

SHOP TALK: FRED CLARK

Clark Sees Advocacy Role as New BHE Chair

Interview by Brett M. Rhyne, *Perspective* editor

Gov. Deval Patrick appointed Bridgewater State graduate Frederick W. Clark, Jr. chairman of the Board of Higher Education Aug. 15. Clark has a long history with the state college system, from his serving as chairman of the Bridgewater Board of Trustees to his work as executive officer of the Massachusetts State College Council of Presidents. Perspective sat down with Clark to ask him how he saw his selection and what he hopes to accomplish.

Perspective: Firstly, congratulations on your appointment. It's encouraging to have a BHE chair who came out of the state college system.

Clark: Thank you very much. I think what's nice about it is that you have an appreciation for the opportunities colleges can provide, because you've been witness to it, you've benefitted by it. So you have a different passion for it.

Perspective: Until recently, you were a member of the Bridgewater Foundation. You co-chaired Bridgewater's first capital campaign, in '99. Over the next five years, you raised \$10 million for college's endowment.

Clark: Led an effort to raise \$10 million. There were a lot of people that really raised the money. Endowments are extremely important to our public colleges. They give our students — and faculty — value added that state appropriations can't do. Faculty research, student research, travel abroad, student publications, financial aid. There's a lot of value added that comes out of these foundations, but you have to build these endowments to the point that they can offer meaningful contributions. We're not really there yet. The state can be helpful with that.

Perspective: How?

Clark: The state has a program called the Endowment Incentive Program where, up to a certain amount of money, the state will match dollar-for-dollar private funds raised. It's a \$13 million program per year. The program is in fits and starts, though, and needs to have a stable amount of funding to come in. It hasn't been funded yet this year.



"We have to invest in our public colleges."

—BHE Chair Fred Clark

Perspective: You played a pivotal role in the 1990 awarding of a \$10 million federal grant to build at Bridgewater what is now the John Joseph Moakley Center for Technological Applications. At the time, it was the largest federal grant ever awarded to a state college in the United States. You're a guy who's good at bringing in money. Do you think that played a role in your selection as BHE chair?

Clark: No. I really don't. I think the reason I was selected because, as executive officer of the Council of Presidents, I spent the vast majority of my time trying to build collaborative relationships with all three segments of public higher education, build bridges to private education, and make a case for the institution of public higher education — an advocacy case, as to why investment is appropriate, in economic terms. It was that convener role, collaborative role, ability to work with people and not alienate them. And also, the experience of having served at just about every level. The understanding of the public system. It's the mission that I feel I have. I'd love to raise some money along the way, try to help from that perspective, but that's mission three or four; there's other missions, too.

Perspective: What's your top priority?

Clark: Remaking the Board of Higher Education into a real, supportive partner of public higher education. One that can be a convener of all the institutions to talk about subject-to-subject best practices, encouraging discussion amongst the colleges to learn from one another and bring in national examples. What's equally important is making the case for investment in public institutions. Operating funds, we're 46th in the nation; capital funds, we're about 43rd, 44th in the nation, as a percentage of the budget, and last amongst our competitor states. For financial aid for our students, we're about 44th in the nation. All of that adds up to a disgrace, from the state perspective. Only recently has the case been made in terms of why that investment is absolutely critical: because our public colleges, and the students who populate them, are our workforce in Massachusetts. We're producing the workforce. Can I give you a statistic? Two-thirds of all the high school graduates in Massachusetts who go on to college go to public institutions. Only in the last couple of years has there been a realization of those basic, factual numbers. We have to invest in our public colleges, we have to invest in our state's students, so building the advocacy case for that is a very important part of what I'm going to do.

Perspective: Who do you make the case to?

Clark: You make it to the business community. Over the five years I was with the state colleges, I spent a lot of time with the business community. You make it to Beacon Hill. And I want to say that the governor, Gov. Deval Patrick, understands; he's not a person that has to be educated as to the importance of higher education. He understand the importance of investment. That's one of the reasons I'm happy to serve: I know we'll have leadership and understanding from the governor's office. Leadership and understanding that we may have not had in a lifetime.