VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN PRAISES COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM DURING WLAC VISIT

BY STEVE SPRINGER

In a continuing effort by the Obama administration to focus on the key role community colleges play in higher education, Vice President Joe Biden visited West Los Angeles College in January.

“The best kept secret in America is the community college system,” Biden told a group of students, trustees and administrators at WLAC. “Any country that out-educates us will out-compete us.”

Biden said those two lines are favorites of his wife, Jill, who teaches at a community college.

The vice president spent two hours touring the WLAC Dental Hygiene department, part of the college’s Allied Health Program, and taking part in a roundtable discussion. Also in attendance for the vice president’s appearance were employers interested in hiring college students. Biden stressed how critically important partnerships between community colleges and businesses are in providing students with career opportunities while bolstering the economy.

Biden also praised a proposal by President Obama to make community college tuition-free.

“Twelve years of free education is not enough,” said the vice president.

“Vice President Biden and President Obama understand that community college should be free so students can achieve their dreams of a better life and a brighter future,” said Scott Svonkin, president of the Los Angeles Community College District Board of Trustees. “The vice president was clear that community colleges are the road to careers that will enable our students to take care of their families today and tomorrow.”

In welcoming the vice president to his campus, Dr. Nabil Abu-Ghazaleh, WLAC president, said, “The challenges to students seeking social mobility, access to meaningful work and a fulfilling civic life are the story of America today. At West Los Angeles College – like all community colleges – my excellent faculty and staff dedicate their lives to our students. We need the support from industry partners to even better integrate our programs and the job training aspect of our mission so we can prepare students for jobs that are emerging tomorrow and for a lifetime of careers that have yet to be invented in this gloriously changing world of knowledge, growth and of the improvement of matters of social justice.”

Senior dental hygiene student Jessica Short, who was part of the roundtable assembled for Biden, said he seemed, “Super humble. The heart that he has for the people is inspiring.”

Fellow student Courtney Cylear, a junior, said it was “Surreal. He came to listen and really understand where we are coming from in the community college world.”
Dear LACCD Colleagues:

What an unprecedented opportunity for our nation’s community colleges and for LACCD. Community colleges are receiving well-deserved national attention these days. Specifically, attention is being paid to the significant roles community colleges play in transferring students to universities, building the middle class through workforce training, and elevating adult literacy in this country. We are also seen as a vital, national strategy to lift people out of poverty. In order to fulfill this promise, we must bolster the educational outcomes of the students in our institutions.

This dialogue surrounding institutional performance and student success in the two-year system is resounding and exciting, with virtually every community college in the country focused on ways to improve success rates of all students, with special emphasis being paid to historically underperforming students, who now make up a growing proportion of student enrollments. At LACCD, we recognize that, in order to "move the needle" on student success, a coherent plan needs to be constructed and monitored, and that it requires a districtwide institutional effort. In my view, without another major shift in diversity, equity, and inclusion in community colleges and higher education, our profession runs the risk of further bifurcation and passive perpetuation of racial inequality. We are, in fact, replicating sameness and embedding disadvantage without change.

In his State of the Union address in January, President Obama gave community colleges a visible, national platform by declaring through his America’s College Promise proposal that all Americans, who meet specific performance criteria, should be afforded the opportunity for a community college education – free of charge! For California, which possesses the lowest community college fees in the country at $46/credit hour, tuition-free education is a part of our legacy. President Obama’s bold proposal adds to his administration’s legacy of expanding federal support for students. Our district is on record formally supporting the President’s proposal and, just last month, unanimously passed a resolution to underscore this support.

California Governor Jerry Brown, through his January proposed budget for 2015/16, proposes an 8 percent increase to the state’s community colleges, bringing our total allocation to close to pre-recession levels and, as importantly, proposes no student fee increases. Our slow, but methodical, funding restoration in California allows us to invest in our infrastructure – our students and our people. At LACCD, we have added much-needed classes, bolstered student support services, and hired people for key leadership positions. As one example, LACCD stands to hire a record number of full-time, tenure-track faculty for 2015/16, our single biggest investment for student success in decades, perhaps ever.

We are proud of this capital investment in people. Soon our students will discover that our community colleges in Los Angeles and across the country represent the greatest educational value per dollar and that our faculty, support staff, administrators, programs and services are among the very best in higher education.

Like so many other community colleges in California and throughout the nation, LACCD is riddled with challenges and opportunities, but I firmly believe that our opportunities for impact greatly outweigh the burden posed by our challenges. In coming to Los Angeles as Chancellor, I feel like I am coming back home to San Francisco, where I was born and raised. The noise, the smells, the sounds, the whole urban vibe speaks to me. Growing up in the City, I developed and now possess certain urban sensibilities and they have served me well in my transition since last June.

My principal charge as Chancellor is to raise the educational attainment of our students, while ensuring that our colleges, spread throughout this very large district, have the resources and support to be successful. As Chancellor, I am also responsible for setting the tone of excellence and expectations for the organization. I thank you all for your guidance and patience during this first year.

Enjoy the contained stories of this edition of Synergy – from an historic opportunity to offer a bachelor’s degree at West LA College to Vice-President Joe Biden’s remarks on the tuition-free proposal – stories that help to illustrate the promise and purpose of our district’s mission to serve and educate.

Thank you for your continued confidence and trust,

Chancellor

Francisco C. Rodriguez Ph.D.
Chancellor, Los Angeles Community College District
West Los Angeles College was among 15 community colleges selected by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors for inclusion in a pilot program to develop a bachelor’s degree in a specified field. For West L.A., that field will be dental hygiene.

“The selection of this program at West Los Angeles College is wonderful news for prospective students and the entire district,” said Dr. Francisco Rodriguez, chancellor of the Los Angeles Community College District. “It affirms the excellence of our faculty, curriculum, and facilities in dental hygiene, and the great partnerships we have in the Los Angeles region with prospective employers. The opportunity to make this high quality, four-year degree available for roughly $10,500 in this high-need profession suggests to me that we will be immediately oversubscribed.”

California State Senate Bill 850 authorized the Board to establish this program at no more than 15 community colleges.

“We are thrilled to have been selected to be a part of this important pilot program,” said Scott Svonkin, president of the LACCD Board of Trustees. “This program could offer our students the chance to expand their horizon in higher education at an affordable cost. That’s why our board voted to participate in the great opportunity afforded by SB850. Our students’ chances of achieving their dream of a better life and brighter future will be helped by programs like this.”

Other California community colleges were chosen Tuesday for fields ranging from respiratory therapy to automotive technology to aerospace manufacturing.

“Students will have a range of programs from which to choose to earn high quality, affordable and in-demand degrees,” said Brice W. Harris, chancellor of the California Community Colleges. “California employers win too, as they will have improved access to highly qualified candidates in these fields.”

“Over at least the last decade, dental hygienists trained at West have had a 100% record of passing the same board examinations that are required of students in bachelor’s programs in order to practice their profession,” said Dr. Nabil Abu-Ghazaleh, president of WLAC. “Receiving the bachelor’s degree from West will open the door for our graduates to private practice, leadership positions, and transfer into master’s programs.”

Currently, a baccalaureate degree in dental hygiene is not offered at California’s state colleges and universities. This degree is only available at private institutions where the cost can range from $80,000.00 to $120,000.00 versus the significantly lower cost of delivering an equivalent program in a community college setting.

“This has been a long time coming, a game changer for graduates of the program, and it will open doors that were barriers in the past,” said Carmen Dones, chairperson of the Allied Health Division at WLAC. “Graduates will now be able to apply to be an educator, researcher or corporate representative, in addition to clinical practice. I have been receiving phone calls, emails and visits from interested students who are excited about this opportunity.”
Philanthropists Steve and Debi Lebowitz have donated a magnificent sculpture named Ripples to Los Angeles City College.

The 20-foot high gift, designed by artist Jeffery Laudenslager, was placed in the center quad of the campus and dedicated in January.

“The sculpture not only brings beauty to our campus,” said Renee D. Martinez, president of LACC, “but reminds us of alumnus like Steve Lebowitz who is an example of what student success is all about. We are honored to display this wonderful piece of art for everyone to see and enjoy.”

Lebowitz donated $120,000 for the sculpture, $110,000 to purchase it and $10,000 for the installation.

Made of titanium and sterling silver, Ripples is a wind-driven kinetic art/sculpture that can spin at a speed of five to seven miles per hour, depending on the strength of the wind.

“I created a similar kinetic sculpture that actually survived Hurricane Ike in Texas,” Laudenslager said. “So the sculptures are pretty strong.”

Ripples’ design was created using computer software from SolidWorks.

“One of the main goals of the Steven & Deborah Lebowitz Foundation, is to promote public art,” Lebowitz said. “I am focused on institutions that have provided me with unique personal opportunities. LACC is one of those institutions. It allowed me to continue my career and gave me a second chance, and I am very pleased that we are able to donate this sculpture to be on campus for everyone to enjoy and be stimulated by beautiful art.”

After graduating from Fairfax High School, Lebowitz enrolled at LACC. He left in the middle of his second semester to head for New York. But realizing that he wasn’t going anywhere in life without an education, he returned to LACC, got an Associate of Arts degree in Business Administration in 1960, then transferred to USC where he earned both a Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting and a Master of Business Administration degree.

He went on to work for the Brookings Institute, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and President John F. Kennedy’s War on Poverty Initiative before returning to California where he co-founded G&L Realty.

He is currently Chairman of the Board of the USC Davis School of Gerontology.

Lebowitz was among the distinguished honorees at the Los Angeles City College Foundation 2014 Gala, held at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Also honored were David and Merryl Alpert and Lula Ballton.

RIPPLES

BY COLLEEN STRINGFELLOW