

# OFFICE OF U.S. SENATOR SHERROD BROWN

## Senator Alexander's Remarks at the Second Annual Ohio College and University Presidents' Conference April 1, 2009

*I appreciate the job that all of you do. We are in the middle of the budget process, so I won't delay you long. I wanted to welcome you to Washington and make three comments, and issue a little challenge, and then leave five minutes for questions. I'll leave around noon to go onto something else.*

*One, I think the greatest threat to education is overregulation, not underfunding. Sometimes, it's almost a solo battle up here to get members of Congress to understand the value of the autonomy of our 6,000 institutions from Nashville Auto Diesel College to Harvard University to Kenyon College, where my son graduated some years ago. They are all different, and they are all autonomous, and the students choose them, and the research is competitive.*

*It's a very different model than we have for K-12, and many members of Congress don't recognize that. I voted against the Higher Education bill this year because it takes a stack of regulations that are this high, literally, and doubles it. Which means, in all your places, you're going to have to hire some people, or add some people, or divert some people to fill out a lot of forms, and find out a lot of information, and send it up to people there, and nobody even reads it for no good reason. I don't even know what we do with it if we have all this information.*

*I've been over to the Education Department before. There are some nice people over there, but what are they going to do about all that information on your campuses? It's hard enough for you to begin to do it, so that's number one. I think it's important, and great Sherrod is having a discussion like this because it sounds like such a dull issue, but it's really not. The president of Stanford said that seven cents out of every tuition dollar goes to deal with tuition regulation. That was several years ago.*

*Number two, I suggested to the ACE [American Council on Education] the other day that colleges and universities ought to consider giving an option to some students of a three-year community college, free. The reason I suggested this is because if you were to do that, you would probably get members of Congress to listen to the next thing you have to say to them, which might be you don't need to regulate us.*

*You can leave education alone because that's the system they set up. Because what I hear of is every time we raise Pell Grants, all they do is raise tuition. Well what you need to be able to say back is one reason we raise tuition is because Medicaid costs are so out of control in Ohio and Tennessee that it is taking up all the money that goes to higher education. Or we have a lot of answers to that, but no one is listening because they think that every time we raise Pell Grants, you raise tuition.*

*So I would suggest that you find some answers, which would not be to explain it but to say "here's what we're doing." I think one way to do it is to explore whether it would be a good*

*idea to offer some well-qualified students the option of a three-year degree. I know there are problems with it; they've reduced flexibility on some students to be eligible, but there might be a number of students who would like to spend less than five or six years in college, or some who might want to go onto other work or medical school, or might not be able to afford more than three years.*

*I remember George Romney, when he was president of American University in the 1960s, told the Detroit car companies that nothing is more vulnerable than entrenched success. American higher education is by far the best in the world. Nobody has anything to compare it with. Nothing is more vulnerable than entrenched success. The "Big Three" didn't create small cars in the 1960s and 1970s, but their Japanese competitors did, and sold them one by one and you see where we are today. You see where we are today.*

*So we have a different situation, but, in a way, a similar situation in the sense that there are 6,000 higher education institutions. The world is changing in many big ways, so there is competition for the traditional model for the college degree. So, one option might be the three-year college. When I say pre-community college, it's almost free anyway for students in terms of tuition. Why not make it free anyway and why not reach the ten areas like the community college does for the people that live there?*

*What the community colleges have said, and the five counties around there, is that anyone who lives here and wants to go to this community college – tuition will be free. So you will first start out with a Pell Grant, and then a state scholarship, and you see what's left, and the county governments and businesses make up the difference.*

*It costs the Sullivan County government – the biggest county, where Kingsport and Bristol are – only \$80,000 last year for its share. So it's able to say for you and this district, community college, if you're prepared, is free to you.*

*So, I think that's a different message to be able to say to the critics of higher education and its costs - that we're doing a variety of things and you may think of better things. For some students who are prepared, there is a three-year option and for anybody who wants to go to a community college in the area – it's free. Now, if you start out with that, I think anyone will listen to what you have to say.*

*Finally is the America Can Teach legislation. A lot of us worked on that – Sherrod involved as well. That was an example of Congress actually doing what Congress could do. It came because we asked national academics the ten things we needed to do to help keep America competitive. They gave us 20 [recommendations] after a distinguished group of Dr. Chu, the new energy secretary, and Norma Augustine gave a report.*

*And we put a blueprint for the next five years for doubling funding for sciences and a whole variety of things that you probably know about. People said "it's just a blueprint but it's not funded." Well all of a sudden comes the stimulus and other spending, and there's a place to put the money in a focused way. In other words, you needed the blueprint.*

*That will really happen on your campuses when the economy recovers, as it did in western Tennessee in the 1980s, when we had to make cuts and the economy came back, and we had a few years to plan, and we could put the money where it needed to go.*

*Finally, my challenge. I think Arne Duncan is President Obama's best appointee. I told him I look forward to working with him. The challenge that he's going to try to undertake is one that I hope you will support: finding a way to reward outstanding teachers.*

*We did that in ten counties in the 1980s, and it was a brawl with the NEA [National Education Association] for three years, and the colleges of education told me there wasn't any way to do it, which I thought was really stupid for a college of education to say. So we had to do it ourselves.*

*To create master teachers, we need an exceptional teacher for this gifted child. We need an exceptional teacher for this child from a broken home. We need an exceptional teacher for this reason and that reason, and if you can't pay more for being exceptional – if there's no fair way to do that, there will not be exceptional teachers staying in the classroom because they'll be working for IBM or for someone else.*

*It ought not to be up to politicians to figure that out. That ought to be what your colleges of education are doing – and not many are. If you've got one that is, I'll give you a big pat on the back and Secretary Duncan will be working on that through the teachers.*

*It's not easy to do, but it can be done in many different ways and many different places. But unless someone takes the leadership to do it, you will never be able to keep and attract and keep the best women and men in the classroom where we need them for a variety of reasons.*

*Thank you.*