

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

Frank Brogan: Universities will anchor the New Florida

FRANK T. BROGAN • MY VIEW • FEBRUARY 8, 2010

Here's some good news: Florida's economy is showing renewed life.

And here's a challenge: Do we want our economy to return to business as usual, or are we prepared to build something new?

I think we can take steps, now, to make this recovery a turning point — a redesign of Florida into a state of talent and innovation. We can engineer this transformation through long-term investment in Florida's talent engines, our public universities.

Last week, the Board of Governors of the State University System unveiled New Florida, an initiative to generate the talent our state needs to build on its existing economic foundation in aerospace, in bioscience, in technology and in health-related industries.

Florida's economy might be in a slump, but our state has the tools it needs to move forward into the innovation economy of the 21st century — if we have the courage to make the right decisions now.

Florida needs more well-educated citizens — and that's the job of the State University System and its 11 institutions. With sustained investment, as laid out in New Florida, Florida's public universities can dramatically increase the number of college graduates each year. I believe we can graduate an additional 25,000 students — the huge influx of talent our economy needs.

Our universities can also expand significantly in research, which will be the source of innovation and opportunity in the new economy. Already our laboratories bring in well over \$1 billion in outside support for research. With adequate investment through New Florida, these outside research dollars can grow to \$2 billion a year and beyond. That alone is a powerful economic driver. Of course, it is the research itself that matters most — breakthroughs that can generate new companies with high-paying jobs.

This is what New Florida is about — more college-educated citizens, more research, more university-generated patents, more medical breakthroughs, more research spin-offs, and millions more in outside research dollars coming into our state.

The New Florida initiative calls for doubling state support for the State University System over the next five to seven years. Yes, this is ambitious, but it is doable. And it can ignite an economic revitalization in Florida as it establishes a job-rich talent sector. That's why the Florida Council of 100 and the Florida Chamber of Commerce — the state's leading business organizations — included New Florida in their plan for the future. Last week, Gov. Charlie Crist came to the University of South Florida and stood with the Board of Governors to offer his support for the initiative. Gov. Crist's budget proposal calls for \$100 million in new, recurring funding in 2010-11 to get this transformation started.

Gov. Crist, like many members of the Legislature who have looked at New Florida, understands that Florida needs to move past its traditional reliance on agriculture and tourism, the two trusted and reliable sectors of the Florida economy, and growth, which has proved to be unpredictable.

Growth will return, but we need to create something new: an innovation element, based on talent and on our existing strengths in science and technology. That's a design for a strong and resilient economy.

The governor and the state's business leaders also like the strong accountability measures built into New Florida, including "dashboard" indicators for each institution's progress toward the initiative's goals. The accountability measures also include annual reporting on operations of the State University System, as well as work plans that better integrate each institution's work into a larger strategic effort, so that all 11 institutions are pulling in the right direction to speed the economic recovery. All of these will be made public — New Florida will be fully transparent, accountable and credible.

Economic recovery and economic transformation are what New Florida strives to accomplish — nothing less than a redesign of Florida into a state of talent and innovation. Our state is at a turning point. Are we, the citizens of Florida, prepared to take the next step?

Comment posted by “Saberpen”

Hey Frank, you're absolutely right, "Florida needs more well-educated citizens."

So why don't we fist focus on getting our public school educurocracy to turn out better ones and your college and university educurocracy to do the same.

That way the private sector will have more and better talented and skilled workers to hire to make the economy hum.

By the way, if the overpaid professors in your system spent more time educating citizens instead of trying to burnish the reputations of themselves and their universitites and toiling to put more research money in their pockets and more tax money in your system's pockets, maybe we'd have more of those well-educated citizens we need.

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