CANNON Ben

From: John Costa [mailto:jcosta@bendbulletin.com]
Sent: Monday, March 12, 2018 9:05 PM
To: CANNON Ben <ben.cannon@HECC.OREGON.GOV>
Subject: letter to HECC

Good evening,

Please accept this letter from me, John Costa, publisher of The Bulletin and president of Western Communications, and Patti Moss, former head of the Bank of the Cascades. We were both members of the Central Oregon Regional Advisory Board that dreamed up the branch of OSU Cascades.

Two decades ago, we were among those selected by then-Gov. John Kitzhaber to seek answers to a question we believed would define the long-term vitality of Central Oregon.

Or so we thought.

In fact, the issue reached far beyond the future of Central Oregon.

The originating question was the expansion of higher education in Central Oregon, but later became whether the state's political and educational leadership could think imaginatively in a rapidly changing world.

Luckily, there were forceful leaders on the ground willing to shake up the status quo and christen the baby that would grow up to be Oregon State University-Cascades.

To them, OSU-Cascades was a unique opportunity to create a unique educational model in a unique area.

It took vision and nerve to look beyond the resistance, which argued that if this startup in Bend wins, they all lose.

Today, the very evident branch campus springing up in west Bend is testimony to that vision and nerve. And the recent approval by the Legislature and commitment of Gov. Kate Brown to $39 million for further development, including an additional building, is all the more confirming.

Still, the concept of OSU-Cascades as something special is under challenge.

The short history:

Two decades ago, Kitzhaber created the Central Oregon Regional Advisory Board to consider higher education expansion in Central Oregon. We were members.

After considering several ideas, the group settled on a branch campus of an existing university. The reasons were evident then and still powerful today: name recognition, existing programs, accreditation, experienced management, etc. etc. Kitzhaber supported it in his budget.

OSU's then-President Paul Risser jumped on board, and the Legislature - where then-Sen. Bev. Clarno and the late Rep. Ben Westlund were instrumental - approved initial funding.

With a Democratic governor and two Republican legislators, it was an all-too-rare moment of bipartisanship.

When Risser, who died in 2014, left, his successor Ed Ray took up the cause.

The reasons for a branch in Bend were apparent two decades ago and are even more so today. It is the center of the fastest growing and most economically dynamic region in the sate.

One national publication after another has over the years reported on the growing power of the region. In early March, a CNBC report extolled the conjunction of quality of life and development of the tech sector of the local economy.

The expanding presence of OSU-Cascades has been an indisputable major factor for skilled workforce growth, company relocation and development of start-ups, with impacts that benefit all of Oregon.

Despite the undeniable success, echoes of the same arguments that came close to blocking the creation of the branch are being heard today. This time, however, they are aimed at OSU-Cascades' ability to secure capital funds on its own.

Critics say OSU-Cascades should not have an independent path to secure land and buildings, etc. Since it's a branch of OSU, let OSU make the case and pay for it out of its own capital requests as others do, or so the argument goes.

It's an argument for consistency, which can be a good thing until it isn't. As Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.

He wasn't thinking of capital funding in Bend, but the point is well taken and will be debated at the upcoming meetings of Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Can it really be that hard to imagine a successful and dedicated branch of OSU with an independent route to funds to expand its footprint and build new buildings and serve students in the hottest region of the state?

Can it really be that hard to support a unique approach to a unique opportunity in a unique region?

And can it be that hard to understand that upsetting this commitment could strike at the tremendous community support – public and private – that OSU-Cascades has worked tirelessly to develop?

Finally, can you imagine leaders of Amazon, Google, Facebook, or Intel, Nike and Bend Research not moving resources to the call of obvious opportunity?

For the sake of all higher education, let's hope not.

--- Patti Moss and John Costa