

**Remarks by Dr. Charles B. Reed
Chancellor, California State University
Campus Compact Presidents' Retreat
Carmel, CA
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Thank you, Peter (Smith), and good morning to all of you.

I want to welcome you to what promises to be a fascinating retreat.

We are living and working at a time when civic engagement is probably more important than ever.

Our country is facing serious national and international dilemmas.

We are set to vote in a major election in just 28 days.

Yet getting our citizens – especially young people – to become engaged in civic affairs remains a struggle.

Even though we live in one of the most successful democracies of all time, we do not have the full participation that our ideals are based upon.

One interesting example – The Public Policy Institute of California recently did a study showing that civic engagement in California is strongest among affluent white voters.

This means that in a state with a majority-minority population, the more civically active wealthy, white population has a disproportionate role in policy decision-making.

It also means there are some issues out there that are very important to large groups of people that are not getting addressed.

We need to find out how to bridge that gap.

For this retreat, Campus Compact has laid out two important questions:

- 1) How do we get students engaged in civic life?
- 2) How can we assert the role of colleges and universities as central players in developing lifelong civic engagement skills?

I hope we get a chance to take a good look at those questions over the next two days.

California State University

I thought I would share with you a little bit about our university system and some of our experiences in civic engagement.

The California State University system – which is the largest four-year university system in the country with more than 400,000 students – is committed to developing a culture where civic engagement, including service learning, flourishes.

We do not require students to participate, but we require all 23 universities to make community service and service learning opportunities available for our students.

All told, more than 185,000 CSU students participate in community service and service learning. That comes to 30 million hours of service each year.

The value and benefit that our students receive from these various experiences is one of the reasons why we continue to make these efforts a priority.

By working in real-life situations, students can apply their classroom learning to complex issues facing their communities.

It's worth noting that we have been able to continue a strong commitment to community service and service learning even during difficult economic times.

We have been fortunate to receive tremendous support from our Board of Trustees.

You will hear from CSU Trustee Debra Farar later this morning. She is the former chair of our board.

We also have outstanding leadership from our campus presidents on this issue.

Peter Smith of CSU Monterey Bay, Bob Corrigan of San Francisco State, and John Welty of Fresno State have all been long-time advocates for this work.

They have developed successful campus-wide programs that fulfill the civic mission of the university, and they have taken on a broader role by serving on national boards relating to campus civic engagement.

Also three of our newer presidents – Rollin Richmond of Humboldt State, Dick Rush of CSU Channel Islands, and Paul Zingg of CSU Chico – have taken active roles from the start of their presidency to ensure that their campus civic programs thrive.

This kind of leadership from the top is vital. I feel fortunate to have all of these leaders on our team.

But good academic leadership also means giving our faculty and students the opportunities to create innovative approaches to civic engagement.

Our faculty members have taken a strong interest in service learning. They have helped us create a 100% increase in service-learning opportunities since 2000.

More than 65,000 CSU students will have the opportunity to participate in service learning this year.

We also have a strong commitment from our student body, especially our statewide student government, the California State Student Association.

This fall the students launched a statewide campaign to register 40,000 students to vote in the upcoming elections.

One of our campuses, San Francisco State, was recently singled out in a Harvard University study as one of the top universities in the country in terms of innovations in encouraging students to vote.

Also, last week I had the privilege of visiting the CSU's study-abroad center in Florence, which is host to 100 CSU students.

Even in Italy those students take the time to offer service to the community.

They work either at a local elementary school, at a recreational arts center for mentally challenged adults, or at a food kitchen for the homeless – and they have a good chance to learn Italian while doing so.

Our task is to continue these and other efforts to encourage civic engagement and to involve all segments of our population, especially underrepresented groups whose voices are not always heard.

We also need to find ways to get more recognition from our policymakers and citizens for the public benefit we provide through civic engagement.

At a time when our universities are being scrutinized for issues like cost and tuition increases, it is more important than ever that we make a statement about the value we add through education: the economic value, the civic value, and the cultural value.

I hope that these sessions will give us some new ideas and enthusiasm for advancing civic engagement and for promoting our important role in society.

Thank you again for gathering here. I look forward to working with all of you.