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## Ohio education chancellor calls for bipartisanship in coming budget battle

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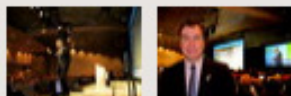
Eric D. Fingerhut issues call to work together.

Photo: John Michael Spinelli

Slideshow: eTech Educational Technology Conference



Photo credit: John Michael Spinelli



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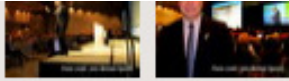
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**COLUMBUS, Ohio (CGE)** - Following his Tuesday morning presentation at the 13th [eTech Commission's](#) Educational Technology Conference in Columbus, one of the nation's largest such events, the Ohio Chancellor of Education told CGE that he fully expects Gov. John Kasich and the Ohio General Assembly won't do anything to harm the attainments the Ohio University System ([OUS](#)) has accomplished since he became its leader in 2007.

### Working together is key

[Eric D. Fingerhut](#), chairman of the 13-member eTech Commission, said higher education is the cornerstone of prosperity in the state, and believes all parties are committed to an affordable and accessible higher education system.

Fingerhut, a Democrat, said that in his conversation with Ohio's new Governor John R. Kasich, a Republican, he knows they both share a commitment of economic prosperity in Ohio and understand the role higher education



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prosperity in Ohio and understand the role higher education will play in achieving it.

Noting that he "loves his job" and that there is no need to talk about the safety of his job now, since state law provides him a five year term, Fingerhut hopes bipartisanship will breakout during budget negotiations in order to keep the OUS in tact and keep education funding moving forward.

On a bipartisan basis, he said, "I'm absolutely confident that by working together, we'll be able to fulfill those commitments." Fingerhut, a former Congressman from Cleveland who served eight years in the Ohio Senate before former Gov. Ted Strickland appointed him Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, believes "people will do everything they can to make sure we deliver on the commitments that we have to the people of Ohio."

He reminds everyone that the USO is not a product of any one administration or any one General Assembly, but has been around as long as Ohio's been around. "Every generation, every governor, every General Assembly has done their best to maintain and grow it," he said at the Columbus Convention Center, site of the eTech conference.

### Picking 'low-hanging fruit' to reduce costs

Fingerhut, who gave serious consideration to mounting a challenge to Ted Strickland in the Democratic primary for governor of 2006, said there are endless ways to work together to be more efficient. "We've done pretty well, as you know. We share a broadband system, we share a computer system, we share library systems, we're starting to share servers and pharmaceutical purchasing. But in a system as large as the USO of Ohio, with its 14 universities, 23 community colleges and 24 regional campuses, there's always more you can do."

The Chancellor said sharing faculty and administrative



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resources are additional ways to change higher education cost structures. "That's what the people of Ohio expect of us," he said.

In the middle of a conference where 7,000 school-centric people, professionals and vendors showed up Monday, Fingerhut made a point to distinguish between keep focused on having a technology and having it being fully integrated into operations. "We do tend, sometimes, to get fascinated by the next cool thing before we have fully integrated existing technologies," he said, noting that "real changes come with mass adoption."

Offering an example, Fingerhut said digital books, which can cost far less than paper textbooks, can help reduce the costs of college. "I showed very aggressively how we can save students money when a student and their parents are figuring out how to pay for college," he said. "They don't mentally distinguish between tuition and text books, which are part of the costs; there is lots of low hanging fruit for us to lower costs."

#### Online learning grows

Speaking on the rapidly rising use of online learning, Fingerhut said more students are finding they like to blend going to school and learning on line. "The lecture can be online while the lab would be hands on...one course in person, one course on line...the full integration of online learning is growing at a rapid pace...but we're not there yet."

Fingerhut is excited about the \$150 million in federal stimulus funds Ohio won, that he says is about ready to be realized through broadband fiber connecting all parts of the state. "OAR net is the highway, and we're now building off ramps into places that we haven't had it before," he said of using the federal funds to build out Ohio's broadband technology.

Making people aware of these opportunities, he said, is still a big challenge. "It takes a while for people to become aware of this," he noted.

"We are in a knowledge based global economy, and everybody understands that, the Governor, the General Assembly. They understand the incredibly important role of higher education and want that to succeed. I think we'll work together," he said.

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