Now, that is addiction, folks! But, I am not talking about that. There are three issues related to gambling that we have to deal with. One is the lottery--we do not have one. Georgia has one and lots of other states have one. The others are video poker machines and parimutuel betting. We have some people who would come to South Carolina in a skinny minute and build a thoroughbred race track down in the Grand Strand area around Myrtle Beach if we would pass parimutuel betting. There are a lot of things appealing about that. If we build it in the Myrtle Beach area, probably 80 to 90 percent of the funds that will be bet there are going to be from people outside of the state--tourists coming in. *It is easier to pick a tourist than it is to pick cotton!* This is an example of one of the areas where we need some good policy work. I do not believe we have a data base that tells us the long-term impact of a lottery. A number of those states that have lotteries have lived high on the hog for the first few years because of all this money coming in, but what happens to revenues three to four years down the road? Those dollars that are going to the lottery do not go into the general economy and turn over. People are not buying tires and washing machines and all of those kinds of things with it. So, a good policy study on what the long-term impact of a lottery is would be very beneficial to many of us.

Property rights is another crucial issue. We passed a bill this year that dealt with personal property rights--takings legislation. How do we protect an individual's personal property rights? There are some really serious policy questions within that issue. So, if you want to get on a real first name basis with your legislators and really make a contribution to your state, get involved with those people who are setting the policy with your policy activities and give them guidance and assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to be with you. I have not talked very much about where I think a land grant university needs to go in the future. But, I will re-emphasize two points. One is the need to get the entire university involved in an outreach program, however you define it or whatever you want to call it. The needs are there. You must respond to business, to manufacturing and to engineering--at least, in a state like South Carolina. There is one area where you could really make a contribution to the future well-being of your state and that is to provide some public policy information and education to the members of your legislature.