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May 7, 1984

Testimony by Dr. George A. Pruitt at the Public Hearings
on the Commission on the Future of State Colleges

Chancellor Hollander, members of the Board of Higher Education, I wish to begin by expressing my heartfelt appreciation to the public-spirited members of the Commission on the Future of State Colleges. Their conscientious efforts have resulted in a very important document whose recommendations, if followed, will greatly serve the public interested in the enhancement of New Jersey's State Colleges.

The time allotted for my testimony is understandably limited. Therefore, I would like to incorporate, by reference, my testimony to the Commission on the Future of State Colleges in January of 1983, for the record. I do, however, wish to make some general comments here. The Commission has accurately delineated many appropriate major objectives for the State of New Jersey and its public colleges. I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically endorse the specific recommendations referring to Thomas A. Edison State College. I do, however, stand in respectful opposition to the Commission's recommendation that the nine state colleges be brought together in creating a unitary University of New Jersey system.

In the Department of Higher Education's regulations covering the Licensing of Institutions and Approval of Academic Degree Programs, there is contained a description of the characteristics of a true university. These characteristics contain real substantive ingredients that differ greatly from the university suggested by the Commission.

The Commission proposes to accomplish its objectives by enhancing the imagery of separate state colleges by calling us collectively a university. This state is greatly blessed with an exceptionally outstanding university -- it's called Rutgers. I suggest that what we are in need of are strong state colleges, not a cosmetic university. A college is an important and noble thing. It is the appropriate sector within higher education that concentrates on quality undergraduate education. We need not abandon the concept of college to persuade the people of this state that colleges are important and deserving of their support.

The requirements of the nine state colleges are not at all cosmetic. We are afflicted with two major problems. We are overregulated and underfunded. In my opinion, the Commission's recommendation of creating a central Board and administration would compound rather than alleviate these problems. It would not remove the regulatory burden from which the colleges suffer; rather, it would transfer the

external approval authorities from several diverse agencies to a new one. There is little reason to believe that the regulatory burden itself would be eased. The funding dilemma would be aggravated by the creation of a tenth professionally staffed entity to join nine others in a pot containing already limited resources for its current occupants.

The Commission suggests that a central system administration could speak with a louder and more distinct voice than the nine separate and diverse voices now heard throughout the State. My view is that nine strong voices, separate but in harmonized concert, can be more effective than the monotone from a system.

Edison State College has a unique anxiety about the model being proposed. The fundamental tendency of all systems is to standardize and homogenize. Those tendencies, if not resisted, would be disastrous in terms of Edison's ability to conduct its special mission as now perceived and reinforced by the Commission's recommendation concerning us.

The final concern is as to whether or not the new system would achieve its expected ends. The Commission describes a number of laudable objectives and then concludes that the systems approach is the best way to achieve these objectives. I would suggest that thirty years of national experience with systems has not provided convincing evidence that this is the case. I am particularly mindful of the comments of Professor Louis Mayhew on this subject. He concluded that there exists no objective evidence that centralized systems which were created in other states to achieve the same results sought after here, has been attained. The only difference between the highly centralized California system and the highly decentralized Michigan system is that the taxpayers of California spend considerably more on overhead and administration than do the taxpayers of Michigan. The report of the Commission attempts to maintain some semblance of current institutional identity by providing for the retention of local Boards. The evidence, however, with systems taking this approach suggests that these local structures serve more of a public relations function with local communities than any real individual governance authority.

It is my hope and request that the Department of Higher Education and the Board of Higher Education seek to strengthen the state colleges and support the Commission's recommendations, but within the context of the current governance structure.