2002

Welcoming Remarks

Lee T. Todd Jr.
University of Kentucky

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/klj
Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/klj/vol90/iss4/4

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kentucky Law Journal by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.
I love interdisciplinary conferences. I’ve been struck by the fact that back in the olden days, as my children say, when I was a graduate student and a young person, the word “interdisciplinary” was hot, but if you did it you were in trouble because when you got out there weren’t jobs for people who crossed boundaries. But today it’s probably the hottest area in which we can get research funding. So I’m really pleased that 11 of our colleges have been involved in the planning of this effort and that we have such a diverse crowd, not only across our campus, but across the state and even the country.

I already had a chance to meet some of the experts who have joined us. I know it is a tough time for public health officials and experts in this state to be away from their work and their duties, but we really appreciate your contribution here. I also want to thank the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the University of Kentucky College of Law Gallion Baker Professorships in Law and Medicine for helping us sponsor this. It’s quite a list of sponsors.

This conference obviously comes at a most important moment in the history of our country. We find ourselves in a period where we hear about health problems arising from Ecoli which we thought was one of our bigger problems possibly before September 11th. Health concerns about our traditional cash crop, tobacco, are certainly on our minds here in this state as we try to decide how to use some of the tobacco settlement money to try to change our economy, but we also have to continue to worry about the health conditions and how they’ve placed our farmers in the midst of a battle over public health policy. In the last six weeks we’ve seen public...
health issues obviously assume a new urgency as Americans and the rest of the world confront bioterrorism. We were just talking a few minutes ago about how that subject is on all of our minds.

We have two schools of public health in Kentucky. Dr. Shumaker and I are talking quite a bit now—for those of you out-of-state you may not realize the significance of that, but he is the President of the University of Louisville—and we are working hard with Scutch and others to get the two public health schools up and operational because we feel that there is a significant amount of work we can do in the bioterrorism area. I was interested to find out that the planning for this conference began September 2000, well before September 11th was emblazoned on all of our minds and so you were way ahead of the game on a subject of the utmost national interest.

The thing that also makes this an interesting conference for me is part of our top 20 mission here in Kentucky—and I’ll speak to those of you who are not Kentuckians for just a second—UK is challenged to become a top 20 public research institution by the year 2020 by our Governor and Legislators. They put up some money when they made that challenge. We got “bucks for brains” two sessions ago, $67 million that the state put up if we matched it, and if we did we got to create endowed professorships, and we’ve done that in two sessions now, another round of $67 million. I’m certainly hoping we get “bonds for brains;” I think that is a third round. I know the Governor is going to push it and I will be with the Governor and part of my mission is to continue to push “bonds for brains” with him. He is pretty committed to it. But that program behind the challenge they have given us has allowed us to grow our endowment over $430 million. We have already brought in, in 1999 and 2000, $46 million. Ninety-seven percent of that is federal funding, so we are doing the right things as we go toward that challenge.

I’ve taken the position that if all we did was to try to focus on research dollars, if we just looked at the list of the 20 public research universities, starting with Michigan at $600 million, and looking down the line to see what number 20 had, and just focused on research dollars trying to knock them out of position, we could do it that way and we could fail the state, because we might not change the lives of Kentuckians. We might not pay attention to areas like arts and liberal arts. We might not pay attention to areas like business and law, which do not bring in a lot of research money, but are vitally important and help move this state forward. So I have a committee working on the analytical measures we will use to compare ourselves to all the other institutions and some numbers have just come out recently. We are the 32nd public research institution now, so we’ve got a
bit of a way to go. In addition to that, our research has grown by 67% from 1990 to 1999, the fastest growth rate of any of the public institutions that are our benchmark. So those analytical measures are important and we are going to track those.

In addition to that, this group is looking at what I call the "Kentucky Uglies." These are things that have held this state back for a long time. These are things that sometimes we do not want to talk about. Well, I have learned in my life if you don’t talk about your problems you never solve them, and so we are looking at ways to take measures. We are leaders in lung cancer and in heart disease, and we’re leaders in spina bifida. We’re not leaders in literacy, we’re leaders in illiteracy. Our per capita income is not growing like other states. So we are actually going to take some measures in the area of social well-being, trying to find a cultural index for the state that we can measure. There are several health measures that we already have in mind and we are going to challenge our best minds at this institution to work on those toughest problems, and that is largely what you are doing today. You are attacking some of our toughest problems.

It is my feeling that if we write proposals with passion, if we are trying to solve a Kentucky problem and get funding to do that, it will help the state of Kentucky change, and those dollars count just as well toward that top 20 research goal as any other dollars. So you can be doing research and doing good at the same time and that is really the top 20 mission. When the Governor and the Legislators told us that they wanted us to be a top 20 research institution, I think what they really were saying to us is, “we realize that everybody’s economy now is going to depend on knowledge, on higher education, we’re not sure exactly how to get there, we want the higher education institutions to take us there.” And that’s our responsibility. But we have got to do it in a way that will help our citizens. The content, the information you are talking about today, is right in line with what we have to do, so I really appreciate the effort you are making here. I want to thank the organizers for being able to pull together the expertise that you have.

Before I leave, I have the genuine pleasure of introducing the next speaker. I have known Attorney General Ben Chandler for several years now. I had the pleasure of working with him on Governor Jones’ Quality and Efficiency Task Force, where he was on the Board and I headed the Work Force Group and the Technology Group. I had not met him before, but spent a lot of hours there watching and looking and studying the problems of Kentucky. Ben won his first state office in 1991 when he was elected Kentucky’s Auditor. In that office he built a strong record of ferreting out governmental waste and corruption. In 1995, he became
Kentucky's Attorney General and was re-elected to that position again in 1999.

During his service in that office he did something very significant. He filed a suit against Anthem Insurance Company and won a settlement that resulted in the recovery of $45 million in charitable assets that once belonged to the former Blue Cross/Blue Shield company. And I might say that money helped form a foundation that recently gave a million dollars to the University of Kentucky for an endowed chair in rural health care, and at the same time, gave a million dollars to the University of Louisville for a metropolitan health chair. We are working together with U of L to select those personnel, so that we make sure we do it right. The state matched that million dollars so we have two million dollars chair here in the area of rural public health. We want to thank him personally for that because that is a significant move for us and that person will have an office in Appalachia and will live over there, will be in that area where the problems arise.

He also created a new unit in his office to represent the public's interest in health insurance rate hearings. Ben established a new division dedicated solely to helping senior citizens protect themselves from crime, fraud and abuse. He started a division to investigate the rapidly increasing crime of financial identity theft and he also created a public corruption unit in his office, to specialize in uncovering government corruption. Obviously, Ben has much value to share with us today. What impresses me and has always impressed me about him since the day I met him, is his energy, his intellect, and his true passion for the state of Kentucky. So it is my pleasure, Mr. Attorney General, to bring you to the podium now. Please welcome Ben Chandler. Thank you all very much for coming.