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ONE OF THE CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO

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MARCH 8, 2006

FCCCC President's Address
CCC Board of Trustee's Meeting
Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Chairman Tyree, Chancellor Watson, members of the Board, Officers of the District, faculty, staff and all others present: Good morning!

Today's address will be brief. As you may have noticed, I have been moved up on the agenda to accommodate my teaching schedule. I teach at Daley later this morning.

This past Sunday's *Chicago Tribune* published a front-page story titled "In debt, forever," on the ever-rising costs of attending college. This next paragraph should come as no surprise:

Over nearly a decade, average debt for a four-year college graduate rose from \$12,100 to \$19,300, with about 25 percent of recent graduates having borrowed more than \$25,000 to pay for their undergraduate degrees...

At the same time, the federal government is slashing \$12.7 billion from student loan programs in recent budget legislation that will only exacerbate this downward spiral. The result of this is that we, as a society, are closing the doors and limiting opportunities for those who can least afford a college education and soon we will be pricing out middle-class families as well.

This is where the City Colleges of Chicago can and will play a vital role in providing access to higher education. The same day that the *Tribune* published the "In debt, forever" story, ironically, another Tribune Co. newspaper, the *Allentown Morning Call*, ran columnist Gregory Karp's article titled, "Community college: a thrifty education option." Now, this may seem obvious to us but apparently the message still needs to get out.

In his article, Karp argues that the community college is the financially sound choice and lists nine reasons for attending the community college: 1) you're already paying for it; 2) two years at half price; 3) results are good once a student transfers to a four-year school; 4) favorable teaching conditions; 5) the stigma has faded – he notes that 35 members of Congress are community college graduates; 6) live cheaply at home; 7) ability to work; 8) exploration; and 9) lower student loan bills.

In spite of these benefits our enrollment and in at least half of all Illinois community colleges still declined last year. I cannot speak for the suburban and downstate colleges, but here at the CCC one major factor is facilities. Yesterday at the committee meeting the Chancellor rightfully noted that our competition, the suburban community colleges, has an inherent advantage over the CCC: space. Their campuses are designed and built like four-year colleges. For instance, my alma mater, Elgin Community College, has a beautiful campus: a performing arts center, a fine arts building, a science building, a sports complex...

In past addresses I've decried the lack of vision in our politicians to be bold and to do what is right in spite of popular pressures. I believe that the axiom "Build it and they will come" would hold true for us. So I say to you: be bold and be visionary. The new Kennedy-King is

under way, the renovations at Harold Washington and Malcolm X Colleges are near completion, and Wright College is moving to acquire 60 acres of land. Don't stop there. Two colleges have the space to grow significantly and become like their suburban counterparts: Olive-Harvey and Daley. Imagine science and math buildings, sports complexes and performing arts centers that would serve the communities of the Southeast and Southwest sides. They say there's no money and to that I reply there's no will.

Of course, to accomplish these quixotic dreams, we would have to work together: the Board, administration, faculty, staff and students. It always seemed logical to me to get busloads of us, especially students, from each campus and go out to Moraine Valley, the College of Lake County, Harper, Oakton and even ECC. Let our students see what they should have here in Chicago. You go down to Springfield and we go down to Springfield to fight over our diminishing piece of pie but the students, even a tenth of our 50,000 plus, would most certainly get the attention of our lawmakers.

Am I naïve? Perhaps, but, to paraphrase, "Build them and they (the students) will come."

Respectfully submitted,

Todd Lakin, President, FCCCC