

TESTIMONY OF GENE POWELL  
CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF REGENTS  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

Chairman Branch, Chairman Zaffirini, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gene Powell and I am chairman of the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System. It is my pleasure to appear before you today and to address one of the charges given to this committee, namely the manner in which governing boards and administrators of systems and institutions of higher education develop and institute major policy decisions.

The Texas statutes and Constitution entrust management and control of U.T. System institutions and of the Permanent University Fund to the Board of Regents. It is large, serious, and humbling responsibility in regard to which each member of the Board of Regents has taken the constitutional oath of office. We take our duties very seriously.

Our Board of Regents has a specific constitutional mandate to provide a university system of the “first class.” We understand that a system of the first class requires commitment to all three aspects of the mission of a great university system—education, research, and service. During my tenure as chairman, the Board of Regents will not deviate from that commitment.

As you know, higher education is in a time of transition. The Legislature and the people of Texas are asking us to provide a high-quality college education to more students, at less cost, with more efficiency, and in less time. The University of Texas System, under the guidance of the board and the administration of Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa, is up to the challenges of higher education in 2011 and for the foreseeable future.

In the face of these challenges and in light of our constitutional mandate and high ambitions, the U.T. System has been proactive. As chairman, I appointed two task forces with membership consisting of regents, presidents, provosts, and Chancellor Cigarroa. One was focused on Productivity and Excellence and the other was

focused on Blended and Online Learning. The task forces, which put in more than 1,000 hours of work, provided insight and clarity critical to the development by the Chancellor of a framework for advancing excellence throughout the system.

Chancellor Cigarroa initially laid out the framework in May and, at the end of August, presented a detailed plan to the Board of Regents for implementation of the framework. That framework and action plan are the result of months of intense systemwide effort that included the participation of each of our fifteen institutional presidents and are anchored on unwavering commitment to four areas: (1) opportunity for students to have access to affordable education of the highest quality and to succeed in their education ; (2) fueling greater economic prosperity for Texas; (3) improving the quality of life for Texans; and (4) efficient stewardship of the human and financial resources entrusted to us by the state and its people and with which we are blessed.

Many elements of the Chancellor's action plan relate to the core research mission, including a focus on promoting strategic research collaborations, augmenting technology transfer and commercialization, and supporting our four emerging research universities. Having managed a research university—the U.T. Health Science Center San Antonio—for eight years, our Chancellor is well-schooled in the value of research and the management of the research enterprise. In addition, the Chancellor is currently a member of the National Research Council's Committee on Research. That distinguished committee is conducting a study on the future of U.S. research universities, in particular examining the financial, organizational, and intellectual capacity of U.S. research universities with a view to ensuring that these vital institutions continue to contribute to U.S. economic competitiveness and other national goals. Our Board is awaiting the issuance of the committee's report and the recommendations of Chancellor Cigarroa as to the effect of that study on the framework and the action plan.

I am pleased that the Board of Regents unanimously adopted the framework and the plan, with its associated strategies, as the proper path for advancing the mission of the U.T. System. The Chancellor's framework integrated seamlessly with the work of the two regental task forces, and Chancellor Cigarroa is now developing a system to track our progress on implementation. In other words, the framework is

not a document destined to gather dust on desks and shelves, but will be the active guide for the management of the U.T. System for years to come.

Having endorsed the Chancellor's framework, the board will leave its implementation to the Chancellor, who will provide us with appropriate progress reports. As I told him at the August meeting at which the board offered its unanimous support, the ball is now his. He is a great man with a great team, and he and his team have the full support and confidence of this board and of this chairman.

The development and adoption of this framework is a prime example of how I believe a board of regents and system executives and administrators and institutional presidents best develop and implement major policy decisions:

- In the exercise of their statutory and constitutional responsibilities, the board itself—through committees and task forces—must be actively involved in developing policy.
- That development process should include close work with the system executives and administrators and presidents who will be responsible for implementing the policy and will be held accountable for that implementation.
- The policy should be presented to the full board for approval.
- The responsibility for implementation and execution of the approved policy should be given to executives, administrators and presidents, who will regularly report to the board on that implementation and recommend needed adjustments to the policy.

With its policy decisions, as illustrated by the adoption of the framework, I believe the U.T. System displays good governance in action, which will lead to the excellence and transparency that are the goal of this committee and the Texas Legislature and will benefit for generations the people of our great state.

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