

Remarks by Dr. Charles B. Reed

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The Collins Legacy and the Future of Florida
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TOUGH CHOICES, TOUGHER CONSEQUENCES

Thank you very much. It is a true honor to be here. I consider LeRoy Collins one of the finest political leaders Florida has ever had. He was a true friend and mentor to me.

What we are doing here today – examining Florida public policy, turning it every which way, leaving no stone unturned – is perhaps the best possible way we could honor his legacy. He would be proud to see all of us here today.

Eight years after Tough Choices came out, where do we stand? If I had to write the report again today, I'd call it: "Tougher Consequences." Fifteen years ago, Rick Edmonds helped me write a landmark report on higher education in Florida called "The Emerging Catastrophe and How to Prevent It"

Today we're just beginning to see the aftermath of what happens without careful guardianship of our future. The investments in our higher educational infrastructure have fallen apart. And that essentially means we have a very weak foundation to build upon for future generations.

Why has Florida's structural integrity diminished since those years when we first warned of trouble around the edges? Because we are lacking the cohesive sense of mission or commitment holding it together. The economy and tax cuts have not helped. Florida continues to be a very low tax effort state.

Today I want to talk a little bit about that change, and then a little bit about what we can do to re-set our goals and ambitions for Florida's future.

A Sea Change

Here's a quick sketch of "how things used to be" versus "how they are now."

After World War II, our country came up with a societal set of goals to support everyone who wanted to go to college, the G.I. Bill. You could get a high quality education at a

low cost. The states were the ones that backed that low cost. From a societal standpoint, they led everyone to believe that you could get a college degree. And that college degree was your ticket to a good job and a solid future. It built the middle class in America. The college degree was considered a public good.

Slowly, that commitment has eroded away. But no one has told the public. There's been a big shift from higher education to health care and to the criminal justice system. There have been major increases in the cost of K-12. But no one has told the public that universities aren't universally accessible anymore. No one has come right out and said that maybe everyone can't go to college. Maybe a college degree is becoming a private or personal good.

But the bottom line is, someone has to pay for education, and the states just simply aren't doing it. According to the national policy center Demos, in 1990-91, Florida public colleges and universities received 56 percent of their funding from the state. By 2009-10, that number had dropped to just 30 percent.

Since 1990-91, average tuition at four-year institutions in Florida has gone up by 55 percent. The average tuition at two-year institutions has risen by 94 percent.

And it's not even clear that there's public support or understanding of the commitment that's required to keep higher education accessible. When "Tough Choices" first came out, respondents were asked where they would cut from if the state had to cut money from the budget. Nearly 1 in 5 people chose "colleges and universities."

What will Florida – or even the United States – look like if we give up on our commitment to higher education? What will it look like if we fail to give our young people a stepping stone to a better future?

We'll feel the consequences in our quality of life, quality of community, economy, health care, and even the environment.

If we want to get Florida back on track, here's what it's going to take:

- 1) A central plan
- 2) A focus on economic and workforce development
- 3) A commitment to the common good

One - A Central Plan

Florida is lacking a strong central plan, or sense of purpose.

To give you some perspective, I want to share an example from California. California is imperfect in many ways, just like Florida. But what California does have is a very clear Master Plan for Higher Education that divides the higher educational system into three distinct segments:

- **University of California** – 10 campuses, graduate institutions focused on research, including enterprises such as teaching hospitals and national labs. UC Berkley, UCLA, UC San Diego
- **California State University** – 23 campuses, masters-level institutions focused on providing the baccalaureate degree and promoting workforce preparation. SF State, San Diego State, Fresno, Cal Poly SLO
- **California Community Colleges** – 112 two-year colleges focused on transfer degrees and technical training.

In California, the UC and CSU boards operate with great flexibility. The boards are by and large independent. They set tuition. They receive a lump sum budget. There are no specific buildings mentioned in the budgets. No turkeys.

Here in Florida there has been little to no leadership at the state level in guiding Florida's universities to a common mission. Everyone wants law schools, medical schools, and graduate programs because they are prestigious. So now, schools are creating more graduate programs at the expense of undergraduate programs – with the dollars generated by undergraduate enrollment. These low-enrollment duplicative graduate programs have not served the state well. It's turned into what the local chamber wants, not what the state of Florida needs. It appears to be a “free for all” not what is best for Florida. Millions to be spent on a Polytechnic University.

In Florida, we also have community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees. This has resulted in “degree creep” – and it has short-changed the state in terms of workforce development programs, like allied health and occupational/technical programs. It has now become a race to see who can become a four-year college. Governor Collins started these schools not designed to award baccalaureate degrees.

These institutions are now acting as lone players or competitors. There's no sense of mission because it's every institution for itself. And there's no incentive for them to act in Florida's best interests.

So those dollars that are being channeled into higher education are not being used as effectively as they could be.

What we really need is a central agreement that higher education is important, and to make it effective, we all need to work together for the benefit of our state.

Two - Focus on Economic Development

The second piece relates to setting our focus and keeping our long-term goals in mind. We all want a stronger Florida. And the best way to position our state for future success is to focus on economic development and workforce needs.

When I was in California, we used to produce a report on the California State University's economic impact. When we attached actual dollar amounts to what we were doing, the results were astonishing.

- For every \$1 invested by the state, the CSU generated \$5.43 for California's economy.
- CSU-related spending generated more than \$17 billion in economic impact in California that supports 150,000 jobs in the state.
- For UC they generated \$7.50 for the economy. UC spending generated more than \$2.5 billion in economic impact.

By showing these numbers, we were able to remind a larger audience of the major impact and long-term importance of a healthy higher education system. We want employers and businesses to think about universities in that context.

Universities provide employers with students who can write proficiently, think critically, and will be a dynamic addition to the workforce. The silicon valley looks for liberal arts graduates in addition to the high tech degrees.

Universities prepare students who can work in teams, use and fix technology, solve problems, and speak more than one language.

They help students hone their creativity and problem-solving skills.

The California business community bought into higher education because of our commitment to workforce development and their workforce needs.

We know that this is what Florida employers want from their employees too. And if they can't find them from Florida graduates, they'll hire from elsewhere. That's why Florida lawmakers and policymakers have to understand the need for supporting critical skill development through higher education.

Three - Commitment to the Public Good

Higher education has the ability to lift up the entire society through economic growth, higher tax revenues, and greater community participation.

Yes, it's true that we need accountability to ensure that the money is well-spent. But policymakers and the public need to understand that support for public universities equates to long-term benefits for society. Why not have each of the universities in Florida publish a "public good" page.

Let's look at Florida right now: According to the Demos report, Florida has the fourth-largest young adult population in the United States, and one of the fastest-growing as well. Florida's young Latino population has grown 213 percent in the last twenty years.

These young people are motivated to learn and help their communities – and they know that higher education is the ticket. But our enrollment rates and our graduation rates are not up to what they should be.

Who is looking out for these underserved students? In Florida, it seems that the thinking has become, "Higher education is a personal good – people who will benefit should pay more." So tuition goes up, and it prices out people at the low-income, high-talent level who would benefit most from higher education.

Florida's financial aid system is upside-down. Bright Futures provides the most merit aid to people who need it the least. People who get Bright Futures tend to be kids who have enriched education, travel a lot, and do well on tests. The aid disproportionately goes to wealthy families.

In 1990-91, 40 percent of Florida's grant support for students was need-based. In 2009-10, that need-based aid had dropped down to only 25 percent of total grant support. Young people from high income families earn bachelors degrees at seven times the rate of those from low income families.

So it has become more than just a political issue. This is a civil rights and moral issue. Florida can't afford to carry out this program anymore. The new Bright Futures criteria will only be available to 11% of African American students according to a University of South Florida study.

What will happen in Florida if the current aid system continues as is? Will we be able to reach those talented young students who are starting off with an economic disadvantage? Or will this become a state with a vast swath of the population that is under-educated? And will the middle class keep shrinking until it disappears entirely?

If Florida continues in the current direction, it does so at its own peril. Because when the higher education system fails to help our young people, the future workforce and the economy will follow. And I know that this state – which is home to so many incredible resources and talented people – can and must do better.

I want to finish with a story about LeRoy Collins that seems fitting in this context. Back when I worked as Chief of Staff to Governor Bob Graham - once in a while on my way home in the afternoons (not very often) Gov. Collins would invite me to stop by the Grove and talk to him. He liked to know what was going on in our state.

He shared with me a story about one day sitting beside the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court at a White House dinner. The Chief Justice asked him what he felt his biggest accomplishments were. He ticked off a couple. Then the Chief Justice asked him what his biggest failures were. That's when Governor Collins said that he tried over and over again to get the Florida Legislature to reapportion itself for one man, one vote, as per the Voting Rights Act.

The Chief Justice looked at Governor Collins and said, "That wasn't a failure at all. We knew that if you couldn't do it, no one could do it, so we knew we had to come up with a remedy."

I think that's a great lesson for us even today. What we might think of as a failure can actually be a call to action. It can be the tipping point for setting us in a new direction for Florida's future. We may have made some poor policy choices in the past, but it doesn't have to stay that way. We just need to act before those tough consequences become the reality for Florida's future. We can never give up.

Thank you so much for inviting me to speak. I will be glad to answer any questions.