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Duncan Criticizes States as 'Penny-Wise and Pound-Foolish' for Higher-Ed Cuts

By Eric Kelderman

Chicago

The U.S. secretary of education, Arne Duncan, took states to task on Thursday for cutting spending on higher education, saying state lawmakers were being "penny-wise and pound-foolish," and were undermining their own economic growth.

In a speech at the annual policy meeting of the State Higher Education Executive Officers, Mr. Duncan noted that during the recent economic downturn, only four states have increased what they spend, per-student, on higher education. "Disinvestment is not the strategy that other countries are choosing," he said, comparing the United States' approach to that of China and Singapore.

The result is that tuition has gone up to replace the state dollars, and middle-class families, especially, are being squeezed by college costs, Mr. Duncan said, citing the association's recent annual report, which noted that in 2011 state and local spending on higher education hit a 25-year low. "Higher education should not be a luxury for those who can afford it," he said.

Mr. Duncan was largely preaching to the choir on the need for more state money. Nearly all the attendees at the annual meeting work for state governments that have been hard hit by the recession and continue to struggle financially during the slow recovery.

And while higher education remains a target of state-budget cutters, pressure to raise college-completion rates is driving significant policy changes at the state level, said another of the day's speakers, Jamie P. Merisotis, president of the Lumina Foundation for Education, which focuses on developing policies to improve graduation rates.
"States really are where the action is," Mr. Merisotis said, noting that more than two-thirds of states have set specific goals for improving completion and graduation rates. Those objectives, he said, are similar to Lumina's goal of having 60 percent of the nation's population earn a college credential by 2025.

'Stackable Credentials'
However, while Mr. Duncan touted the Obama administration's efforts to improve completion rates, particularly with a 50-percent increase in the number of low-income students receiving Pell Grants, Mr. Merisotis called for more substantial changes at both the state and federal levels.

What is needed is a national system for student financial aid, Mr. Merisotis said, a system that would coordinate the efforts of federal and state governments as well as the colleges the students attend.

In addition, he called for overhauling how students are awarded credit, so that it would include more prior learning and other forms of nontraditional learning. "We need stackable credentials that give students credit for learning, no matter where it comes from," he said.

Mr. Merisotis's recommendations present a substantial challenge for state higher-education agencies, which are already struggling to maintain authority, and even relevance, in a fast-changing landscape of higher education.

With the growth in technology, higher education is being democratized, Mr. Merisotis said, and the importance of traditional higher-education institutions is diminishing.

"The capacity for state policy development needs to grow," Mr. Merisotis said. "The onus of responsibility will be on the states."
This is dumb.

We’re one of the better-off states. Even so, the main pressure on the state budget is skyrocketing Medicaid costs. The administration has done nothing to help with these, and PPACA is a time bomb. Given the substantial inertia built in public education budgets, both K-12 and college, by salaries, etc., a state would be crazy to expand higher-ed at the moment. On the 5–10 year time scale, things look pretty darn scary.

The idea that what this country needs to develop and succeed is an army of third/fourth tier college grads is laughable. They cannot even get jobs requiring a degree today. We will look back on this as one of the most misguided public policy ideas since urban renewal.

If the states could print their own money; then we could do a fine job like the feds do.

If the Mittster gets elected president, his handlers will really mess up the educational system and then we will really be a third rated nation. Sorry that people only see the Democratic / Republican mantle and not the man who worked hard to screw up Massachusetts educational system and almost succeeded!

"Stackable credits???" Is higher education about teaching and learning or is it a framework for certifying career preparation?? Let those who might hire work out how the non-collegiate experiences contribute to a particular employment or professional pursuit.

Merisotis is repeating the dogma of all the overpaid but underexperienced consultants for higher ed NGO's that technology is diminishing the importance of traditional higher education. Unfortunately they still have not discovered that higher ed's traditional framework discovers, defines, and conveys the knowledge base and the best practices for conveying knowledge regardless of the tools used to aid student learning So far, computers and teaching centered for-profits have not replaced these functions.

Many studies over many years have revealed that the three prime factors in collegiate learning are: time at task, relationship with an interested professional, and student motivation to learn. Computers do not replace these and so far, traditional settings with their climate for and assets for learning (faculty, knowledge stockpiles, equipment) combined with staking out good contexts for student commitment of time at task, have been the most successful frameworks for the largest component of the college bound population. Other frameworks may work for some but traditional institutions are the ones that have focused on the three prime factors in collegiate learning.

Traditional higher education is not just about imparting knowledge but more importantly about discovering, translating, critiquing, revising, and transferring knowledge. Learning and teaching
are about far more than just transmitting established knowledge and a critical part of their outcomes is preparing the student to become a skeptic, an innovator and a manipulator of knowledge. This preparation is inherent in the design and mission of traditional institutions with mutual contact between students and professionals, knowledge stockpiles, students and students, problem solving and research contexts, and a climate that appreciates the devotion of time and the pursuit of success in learning.

IBM Predictive Analytics - Doing More with less - Focus on student retention, focus on early engagement for freshman and transfer students, focus on the ROI and quantifying the cost per student and the return per student you save or attract - Doing more with less - Prescriptions prior to Reduced Admissions - IBM Predictive Analytics - Go to Youtube, read our stories... listen to our clients/partners success stories.

We are reminded to "put our money where our hearts belong!"

Beyond rhetoric speeches, are the hearts of both US and state governments truly in EDUCATION???

I'm just wondering why the country needs 60% of its population to have a college degree when the evidence* suggests that barely half of college graduates going back to 2006 have a full-time job at the moment? The market would suggest that we already have far too many college graduates for the work available, and at the moment only 30% of the country has a college degree. Perhaps the answer has to do with Lumina's co-founder and source of its initial $700 million in funding: Sallie Mae.

I mean, the country with the highest percentage of college grads in the world is Russia, and they don't exactly have an economy one wants to emulate (unless you are a plutocrat).

*This was shown in a Rutgers study from about two weeks ago; see also the NY Fed Reserve report from this spring that states that only 50% of outstanding student loans are in active repayment at the moment.

So, let me see if I have this scenario right. We need to save money on higher education, so we get the students to graduate as quickly as possible. One of my colleagues calls this the "Rawhide" model of education: "Head 'em up, move 'em out." One administrator has been heard to refer to the students as "throughput."

Now we find that, degree in hand, students cannot find jobs. We find that employers are dissatisfied with the results: see the LEAP Report and the number of foreign hires in tech companies. Maybe moving them out quickly is not such a great idea. WITH WHAT are they moving out, and TO WHAT are they moving? WITH WHAT EXPECTATIONS did they enter?

Our institutions are crumbling, as they always do, as cycle moves to cycle and era to era. But it is not fun living in Rome when the Goths and vandals are pouring in.