



## **Transcript of Remarks Made by Dr. Su Jin Gatlin Jez**

### **Regents Special Committee to Consider the Selection of a President**

Good afternoon, my name is Dr. Su Jin Jez, and I am the Executive Director of California Competes. As an organization focused on the role of higher education in driving our state's economy, California Competes believes new leadership should focus on increasing enrollment and degree attainment rates for California's underserved communities. While California's economy rapidly adds higher-paying jobs, millions of Californians fail to qualify for these opportunities because they lack the required postsecondary credential.

I speak to you today as a researcher who regularly assesses the indicators of student success in our state. But more than that, I went through UC Berkeley as a first-generation college student, woman of color, daughter of an immigrant, and STEM major. I know too well what it's like to face systemic barriers while attempting to earn a degree. And today's students have it even harder. They're up against extreme income and wealth inequality, under-resourced institutions, and a growing basic needs crisis. The next UC president has a tremendous opportunity to not only improve the student experience for hundreds of thousands of students but also lead change in how higher education more equitably drives the state's economy.

I'd like to talk about two key priorities for the UC's next leader to address: accessibility (particularly for traditionally underserved students), and leadership around the state's economic and workforce needs.

It's time to not only recognize but embrace that the average student is not the traditional student. Today's students are more diverse than ever before. Many are well into their 20s and beyond. Most have jobs, a lot have children of their own, and they juggle a host of responsibilities. Many are operating without a roadmap, as the first in their families to attend college. Their primary reason for attending college is to get a better paying job. Most Californians will start out in community college and not go on to earn a bachelor's degree. To better serve our state, the UC must serve these students - both directly as their university and also indirectly through the UC's leadership in the state. Some may think that serving these students will require a trade-off in academic quality or rigor but these are the same ideas that

kept women, people of color, and immigrants out of highly selective universities—the universities that develop our nation’s leaders—for too many years.

Building off of President Napolitano’s increased acceptance of transfer students, the new UC President must recognize that transfer is a critical access point for students who decide to attend college later in life or who were stuck in inequitable systems that limited their ability to immediately matriculate into the UC. Devoting more resources to building the transfer program will build more equity into the system, promote the UC’s integrity and excellence, and ultimately benefit all Californians.

The UC’s next president should also prioritize how to serve the more than 12 million Californians without a college degree, including 4 million who started college but never finished. Governor Newsom’s budget proposal released on Friday underscores the critical importance of this population through his proposal to provide increased resources for online programs through UC Extension. To quote UC Irvine’s Dean of Continuing Education: “it’s inevitable that the UC will offer an online undergraduate degree, particularly for those Californians who have attended some college but had to drop out because of life circumstances. That’s a forgotten population.” [end quote] Whether through online education, credit for prior learning, or other innovative models, the UC’s next president should be open to trying new approaches to ensure these Californians—and the UC—are not left behind.

Some of this will be through changes within the UC system itself but some of it will be in leading change among California’s higher ed system—the CCC, CSU, and private institutions. The Governor’s Post-Secondary Council provides one such opportunity for more intersegmental collaboration. Beyond this group, the new leader should be willing to reach out to other segments and sectors in the interest of streamlining and enhancing pathways to the UC, through the UC, and onto good jobs and economic innovation.

I’ve distributed some research that I believe is particularly relevant as you conduct your search. Our *Back to College* series highlights the needs of adult students and *Opportunity Imbalance* reveals stark inequities across race and ethnicity, gender, and regions. And there’s even more research on our website. Thank you for reviewing these publications in addition to considering the recommendations I just mentioned. I’m happy to take any questions.