

Presidents Council Forums

The Public Challenge

In recent years there have been many concerns raised

about higher education in Michigan...

...concerns about rising tuitions

...about the productivity and efficiency of our programs

...about the impact of new programs such as MET

But, in reality, there is only one issue...

Namely, how to continue to provide broad access to quality higher education in Michigan in the face of the serious erosion in public support which has occurred in our state in recent years.

And, in reality, there is one one answer...

And, that, unfortunately, is that we have come to a turning point...a crossroads for higher education in this state.

Unless we are able to reverse the tragic erosion which

has occurred in our public support of our public universities in Michigan, it is clear that we will rapidly lose one of our most state's most valuable resources...
...its great system of public higher education.

And, of course, that is reason why I and other presidents

are appearing before you today...to sound the alarm...
...to issue a call to arms...before it is too late.

We hope that through these forums...and other actions

over the next several months we can form with the people of this state...and their elected public leaders...a partnership...

A partnership committed to restore adequate public support

of higher education in Michigan--and thereby provide to all the access to high quality public education so necessary to the future of our state.

We want to work with state leaders to develop a plan:

To reverse the steady erosion in public support of higher education in Michigan which has seen our state slide from being a national leader to 45th in the nation--almost dead-last--in the change in its support of higher education over the past decade.

To address the real issue facing education in Michigan-- which is the silent shift of public policy that has, in just a few years, undermined the public principle of higher education -- that is, the support of higher education by public tax dollars rather than student tuition.

We want to put "public" back in public education.

We simply cannot let either the quality of or the access to higher education in Michigan deteriorate any further.

The First Step

In recent months there have been a number of very encouraging signs for higher education in Michigan --that our elected public officials have begun to take steps to restore an adequate level of public support.

The Governor's budget recommendation brought good news.

In the face of a difficult budget year, the Governor took courageous and visionary steps to restore strong public support for higher education by proposing a 5% increase in our appropriations.

He has been joined in this effort by strong proposals from the Senate Republican leadership, who also have clearly identified education as their number one priority.

But it is also clear that this is only the first step which must be taken, because this step, while encouraging, will cover only inflationary cost increases...it will

only stop the hemoraging...it will not heal the wounds.
Of more importance is the clear signal that education is
becoming the number one priority...
...of the Governor
...of the leadership of the Legislature
...of both political parties
...and, indeed, of the public at large
To be sure, this new priority has been given compelling
urgency by the staggering education needs faced by our
state and our society.

The Challenge of Change

In our institutions we are preparing to meet
the challenges of the 21st century--
an ever-accelerating pace of change
in our society, in our state, in our nation, in our world.

As we become ever more diverse, more pluralistic
as a people. Indeed, almost 90% of the new
entrants into our workforce during the 1990s
will be people of color, women, or immigrants.

As our economy and commerce are become ever
more interdependent with other nations as
the United States becomes a world nation,
a member of the global community --
as this past year's events in China, Russia,
and Eastern Europe make all too apparent.

And as we rapidly evolve into a new post-industrial
society, in which the key strategic resource
necessary for prosperity and social well-being
has become knowledge itself, that is,
educated people and their ideas.

Michigan at the Crossroads

Needless to say, the pluralism, the globalization,
and the age of knowledge that comprise our future
will pose great challenges and demand profound changes
in our state and our nation.

The impact of these changes are already painfully apparent
to Michigan's workers and industries.

In fact, it is here in Michigan...in the heart of the "Rust Belt"
that the impact of these extraordinary changes are
most clearly seen...and felt.

We all know that past decade was a period
of great difficulty for our state...

Industries of great economic importance to our
nation such as steel and automobiles have
fallen victim to intense competition from abroad...

Plants have closed...we still have many people chronically
unemployed...or under employed

Indeed, Michigan's per capita income has now dropped below
the national average...

It is clear that our state is in the midst of a profound transition...
...from an industrial economy based upon the abundance
of natural resources, unskilled labor, and, to some degree,
constrained, slowly moving domestic markets...

To a knowlege-based economy, characterized by intensely
competitive world markets, rapid change, and--most
important of all--educated people and their ideas.

This has not been...and will not be...an easy transition to make.

The truth is that the outcome is still very much in doubt!

We have come to a critical turning point.

Whether we will emerge from this transition as a
world economic leader once again...with a
strong, prosperous--albeit new--economy

producing jobs and improving our quality of life.

Or whether we will fail to heed the warnings...

...to make the necessary investments and sacrifices today necessary for strength and prosperity tomorrow...

And become an economic backwater in the century ahead.

Our central point is that education, broadly defined, will be the pivotal issue in determining which of these two alternative futures will be Michigan's.

Indeed, we are absolutely convinced that the dominant issue of the 1990s will be the development of our people and the education of our youth.

Previous economic transformations were closely associated with major public investment in infrastructure such as railroads, canals, electric networks, and highways.

I believe that the coming economic transition, an equivalent infrastructure will be an educated population.

We simply have to dedicate ourselves to restoring our public investments in education--and commit ourselves to providing every person in Michigan with the quality education they will need to compete in the 21st Century.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude with a challenge to this state, its people, and its leadership...

To Us...

In a very real sense, our state has entrusted to us its most valuable resources...its youth...and its future.

To be responsible stewards of the public trust, it is clear that we must strive to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in our use of public funds...

and I can assure you that we are doing just that...and will do more.

But even beyond this, we must become staunch guardians for the quality of our institutions...

For in education, as in every other aspect of American life, quality will be the key to our future.

We need to give our children the best education and chance for the future that we can. We should be willing to pass on to them what we ourselves have received...opportunity for a better life.

Hence, to us falls the responsibility of taking the forceful and courageous actions necessary to sustain and enhance this quality...in the long run the people of this state both demand and deserve nothing less!

To You...

Higher education represents one of the most important investments a society can make in its future...since it is an investment in its people...

It is indeed the case that our state and our nation have developed the finest systems of higher education in the world...

But we must also remember this resulted from the willingness of past generations to look beyond the needs and desires of the present and to invest in the future by building and sustaining educational institutions of exceptional quality--

Institutions that have provided those of us in this gathering today with unsurpassed educational opportunities.

We have inherited these marvelous institutions because of the commitments and the sacrifices of previous generations...and it is our obligation as responsible

stewards--not to mention as responsible parents--to sustain them to serve our own children and grandchildren.

It seems clear that if we are to honor this responsibility to future generations, we must re-establish the priority of both our **personal** and our **public** investments in education, in the future of our children ...and hence in the future of our state and our nation.

To our elected leaders...and those aspiring to public office

1. I ask you to work with us to develop and implement a strategy to bring us from the very bottom among the states to a position of national leadership once again in our support of public higher education.
2. Let us end the present freeze on capital outlay appropriations for higher education--now entering its fourth year--and begin to deal with the seriously deteriorating facilities on our campuses--and move forward with Governor Blanchard's courageous proposal to lift the cap on the State Building Authority and begin to rebuild our campuses once again so they can serve future generations
3. Let us respect the constitutional autonomy of our universities and preserve it for generations to follow as the best safeguard for maintaining quality public higher education accessible to all.
4. Let us realize that we are all the guardians for the moment of an extraordinary resource for our state--one of the world's finest systems of higher education--a system that has resulted from the commitment

and sacrifices of eight generations of Michigan citizens.
Let us work together to serve the people of Michigan
--to educate new generations and provide the
ideas and discoveries to build and sustain our
quality of life.

So what can you do?

We believe that education has become the dominant
issue in our society for the 1990s...and that our
public and personal investments in education...
K-12, higher education, lifetime education...
will determine the future of this state...
and the welfare of its people.

If you share our concerns, we urge you to bring these
issues to the attention of elected public leaders
in Michigan...

To ask both those currently in office...and those
aspiring to office...what they intend to do to
address the tragic deterioration in public
support of higher education in Michigan
which has taken our state from a position
of national leadership to far below the national
average in less than two decades.

By any measure it is now painfully clear that
Michigan's present level of public support is simply inadequate
to maintain over the long run a system of higher
education that is competitive on a national basis.

We recognize that the choices before state leaders are not easy.

We must address pressing social issues of employment,
health, social welfare, we must meet the important
needs of our citizens today.

But also we must balance the costs associated with

these immediate needs with the investments so
necessary for our future.

We cannot continue to address symptoms of our problems
of the moment without addressing their causes.

For generations, the people of Michigan sacrificed
so that their children could have a better life.

They had faith in education.

We must rekindle that faith
and that commitment to the future today.

We must care for our children's future as much
as we care about satisfying our own present needs and desires.

A Partnership for the Future

Today Michigan's public universities are undertaking a
series of initiatives to do our part in
helping this state and its people prepare
for that future.

We call on our colleagues in state government...
...and the citizens of this state...to join
us in a partnership for the future...

A partnership that restores both our public
and our personal investments in education...
...in our people and their ideas
...in our children
...and in our future.