



Remarks to the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee  
President Peter T. Mitchell – March 1, 2018  
**“Triumph Amidst Tragedy”**

Senator Shuitmaker and members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education, it is an honor and privilege to share with you good news and great optimism at Lake Superior State University,

“It’s a great day at Lake State, how can I help you?” That’s what you’ll hear when you call any office at Lake Superior State University. It’s not a marketing ploy, it’s a heartfelt statement that captures a university finding its groove and stepping boldly into a very promising future. As you review the 2018 Annual Report to the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee, I trust you will sense the palpable excitement permeating campus.

The title of my remarks is “Triumph Amidst Tragedy.” The tragic death of beloved President Thomas Pleger in May rocked Lake Superior State University to the depths of its core. Yooper grit was tested as the campus and community mourned Tom’s death, while at the same time, pulled together to honor his legacy by redoubling its efforts to revitalize the University. The progress achieved this year is a tribute to the foundation that Tom’s charismatic leadership established.

All universities face enrollment challenges – size, academic quality, diversity, and retention. At LSSU, Enrollment has become Job #1. A total retooling of the admissions operation and marketing strategy has produced remarkable results. The February 27, 2018 daily Admissions Comparison Report showed an increase in First Time in College Admitted Applicants of 130% (2,291 versus 998). The entire campus is working together to convert these admits into enrolled students, as well as working to increase graduation rates.

The Fall to Spring Semester retention rate of 94.4% was the highest in LSSU's history; up 3.5% from last year and up 2.6% from the previous historic high – a triumph. Improving 3.5% when the retention rate was already above 90% is an outstanding accomplishment. The enrollment management strategy, comprised of enhanced recruitment and retention, is projecting an enrollment of 2,500 in 2022 and 3,000 by 2025.

A significant reason for the dramatic increase in applications is an outgrowth of Governor Snyder’s address at the Public University Summit in September. LSSU was in the midst of a strategic planning initiative and the Governor’s emphasis on universities preparing graduates for the jobs of the future had a profound impact. Lake State reaffirmed its roots as a career-oriented and hands-on educational experience.

Enclosed in your packet is an opinion piece in **The Detroit News** highlighting Lake State's exemplary track record in merging liberal arts with vocational skills. Building on our national reputation in robotics, fishery and wildlife management, criminal justice and fire science, the strategic direction creates collaboration and synergy among programs. Responsive to the Governor's new Marshall Plan for Talent, LSSU is expanding associate and certificate programs and inculcating a spirit of synergy between programs like criminal justice and fisheries and wildlife management, computer science and forensic chemistry, engineering and fire science. The result will be innovative career-oriented programs equipping the Laker talent pool to play their role in an economic resurgence in Michigan.

A perfect example of the revitalized academic strategic direction at LSSU is our brand new state-of-the-art simulation center. War Memorial Hospital (WMH) committed \$500,000 to transform the first floor of an existing building on campus into a Sim Center that overlooks the International Bridge to Ontario. Collaboration between LSSU and WMH will create opportunities to expand our nursing program and develop new healthcare programs of study. The partnership will enable the two institutions to utilize other facilities on campus to sponsor large conferences drawing medical professionals from Canada, the U.S.A. and beyond, generating new revenue streams for both LSSU and WMH. The Sim Center enhances the quality of instruction and expands the capacity for teaching, thereby increasing enrollment in the LSSU nursing program by over 30%.

Another set of numbers that is triumphant is fundraising dollars. Lake State was approved for a Capital Outlay of \$11,800,000 to construct a Center for Freshwater Research and Education. There's a brochure describing the Center in your packet. The \$11.8 million Capital Outlay project requires a \$2,950,000 match from LSSU. We had raised \$950,000 during the first year with a goal of \$2 million this year. Giving is one of the three most pleasurable activities; I'll let you figure what are one and two. But my mission as a college president is to make people as happy as possible by convincing them to give as much as possible. Fundraising gifts and pledges CFRE and the Hatchery reached \$2,837,000 as of yesterday.

This success inspired the final visioning and planning session to create a dynamic design that expands the original CFRE from 16,000 to 17,500 square feet. Locating CFRE in Sault Ste. Marie's Alford Waterfront Park next to the Cloverland Power plant will create a unique recreational and fishing venue for citizens and tourists. Like the Sim Center collaboration with War Memorial Hospital, CFRE is leveraging synergy among LSSU, the City of Sault Ste Marie, Cloverland Electrical Cooperative and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The impact of CFRE on the Eastern U.P. will be tremendous in terms of enhancing LSSU's academic reputation and enrollment, expanding quality research and the vitality of fish populations, creating innovative education and outreach to teach K-12 students about the Great Lakes, and serving as an economic driver for the area.

We are grateful for the thoughtful questions posed to Michigan's fifteen public universities by Senator Shuitmaker and Representative LaSata. Our senior management team not only worked diligently to provide answers, the collaboration reinforced our commitment to the importance of the issues and reaffirmed our resolve to ensure that every member of our

campus is safe and protected from harassment and sexual assault. Likewise, LSSU has been and continues to be a place where all members of the campus community are receptive to and respectful of speakers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

As the smallest public university, we are fortunate to have an ethos of caring and a culture of concern and affirmation. Our diversity statement begins with these words: *We believe that diversity is the rich array of perspectives inherent in the full range of human differences, individual and collective, that constitute identities and communities, cultural perspectives, ways of knowing and an openness to ideas and exchanges of ideas marked by civility and mutual respect.* The statement concludes with these words: *A diverse campus enriches the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, informs the practical application of education, develops appreciation of alternative perspectives, cultivates a respect for inclusion, and fosters the unfettered quest to know and be known, forming the foundation of a life of meaning and purpose.*

I began my remarks with the way we answer the phone, “It’s a great day at Lake State, how can I help you?” Please allow me to flip that statement and say, **“It’s a great day at Lake State, but there are three very important ways that you can help us.”**

The first way to help is infrastructure asset protection. Like each of the other 14 public universities, and many municipalities in our state, LSSU is working to address a number of asset preservation projects that accumulated over the past 20 years, due in a large part to a decline of state support. Through the master planning process, and our Six Year Capital Improvement Plan, LSSU has identified a number of critical infrastructure projects totaling \$2.5 million over the course of six years.

The most acute and critical of those problems is a full replacement and upgrade of our campus electrical grid. As a result of deferred maintenance, the grid which powers our campus is quickly approaching the end of its useful life. The LSSU campus receives power via two separate high-voltage power lines: Line-One and Line-Two. Both lines were installed nearly 50 years ago. Last year, the campus experienced several power outages which resulted in approximately \$200,000 worth of damage, a loss of 3 academic days, and an estimated \$120,000 in lost revenue. Line-One was partially replaced in 2005, and funding was allocated for replacement of the remainder of that line. The replacement is scheduled to take place in May of this year. The remaining line, Line-Two is in dire need of replacement as well. Replacement of Line-Two is essential, **therefore Lake Superior State University requests an additional \$300,000 from the State to fix Line-Two.**

The second way to help is to increase funding for Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver (MITW). Public Act 174 of 1976 provides for free tuition for North American Indians who are residents of Michigan and attend Michigan public community colleges, public universities, and certain Federal tribally controlled community colleges. In the fiscal year (FY) 2017-18 higher education budget, an additional \$300,000 was appropriated to partially offset the difference between State appropriations and actual costs of the tuition waiver. This was the second appropriation of additional funds for the tuition waiver since FY 2007-08. As the chart included in the **2018 Report to the Higher Education Appropriations**

**Subcommittee** illustrates that State funding for the program has not kept pace with the costs incurred by each University.

Lake Superior State University has a higher per capita enrollment of Native American students than any other Michigan University. The shortfall in funding equates to approximately 2.5% of our total State appropriation, which in turn creates a shortfall of 118% per Full Year Equated Student. This creates a substantial financial burden for not only the institution, but for the students who must make up the difference with increased tuition. **On behalf of LSSU's Native students, who account for almost 10% of the student body, we urge you to continue adding additional resources to support their quest to achieve an associate or bachelor's degree and become part of the Talent Pool that is "pure Michigan."**

The final way you can help LSSU students and the single greatest concern at Lake Superior State University and the single greatest potential negative impact on enrollment is the change in funding for the Tuition Incentive Program (TIP).

The Tuition Incentive Program was established to pay full tuition for Medicaid-eligible high school graduates at a community college or one of four public universities whose mission and location includes serving as a community college – Ferris State University, Lake Superior State University, Northern Michigan University and Michigan Technological University. However, the Governor's 2018-2019 Budget Proposal contains change in the funding from the actual tuition to the following wording:

*(c) For fiscal year ~~2017-2018~~ **2018-2019**, for persons enrolled at a Michigan public university, the department shall pay lower division resident tuition and mandatory fees for the current year. Beginning in fiscal year 2018-2019, for persons enrolled at a Michigan public university, the department shall pay mandatory fees for the current year and a per-credit payment that does not exceed 3 times the average community college in-district per-credit tuition rate as reported on August 1 for the immediately preceding academic year.*

LSSU TIP students come from isolated rural areas throughout the State, the vast majority from outside our district. To reduce funding for these students to \$330 per credit hour seriously disadvantages the Upper Peninsula to the point that these neediest of the needy will simply be unable to attend.

LSSU's Not only is this an equity issue for the U.P. and a significant change in the intent of the program, the additional financial burden will result in talented students not attending college, remaining in dead end situations in impoverished small Michigan towns. Moreover, the students who attend LSSU profit from being in the dormitory, away from family situations that impede their learning and striving to succeed. LSSU already provides financial aid to cover the cost of living on campus, not required by community colleges.

**The most equitable solution is to eliminate the clause** *"beginning in FY 2018-19, payments for individuals enrolled in public universities shall be limited to mandatory fees and a per credit payment that does not exceed 3 times the average community college in-district*

*per credit tuition rate for the previous year” from the Higher Education Appropriations budget. **This action maintains the initial rationale and purpose for TIP.***

The joy of being President of Lake State is the interaction with students. I often eat lunch in the student cafeteria and I've listened to students share their concern about the reduction of TIP funding. I asked a freshman, Megan Rose to put in writing her poignant story. Please hear her voice as reflective of her fellow TIP students.

*Hello, my name is Megan Rose and I am a freshman at Lake Superior State University where I am pursuing an associate degree in liberal arts, with a goal to go on to complete a B.A. degree in Communication and secure employment in Michigan. As a first generation college student I am working to break the cycle that has surrounded my entire childhood. With none of my siblings attending college or encouraging me to go and my parents not having experiences to share with me, college was just something other families attended. It was something I knew my parents could not afford, so I only let myself dream about being able to attend college, until I heard that I was TIP eligible. TIP was a way that I could make my dreams come true in a way that I never thought would have been possible. I now attend college with the assistance of TIP, but that program is currently about to be reduced which will add a financial burden onto my family that could lead to me not being able to continue with my schooling.*

*Attending college through TIP has offered me many different opportunities that I would not have been able to get from my hometown of West Branch. I was able to meet my friends that not only help me see the world from another perspective, but friends that challenge me academically and push me to be a better person. As a dorm student, I have an entire campus community around me that encourages me to take charge of my life and to follow my dreams in whatever way possible all while I get a quality education that will advance my future in so many ways. In the semester and a half that I have been in college under TIP I have excelled in my education, earning a 4.0 GPA my first semester and I have continued to push myself academically through this current semester.*

*So, today I ask that you remove the clause from the Higher Education Appropriations budget that would provide LSSU only three times the average in-district community college tuition or \$330 per credit. Lake State already provides extra financial aid for me to live in the dorm, but the cap of \$330 per credit is \$155 below the actual tuition of \$485, meaning I need to come up with \$3,720 to pay for tuition for both semesters. There is no way my family could pay that amount. On behalf of the 236 TIP students at LSSU who are doing so well and need a setting like Lake State to excel, please honor the original intent of the TIP program and pay the true tuition rate, not a manufactured rate tied to community colleges that serve a different purpose and have a different mission. Thank you.*

On behalf of Megan Rose and the approximately 250 other LSSU TIP students preparing to be the talent pool our state needs, we urge you to restore TIP funding to its original intent and eliminate the language that caps the TIP award for LSSU, Ferris, Northern and Michigan Tech students at 3 times the average in-district tuition at community colleges.

I've been blessed to have served as a college president for 24 years, the last ten at my alma mater, Albion College. I never dreamed that ten years after I thought I retired that I would have the honor, privilege and great joy to serve as President of Lake State.

Lake State's enrollment of 2,000, with a strategy to grow to 3,000, is one-third the size of the next smallest public university in Michigan. Nimble and entrepreneurial, Lakers are ready, willing and eager to take risks, try new programs, serve diverse populations, collaborate with multiple partners and be the institution to test new theories and strategies for improving higher education.

Our location in the Eastern Upper Peninsula with its pristine natural beauty, a stone's throw from the bridge to Canada, the largest percentage of Native American students among Michigan's public universities are distinct strengths. LSSU can and should be a driver of economic development and cultural vibrancy consistent with our mission and founding slogan, "Enter to Learn; Go forth to Serve."

At Lake Superior State University, we don't have all the answers. However, we do have a passion for our region and its people. Like Plato, we believe "necessity is the mother of invention," equipping LSSU to serve as a prototype for the future of small and mid-sized regional public universities. We also have the confidence and force of will to be a beta test site for the Governor's Marshall Talent Plan for Michigan to be the national model for developing and attracting talent.

As a native of Ishpeming, I know that Yoopers are resilient, determined, clever, and not afraid to work a little harder for what we want and need. Higher education will need this spirit and grit to thrive in the future.

We're Lakers who enter to learn and go forth to serve!

Thank you.