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Dear Jim:

I am responding with tremendous interest to the Ohio Board of Regents' advertisement for a new chancellor. The advertisement reveals an exciting opportunity for a seasoned professional to assume the helm of a highly successful, well staffed organization. The board also seems to be seeking someone who is poised for new challenges and able to exert leadership for the state higher education agency at a pivotal time. The new chancellor would be a change agent who works conscientiously to build consensus among various stakeholders, has proven capabilities in formulating and implementing public policy and knows how to listen as well as act. I attach my credentials along with the additional information you request in the sincere belief that I am the person the regents are looking for in a new chancellor.

The route that brought me into my current role as executive director for the State of Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board has been rich and rewarding. My advantages include having worked in a twenty-six campus public higher education system with a single governing board in Wisconsin, a decentralized governance arrangement in Colorado and an even more loosely organized system in New Jersey. The comparative perspective afforded me by this experience has been enriched by working with some of the most talented leaders in our field. They taught many valuable lessons, not the least of which is how to be being decisive without becoming so rigid as to foreclose the views of others. Their work illustrated for me the advantages of taking risks without being reckless. Consequently, I feel well suited for the task outlined in the board's announcement.

Those qualities described by the chancellor's profile match well against my experiential background. There are striking similarities between the job description and posts I have previously held. Indeed, my current duties coincide to some degree with the responsibilities of the chancellor. I now lead an agency that operates simultaneously as part of the statewide higher education community and the state governmental framework. Like the board, we have a superb professional staff whose members perform well under the pressure of unforeseeable circumstances sometimes. We must constantly balance the interests or aims of diverse constituents, including legislators, faculty and staff members, the private sector and the governor's executive staff. This often proves to be more art than science, but the track record shows that I have succeeded in doing it for quite a while.

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The board's web site indicates that Ohio is experiencing near record enrollment levels, something else we share to an extent. Few things can be more sobering than the realization that the state higher education system affords inadequate capacity to accommodate students attempting to advance their learning experiences. We have had to wrestle the apparently contradictory goals of promoting excellence in research while making basic skills available for students who have not acquired the knowledge they should have in elementary and secondary school. Consequently, I understand that creating a seamless educational delivery network can be much easier said than done. Governor-elect Strickland's Turnaround Ohio vision appears to presage a program intended to develop a prescription for attaining precisely that goal.

My experience also includes developing state higher education budgets that address multivariate goals. As other states do, we aim to attain the elusive objectives of access, affordability, excellence and convenience. That renders us vulnerable to criticism from task forces like Secretary Spellings' Commission on the Future of American Higher Education. There may be more than a little justification to the critiques we encounter. However, I remain keenly aware of the value of perseverance. The ablest managers can achieve great gains within constrained budgets. Obviously, the challenges state higher education leaders must confront today are not for the fainthearted. Both operating and capital budgets grow increasingly tighter. Thus, I am naturally inclined to pound the corridors of the capitol making passionate but carefully measured arguments in favor of funding our prized enterprise.

Despite existing fiscal constraints, I have been able to lead our agency by mounting an inspired program of action. For example, the board recently launched a system-wide diversity initiative, which holds the promise of exerting a positive impact on the student body, faculty and staff as well as the campus environment. We are also on the cusp of a similar effort in the realm of international education. This is consistent with the widespread recognition of the information driven, knowledge based global economy we all inhabit. The Ohio Board of Regents has a likeminded attitude as demonstrated by its emphasis on data collection and analysis as the basis for accountability, its continuous attention to the statewide academic degree program array and other policy related efforts it has undertaken.

Finally, I want to argue that I am not a complete stranger to Columbus, Ohio. As a freshman at Michigan State University, I had a roommate who grew up there. Needless to say, we traveled to Columbus occasionally for sports and such. We also visited Dayton and other cities in the state. So, I feel a little familiar with Ohio and unforgettably familiar with its climate.

Jim, I am mindful of the important task the board is undertaking in its search for a successor to our colleague, Rod Chu. Thus, I wish board members the best in their work and am grateful for their consideration of my application.

Sincerely,

James E. Sulton, Jr., Ph. D.