FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATEMENT FROM CHANCELLOR RODERICK G. W. CHU
ON BUDGET CUTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

COLUMBUS, Ohio, June 8, 2001 – Governor Bob Taft was quoted yesterday as saying he was "deeply disappointed in the cutbacks at universities and colleges" and that "higher education officials need to do a better job of persuading state leaders to give them more money."

Following is a statement from Ohio Board of Regents' Chancellor Roderick G. W. Chu on the subject:

I agree with the fundamental point that Governor Bob Taft has made: we need to mobilize a wider and deeper constituency to help make our case in a different way before the General Assembly. We deeply appreciate the hard work and contributions of college and university presidents, trustees, and other campus representatives, but we need to persuade more state and local business leaders, as well as grass roots citizens and students to support our efforts and perhaps take a leadership role in helping make our case.

We did have business leader input and participation in both the development of this budget and its advocacy, and we had some student support as well, but we clearly need more.

Having said that, it is important to note the progress that we have made in the last two years. Higher education has been especially effective in making its case before the editorial boards of Ohio's major newspapers. The support higher education has received from every major state paper, and several regional papers, has been overwhelming. These opinion leaders, and many others like them, now understand that public expenditures for higher education are true investments that bring immense returns to the investor – Ohio taxpayers. And we have heard similar expressions of support or understanding from various elected officials, including those in positions of leadership.

As a contractor might say, we have the stakes in the ground, and the foundation is dug and the concrete poured -- but the building is not yet completed.

A third point concerns the perspective of the various actors in the process and the different pressures and constraints they experience. Elected officials have to operate under immense short-term time pressures, which are the result of a short electoral cycle and the need to address immediate budget concerns in the biennial budget. These factors were simply overwhelming in the case of HB 94.

-more-

Statement by Chancellor Roderick G. W. Chu on the Ohio budget
Add 1

The Governor and the General Assembly had to confront and deal with the following constraints in a very short time period:

- A state economy that experienced an abrupt downturn that reduced resources available for the budget;
- An unexpected increase in Medicaid expenditures that always accompanies a downturn in the economy;
- A Supreme Court decision that imposed great constraints on the freedom of the General Assembly to make other budgetary decisions;
- More resource restraints, given the Governor's objection to tax increases;
- The effective checkmate among the Governor, House and Senate regarding various gambling proposals.

Under these conditions, the state has always turned to higher education as the 'deep pockets' or budget balancer. Given the constraints listed above, state leaders could see no other option than to squeeze higher education. It happened in the early 1980s, and it happened again in the early 1990s, and the pattern repeated itself in HB 94. I doubt if there was much we could have done differently to escape the consequences of these circumstances, and tend to think that we avoided additional cuts by our advocacy efforts.

Members of the Ohio Board of Regents, in contrast, are not elected but are appointed by the Governor to nine-year terms. As a result they tend to develop a much longer-term view of Ohio and its public policy issues, and they obviously do not have to respond to the short-term pressures.

The Regents more so than members of the General Assembly understand the long-term implications and consequences of the state's under-investment in higher education, and have tried to help the state's decision-makers understand this problem and address it before it is too late. But the Regents cannot by themselves help state leaders develop an immunity to short-term political and economic pressures and constraints: hence HB 94.

###

Media Contacts:
Laura Massie, 614-466-7439 (office); 614-306-1302 (cell)
Michael Brown, 614-752-9480 (office); 614-370-0075 (cell)