Good Morning Senators and Assemblers:

For the record my name is Louie Overstreet, a citizen of the County of Clark, Nevada. I am here this morning to offer observations of the state budget as proposed by Governor Gibbons. While we can all appreciate the fact that a two year budget to fund state services to the tune of seventeen and a third billion dollars is a lot of money, especially in a time of economy difficulty, there appears to be no consensus as to how to generate the revenue to fund state services at this level or to cover the reported revenue shortfall of one and two billion dollars.

Given the Governor’s stated position of just saying no to any discussion of revenue enhancements, then your task becomes exceedingly difficult, unless the Legislature chooses to exhibit the courage needed to enact revenue enhancement measures such as a state income tax, if allowable without a constitutional amendment vote of the people.

A less painful approach, without an exhibition of profiles in courage than enacting a state income tax would take, would be to look into ways of increasing user fees and reducing service delivery models within selected state departments.

The two prime candidates for reducing the level of state spending for services short and long-term are the Human Services and Education Departments which consume a walloping 60% (33.9%, 26.2%) of the state budget.
Given funding for providing for the care of citizens, particularly for those in the groups that are the most vulnerable in our society, I tend towards not supporting the reduction of services provided by the state’s Human Services Department, however, I have no such reluctance in supporting a critical assessment of a higher education system seemingly being intent of being all things to all people in eight locations with eight different administrative teams around the state.

To me, the current economic situation’s silver lining is that it provides a climate to investigate the present delivery model of higher education in the state of Nevada. We have come a long way from the constitutionally mandated university departments of Agriculture, Mechanic Arts, and Mining to where in Reno we have a 16,000 student population campus where we have 9 degree granting colleges offering 75 majors. Here in Las Vegas, we have basically the same thing, where we offer 125 majors to 28,000 students. On top of this, we are still supporting the fanciful notion that Henderson can or is willing to support a four-year university; even after seven years of operation (2002) there are less than 2,500 persons attending Nevada State University. This creates the situation where it costs 26% more a year ($6,278 v. $7,894) to educate a student in Reno as it does in Las Vegas.

Concluding, I have lived long enough to remember, like many in this room, that seeking a higher education required a little inconvenience and sacrifice to achieve. Even today, it should not be so convenient as not to be realistic as to the cost and corresponding benefit needed to be aligned with the state’s ability to fund a system that constantly tries, yet repeatedly falls short of accomplishing the mission impossible of being all things to all people, in all locations.

Thank you