

PANEL SPEECH
AT ASPA MEETING
March 27, 1987

You are probably thinking that the passages I just read come from Assembly Bill 1173, otherwise known as the state college autonomy law signed by Governor Kean on July 9, 1986. In fact, I have read from the New Jersey Higher Education Act of 1966. The important thing to understand about state college autonomy is that it is a public policy initiative that transcends and is much broader than the change in statute which is the centerpiece of the initiative.

Following the enactment of the first state college autonomy law in 1966, the intent of this legislation was systematically frustrated because competing statutes empowered other branches of state government with jurisdictional control which overlapped that given to the Boards of Trustees of the state colleges. Further, the mechanical control of dollars, vendor payments, and payroll checks, resided within agencies with the ability to enforce their point-of-view as to the division of labor among overlapping spheres of influence (insert Lady Allison's chamber pot story).

It is within this context that you should understand what state college autonomy is not. State college autonomy is not state college secession. We have not seceded from the State of New Jersey and we remain clearly at the service of, and accountable to, the people and the public trust. State college autonomy is not an indictment of the

ability, the effectiveness, or the commitment of the Departments of Treasury, Civil Service, OER, or Higher Education. Nothing in this initiative should be construed to impugn the competence or dedication of these professionals serving the people of New Jersey, consistent with the statutory mandates under which they operate, and as they understand them.

Where there has been conflict, it has been because of the overlap and ambiguity in the authority of each agency to maintain faith with their obligation to a common public, through the mission of their unique regulatory obligation. Our state government staffs and their organizations have not been defective. The imprecision and lack of consensus in the pre-autonomy public policy which separated responsibility from authority in the first place, is the grievance against which the autonomy initiative seeks redress.

For those of us who have ever read an introductory management text, we have come across the principle which says that those individuals or organizations given the responsibility for a task, must also have the authority necessary to accomplish the task, and should, therefore, be the subject of the accountability for the achievement of the task. Or, stated another way, one cannot be held accountable for the effectiveness of an enterprise unless they are given control and the authority to make decisions necessary to achieve the outcomes for which they will be held accountable.

By the start of this decade, some 14 years after the passage of the original autonomy law, it was abundantly clear to the state colleges and the Board of Higher Education that the vigorous progress expected from the state colleges in 1966 had not expressed itself by 1980. And further, it was extremely difficult to focus the accountability for these circumstances because the critical decision-making in terms of resources and personnel was so widely spread between so many disparate offices of state government.

At the request of the New Jersey Council of State Colleges, the Chancellor and the Board of Higher Education formed and charged the Commission on the Future of State Colleges. This Commission issued its report in February of 1984 entitled "Towards a University of New Jersey." While the Commission's report was 41 pages long, its central thesis was rather clear:

1. The state colleges existed in one of the most inhibiting regulatory environments of any in the United States.
2. Many of our colleges had become quite good, but this was in spite of their relationship to the State of New Jersey, and not because of it.
3. The trustees and leadership of the state colleges cannot be challenged to achieve the highest standards expected by the people of this state, nor could they be held fully accountable for achieving less, because they were deprived of the fundamental decision-making authority necessary to any institutional environment to produce effective educational leadership.

The Commission called for the state colleges of New Jersey to be given the same level of operational authority as enjoyed or suffered, depending on your point-of-view, as Rutgers, UMDNJ, and NJIT. The most important policy objective expressed by the Commission was that it was reasonable and appropriate to expect educational achievement of the highest order from the state colleges. To achieve that end, colleges had to receive operational autonomy. The standard for defining operational autonomy in this state was Rutgers, NJIT, and the medical school, and that the means for achieving this authority was to create "The University of New Jersey."

In the Commission's view, state governments and state bureaucracies would never agree to the relinquishing of authority and control, but they might be persuaded to transfer it to another agency, i.e., that of a University of New Jersey. The objectives and recommendations of the Commission were embraced by the state college community, except for the contention that we needed another organizing central agency. We took the position that the Commission's delineation of the problem as well as immediate solutions were appropriate but should be achieved within the pattern of existing governance relationships.

Between February of 1984 and October of 1984, effective consultations were held between the Department of Higher Education, the nine state colleges, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Civil Service, the Attorney General's Office, the Office of Employee Relations, the Governor's Office, the State of New Jersey American Federation of Teachers, and the Communication Workers of America in the

preparation of a policy paper which spelled out the policy objectives, mechanics, and strategies for implementing the consensus that had been reached on aspects of the Commission's report.

The debates and negotiations that took place during the spring, summer, and early fall of 1984 between the various branches of state government and unions were active, vigorous, and ultimately productive. And, in October of 1984, Governor Kean came to the meeting of the Board of Higher education to publicly endorse and express his commitment for those things contained in the Board's initiative "Strengthening Educational Excellence at the State Colleges". This document represented the consensus agreement between all of the parties, including the unions, except for the AFT. More importantly, it defined "state college autonomy."

Following the October Board of Higher Education meeting legislation was drafted to incorporate those aspects of this initiative which required statutory change. The original bills were introduced in the Senate by Senator Feldman and in the Assembly by Assemblyman Doria. They were reported out of their respective committees and were then confronted with vigorous and, frankly, unexpected opposition from the AFT and the CWA. Both unions seized on this legislation as an opportunity to expand the scope of negotiations and to prevent subcontracting, statewide issues of importance not only to those two unions, but to organized labor in the state. Though, let me be perfectly clear the status quo in both areas of interest was not affected by this legislation.

The bills were debated and contested, passed, amended, contested, conditionally vetoed, and reamended through a torturous two years of legislative debate before they were finally enacted in the late spring of 1986 and signed into law on July 9 of last year.

The objective of autonomy was, and is, to change the fundamental relationship between the state colleges of New Jersey and the State of New Jersey. The standards for evaluating our success in implementing this public policy will be to the extent that we achieve regulatory parity between the state colleges and the three other senior universities in New Jersey. Its long-term objective, however, is not regulatory, but educational, to give the presidents, faculties, and trustees the resources, relationships, and environment to achieve educational excellence for the students and citizens of New Jersey.

You will hear from other speakers as to various aspects of transition and implementation, and how we take a public policy statement and operationalize it so that the fate of the 1986 autonomy law does not follow the way of the 1966 autonomy law. Through the leadership of the state colleges, the active support of the Governor, the Chancellor, and the Board of Higher Education, we are committed to achieving the noble outcomes and high purpose that has characterized this quest from its very beginning. Our commitment to this end is complete, and the stakes are enormously high. The achievement of the full deployment of this initiative is central to our ability to deliver to the citizens of New Jersey a quality of education they deserve. We want nothing more, we have the talent in our faculties and leadership to fulfill the requirements of this covenant. We have made a good beginning, the jury's still out. We intend to finish the job.

Thank you