

UM-WCC Alliance

My Message

Few have realized the enormous changes that our society is undergoing as it approaches the 21st Century.

We are becoming 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.

Our economy and commerce are becoming every 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 we are rapidly evolving 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.

Indeed, knowledge will play the same role that in the past were played by natural resources or geographical location or unskilled labor...

In the pluralistic, knowledge-intensive, global future that is our destiny, it is clear that the quality of and access to

- ...education in general
- ...higher education in particular
- ...and great research universities such as the University of Michigan and its sister institutions most specifically of all...

are rapidly becoming the key determinants of the strength and prosperity of our state, our nation, and the world.

The good news is that Washtenaw County is well-positioned for this future.

The bad news is that we are located in a state that seems unusually vulnerable...and asleep at the wheel...

Concerns...

Needless to say, these same challenges of pluralism, of globalization, and of this age of knowledge that is our future will pose great challenges and demand similar changes in our state and our nation.

The America of the 20th Century that we have known... was a nation characterized by a rather homogeneous, domestic, industrialized society... But that is an America of the past.

Our students will inherit a far different nation... a highly pluralistic, knowledge-intensive, world nation that will be the America of the 21st century

Of course, these themes of the future, the changing nature of the American population... our increasing interdependence with other nations and other peoples... and the shift to a knowledge-intensive, post-industrial society.

Are actually not themes of the future ...but rather themes of today... ...in a sense, I have simply been reading the handwriting on the wall...

Yet I also fear that few have realized the enormous

changes that our society is going through as it approaches the 21st Century.

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...

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...

There are many indicators of the impact of this transition on our state...

Over the past decade, Michigan has slipped badly in several key indicators of quality of life:

- 30th in per capita income
- 41st in overall employment
- 48th in business climate (perceived)
- 48th in high school graduation rates
- 50th in return on federal tax dollars

Oh, we still rank near the top in some things...

For example, we rank...

- 12th in property tax burden
- 14th in teenage unemployment rate
- 13th in incarceration rate (and rising rapidly)
- 13th in percentage of children in poverty
- 10th in infant mortality
- 4th in public aid recipients
- 1st in mortality from major disease

There is still one other category of indicators of some concern, and these reflect our willingness to invest in the future. Michigan ranks

- 37th in support of HE per student
- 45th in support of HE during 1980s
- 40th in support of K-12

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 knowledge-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!
producing jobs and improving our quality of life.

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

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.

It is clear that we face a watershed--a fork in the road ahead.

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

Indeed, I am absolutely convinced that the dominant issue of

the 1990s will be the development of our human resources.
Previous economic transformations were closely associated
with major public investment in infrastructure such as
railroads, canals, electric networks, and highways.
In the coming economic transition, an equivalent
infrastructure will be an educated population.
The actions we must take today...
...and the investments we must make...
...will clearly determine our capacity to
respond to this future...

Seamless Web Concept

"Seamless web" concept
In a knowledge-based society, education becomes
a lifelong effort.
K-12 becomes K-14 becomes K-life
Great strength of American education is its diversity
Public and private
Primary, secondary, community college, university
Liberal arts college to massive research universities
Liberal education, professional education, job training
Key to future: linkages...to make seamless web a reality

Objective

Linking together Washtenaw's public institutions
K-12 with higher education
UM with EMU with WCC

How?

- 1) Alliance
- 2) Program differentiation and coordination
- 3) K-12 projects
- 4) Economic development

Themes:

- 1) Addressing particular needs of Washtenaw County
- 2) Using UM-WCC-EMU as a model
...trying some experiments

Next steps

- 1) Build coordination linkages
- 2) President Myron, Sheldon, and I meet regularly