



**Remarks of Gregory W. Powell
Harold Alfond Foundation**

**Husson University
Gracie Theater, Bangor, Maine**

Friday, April 7, 2017

Thank you, President Clark, for your kind introduction. And my thanks to John Rohman, Vice Chairman of the Board, for his warm welcome.

On behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, thank you for giving me the chance to share a few thoughts about the Foundation and to make a special announcement.

Husson University and the Harold Alfond Foundation might have more in common than we think. Chesley Husson, for whom this University is named, was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1903. Harold Alfond was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, a few years later. Harold grew up in that town where he excelled at sports, playing cards, and gambling. Chesley Husson was said to have excelled at billiards and to have slept on the Lynn YMCA's pool table. It is unknown whether the two ever met. But today at this gathering, we can reflect on their humble origins, how lucky we are that they both moved to Maine, and how each man's dedication to education changed our world for the better.

With that history in mind, let me speak about the Foundation's interest in education and the vital role we see education and Husson University playing for our state's economy today and in the years ahead.

Following the lifetime giving pattern of Harold Alfond, the Foundation's grants in education have been based on the belief that a critical mission of education should be to build and sustain a skilled workforce. And the fundamental reality that a skilled work force is indispensable to economic prosperity.

This idea—the correlation between education, quality work, and economic prosperity—is not new. And it did not originate with Chesley Husson or Harold Alford. Over 200 years ago, Ben Franklin extolled the ‘economic mission’ of education, reminding education scholars that “Practical skills should be taught above and beyond the usual theology and classical languages.”

More recently, a Harvard University study has confirmed that educational attainment of our citizens positively impacts family income and economic growth. On this front, Dr. Anthony Carnevale, a Maine native, Georgetown University economist, and nationally-recognized expert on education and the workforce, has described the economic mission of education in these words:

The inescapable reality is that ours is a society based on work. Hence, if secondary and postsecondary educators cannot fulfill their economic mission to help grow the economy by preparing youths and adults to become successful workers, then they also will fail in their cultural and political mission to create good neighbors, good citizens, and lifelong learners.

Increasing the economic relevance of education should, if done properly, extend the ability of educators to empower Americans to work in the world, rather than retreat from it.

We are persuaded by Dr. Carnevale’s description of the economic mission of education. We live in a global economy, more competitive than ever, where the skill of our workforce is continually tested. We believe that the skill and education of our workforce, nationally and in Maine, will determine our future leadership in the world. So we see extraordinary challenges today that make the need for a renewed and creative commitment to the economic mission of education more compelling than at any time in our history.

Here are three challenges that the Foundation is currently focused on.

First, not enough of our citizens go on to higher education and complete it. Today only one-third of Maine’s population has higher education degrees. And only 40% of graduating high school students apply for and complete associate or bachelor’s degrees according to studies by the Mitchell Institute and the Maine Compact for Higher Education. Yet, by 2018, over 60% of future jobs in Maine will require higher education in some form.

Second, here in Maine, our skilled workforce is declining. Between 2014 and 2015, 14,000 skilled workers left the state. Meanwhile, our population is aging and our birth rate has not been rising.

Third, with the exception of a little University in Bangor, Maine, there has been inadequate alignment and interaction between higher education and employers, such that the skilled workforce needed by Maine employers or by employers who may wish to locate in Maine is not present.

A little over 15 years ago, Harold Alford and I visited this handsome campus. Back then, the University had just one campus; just over 1,800 students; 44 full-time faculty; 10 buildings; 2 athletic fields; and assets of \$27 million. And your baseball field needed a boost.

But while many other academic institutions awaited the epiphany that a critical mission of higher education should be “to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to get and keep good jobs,” Husson University had that all figured out. Husson was well on its way to becoming a leader in educating *job-ready* students.

Today, 15 years later, Husson has multiple campuses throughout the state; over 3,500 students; triple the full-time faculty; 16 buildings, double the outdoor fields and athletic facilities, and over \$100 million dollars in assets. Since 2002, over \$73 million has been invested by Husson in facilities.

Most importantly, today, Husson is a vital contributor to sustaining and growing our state’s economy and to increasing the supply of workers with higher education required for today’s jobs. Its programs of study and internship program would have pleased Ben Franklin as they emphasize a hands on, experiential education—an education which connects theory to the realities of workforce needs of our state’s employers. And today, especially in business education, Husson is a leader. Consider these facts:

- Husson has the largest College of Business in the state, with over 1,400 students;
- Enrollment of students in the business program has grown 32% over the past 5 years;
- Husson’s business education is accessible from Presque Isle to Wells;
- Over 75% of Husson business graduates stay and work in Maine—and they work at great companies: Jackson Labs, Unum, Bangor Savings Bank, MEMIC, Acadia Insurance, just to name a few;
- These employers and others say Husson graduates are as well prepared as they come;
- 94% of Husson graduates are employed or in graduate school one year after graduation; and,
- Finally, the University has tempered tuition increases and welcomed low-income and first-generation college students.

Husson is all of these great things and more. Just ask President Clark, he’ll give you an earful. And before you know it, you’ll be writing a check.

But at the Foundation, we didn't just take President Clark's word for the value of Husson University and its contributions to this state and the lives of its students. Husson students have told us. Since Mr. Alfond's first grant to Husson over 15 years ago and the University's establishment of a scholarship fund in his name, countless letters and notes have been sent our way from Husson students—notes of thanks, hopes, and dreams.

“Dear Mr. Alfond,” one student wrote, “I am a single mother whose opportunity to return to school depended entirely on your gift. As I study [to build my career], I give you my promise that my education will not be taken for granted. Because of your scholarship, I can continue to work towards my goal, and this means the world to my daughter and me.”

Another student wrote: “I currently attend Husson University as a declared Accounting Major. I plan on going for my CPA in the five-year program. I come from Etna, south of Bangor. I want to...work for a major accounting firm...[Your scholarship] has been a blessing. It has inspired me to work harder and to try my best. Thanks to your generosity, I am able to afford going to college here at Husson and fulfill my life dream.”

And there are many more letters just like these. *{Holds up stack of letters.}*

So there you have it folks. Aspiring students from all walks of life; a great little University with the state's largest College of Business; outstanding leadership; strong community partnerships; and all of this producing quality job-ready graduates who choose to live and work here in Maine, a state that desperately needs to grow its skilled workforce to grow its economy.

There's only one problem.

Husson's College of Business—Maine's largest business school—is without a dedicated building for business education.

Now, if Harold Alfond and Chesley Husson were with us today, they would be thinking it's time the state's largest and fastest growing business school had a new state of the art building. So, in their honor and on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, I am pleased to announce our grant to Husson University for construction of that building in the amount of \$4 million dollars.

There comes a time in every speaker's life when he looks out over his audience and sees faces exuding nothing but unalloyed pleasure and joy. It's usually after the words, "In conclusion."

So "In conclusion," let me leave you with this. There is a catch with this grant.

Harold Alford loved to say, "Don't tell me, show me." He believed in team work. And during his lifetime of giving, as it is today with his Foundation, he would want to challenge the Husson community to come together as a team, to get a shovel in the ground, and get this much-needed building up and running ASAP. With that in mind, our grant of \$4 million dollars is a challenge grant. For every two dollars donated to the University for this building by you and other Husson supporters, the Alford Foundation will donate a dollar.

So next time you see President Clark coming, remember Harold Alford and Chesley Husson, the card games and pool table of Lynn, Massachusetts. Remember what both men did for education in Maine. Then, get out *your* checkbook. Join the team. And remember that Husson graduates are job-ready. They stay and work in our great state. So when we invest in Husson, we are investing in this great state and our future.

Thank you.