

# Ex-chancellor Reed pulls no punches

**He says a meddling Florida Legislature has consigned state universities to mediocrity.**

By STEVE BOUSQUET, Tallahassee Bureau Chief

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TALLAHASSEE - When Charlie Reed left as chancellor of Florida universities for a similar job in California a decade ago, he exited with his reputation for blunt talk firmly intact.

"Florida has a motto: We're cheap, and we're proud of it," Reed said then.

On Monday, Reed was back in the state where worked for 27 years. His long absence has not tempered his criticism of the system he once headed.

He chastised state leaders for keeping tuition too low and for meddling in how universities are run, steps he said have consigned campuses in Florida to mediocrity.

"You have a lot of work to do," Reed said in a talk to members of the LeRoy Collins Institute at Florida State University.

Florida's Board of Governors for higher education is embroiled in a power struggle with the Legislature over which body has the authority to set tuition at universities.

Reed, who also was chief of staff to Democratic Gov. Bob Graham, sounded as if he longed for the pre-Jeb Bush era when a single Board of Regents oversaw all universities. Under Bush, regents were replaced by the Board of Governors

and trustee boards on all campuses.

To truly compare the two mega-states' higher education systems, Reed said, look no further than the two legislatures.

California's higher-education governing structure is largely unchanged since the 1940s and a "compact," or partnership, between legislators and its universities ensures that student growth is funded year after year. In Florida, higher education "gets what's left over," he said.

Reed blasted the Bright Futures scholarship as the dumbest higher education policy he has seen. By giving merit-based scholarships regardless of need, Reed said, Florida bankrolls college careers for students whose families can afford to pay the tuition, leaving too little aid for low-income students.

Among those in audience was Frank Brogan, president of Florida Atlantic University and lieutenant governor alongside Gov. Jeb Bush. Brogan defended Bright Futures as a way to steer lottery money to education, to encourage high school students to get better grades and to keep students from going to college out of state.

"This was not a dumb idea," Brogan said. The much-maligned governance system "is beginning to jell," he added.

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## **Ex Universities Chief: Bright Futures the 'Dumbest' Idea**

**By JOE FOLLICK**

Ledger Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE | Florida's former universities chief told a crowd of the state's top education officials Monday that Bright Futures scholarships are taking money away from the state's schools and low-income students that need more help.

"When I left, I called it one of the dumbest public policies I've ever seen," Charlie Reed told a luncheon crowd at Florida State University. "I think today I'd call it the dumbest. Why are you financing higher education for students in families who can well afford tuition?"

Bright Futures gives high school graduates with a 3.5 grade-point average and a comparable score on the SAT or ACT a full ride to college and also gives partial scholarships to students with a 3.0 GPA. At the University of Florida, nearly all of the incoming freshmen from the state are receiving a scholarship and the median family income is near \$100,000.

Lawmakers have been reluctant to raise tuition because such a hike costs the state more because of Bright Futures. This year, Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed a five-percent tuition hike - keeping the state's tuition among the nation's lowest - while signing a separate bill allowing the three biggest universities - the University of Florida, Florida State University and the University of South Florida - to raise tuition starting next year that won't be covered by Bright Futures.

Reed was chancellor of Florida's university system from 1985 to 1998 after serving as former Gov. Bob Graham's chief of staff. He is currently the chancellor of the California State University system.

Florida Atlantic University's Frank Brogan led the creation of Bright Futures in 1998 while he was the state's education commissioner. He said the program stemmed the "brain drain" of bright Floridian high school students to other states.

"Too many students were going out of state to college because their families could just as easily afford an out-of-state tuition," Brogan said.

But he added that the assumption was that the standards would tighten and additional criteria would be added to help low-income families.

"The predicate upon which Bright Futures was created was the belief that over time, all of those things would be increased in their rigor," Brogan said. "Had it been allowed to grow in its rigor and its expectations, you wouldn't hear some of the complaints you hear now."

But with a strong base of middle-class families used to Bright Futures helping with tuition costs, any move to reduce its reach is considered a political death wish.

Reed urged the Board of Governors to retake control of the universities from a Legislature.

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