

POINTS OF VIEW

Universities need to play role in creating high-tech jobs.

A couple of weeks ago, Gov. John Engler kicked off the first Governor's Innovation Forum by announcing the results of a survey showing that Michigan's businesses and universities need to find better ways to work together to create high-tech jobs in the state.

"By working together to shape our future, we are guaranteeing the creation of high-tech jobs and increasing the competitiveness of Michigan businesses," said the governor's prepared remarks. "We have to focus on the importance of technology, and the role our universities and industries play in preparing Michigan for the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century."

A troubling finding from the survey: 64 percent of business and 42 percent of university respondents said non-Michigan universities provide the best research for industry. "The University of Michigan is the No. 1 research university in the country," said Jobs Commission spokeswoman Susan Schafer. "Unfortunately, business and academic leaders in Michigan don't tap that resource enough."

I agree. Ever since I've been on the Board of Regents at the University of Michigan, I've been bothered by the disconnect between U-M's high standing in sponsored research (currently \$495 million, tops among U.S. public universities) and the relatively meager number of spin-offs in southeastern Michigan. The contrast between Michigan and Route 128 around Boston's MIT or California's Silicon Valley around Stanford couldn't be sharper.

(Alert readers may remember that I'm a candidate for re-election to the Board of Regents. So, in addition to being alert for any bias that might slip into this column, readers should realize that I am writing from direct personal experience.)

One potential resolution of the disconnect between the business and university communities is to create an institutional structure that regularly brings together top leadership from both. Many other states, for example, have some version of a business-university roundtable. Attendance is confined to CEOs or presidents, people who can commit their institutions.



PHILIP POWER

The agenda is flexible, although usually organized around the theme of business-university collaboration.

There were some hesitant steps toward starting a higher education-business roundtable taken while Jim Duderstadt was president of U-M, but the effort never really got off the ground. Maybe the time has come for another try.

Another more concrete approach is to look hard at the barriers to technology transfer from university labs into the private sector. Many universities, for example, have an academic culture that discourages professors from becoming entrepreneurs. Others have conflict of interest rules that hobble

researchers from getting into business.

I got interested in this part of the problem back in 1996. U-M interim President Homer Neal (a world-class high-energy physicist) drew my attention to the fact that the U-M bylaw on technology transfer failed to state that moving discoveries out of the lab to the private sector was a proper objective for the university. Moreover, the rules were unclear about whether professors could properly receive royalties from their inventions while still serving as members of the faculty.

So there were few incentives at the U-M, whether financial or cultural, to encourage professors to behave like their counterparts at Stanford or MIT and commercialize their research work.

I had a hand in rewriting that bylaw. Transferring discoveries from the lab to the private sector was set out as an appropriate mission for the U-M, while the disincentives in the policy governing researchers and royalties were reduced. The Board of Regents adopted the new version

unanimously.

It seems to have worked. In 1998, revenues related to U-M technology jumped to \$6.8 million, compared to less than \$2 million in previous years. The university granted 43 licenses for companies to use U-M technology discoveries, up from 27 in 1994.

Start-up companies using U-M technology are now a gossip staple in Ann Arbor bars, while the University of Michigan has made it clear that venture capitalists and entrepreneurs are an important and welcome part of the scene.

It likely will take a while, but it's vital to Michigan's economic future to encourage our universities to play their role as an enormous asset in driving the knowledge-based economy of the next century.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gesund is good choice

Recently, I had the pleasure of talking to a bright young man who is running for Oakland County Commissioner.

After talking to him, I know that Ryan Gesund's top priority is working for the best interests of the residents of Farmington Hills. He's pitted against Republican incumbent David Mollitt in the 18th District, who has been around far too long. I think Ryan would be a refreshing change, bringing with him intelligence, good background knowledge, a realistic approach, and a wholesome political aggressiveness.

Ryan believes a good commissioner should be out in the community and among the people he represents in order to serve them better. He has made an effort to go door-to-door meeting people face-to-face so they can become more familiar with his name and his high standards and commitment.

Ryan has innovative, fresh ideas and a plan to help relieve the problems people still have with water and

Although the road commission is a separate authority, he will vote against any budget that doesn't include funding to fix the roads in Farmington Hills. I believe he has the

capability to increase the funding for Oakland County roads.

Wake up, Farmington Hills residents. If Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi, and Mayor Pro Tem Vicki Barnett, are in his corner, let's follow their choice and vote for Ryan Gesund for county commissioner on Nov. 3.

Dodie Harris
Hillside Elementary teacher
Farmington Hills

Don't debate

I read your article in the Thursday, Sept. 17, issue of The Eccentric. When I read it, I was prompted to write to Gov. John Engler suggesting that he never debate with Mr. Fieger, but I never got around to it.

Engler, and any other candidate for office, owes no obligation to debate. A debate, as the dictionary says, is a formal discussion in which opposing sides of a question discuss it.

You cannot intelligently discuss how our state government should be run in an hour or an hour-and-a-half debate. One could not make an intelligent judgment by listening to a couple of candidates argue for that period of

time, and we all know that few people will sit in front of television and watch a series of ongoing debates.

The voting public today is greatly influenced by how a candidate appears.

One has to take into consideration whom one is debating. Fieger is a much more experienced man in talking to juries; he has won some of the biggest judgments in the state.

Fieger in a debate would recognize no rules; it is hard enough for a judge in court to get him to stay within bounds. Fieger wants "a tough debate." Toughness to him is using innuendo and name calling to make him look tough rather than intelligent. Fieger's ads are meaningless TV ads, like, "I'll fight for the people!"

I think an open forum, where clearly defined issues are argued and where each candidate can be asked questions by the audience, makes much more sense.

If a voter wants to learn more about a candidate, then the voter should read what the candidate writes and go to meetings where the candidate is to speak.

You want a debate on television "in the public arena." Fieger is a political street fighter, and the debate would on his part amount to nothing but a street fight with a lot of swings but

with little intelligent discussion.

John P. O'Hara Jr.
Bloomfield Hills

Vote Reform

The national debt stands at \$5.5 trillion. This year you and I will pay more than \$240 billion on the national debt in interest alone. That's money that won't go to our children's schools, but rather to banks, insurance companies, and other wealthy individuals and institutions as pure profit taken from the taxpayer.

Because of the federal debt, when it comes time to support our local schools, voters are not as inclined.

Not surprisingly, the same group of special interests that is benefiting from the national debt is also spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year to control our election process. In this year's state election alone, the Democratic and Republican parties will spend more than \$30 million. The money that could repair school roofs, eliminate portable classrooms or restore fine arts programs will instead go to fund candidate's slim ads.

The other two major parties never admit when they're wrong. They certainly don't admit their parties'

responsibility for the national debt and the effect on our children's future. When given an opportunity to pay down the national debt with more than a trillion dollars in broadcast spectrum rights sales, they chose instead to give your rights away. The same goes for our national mineral, forest and fishing rights, just given away to globalized special interests. Through NAFTA, they have surrendered a whole generation of high-paying, highly skilled American jobs for quick corporate profit. Now these parties are asking for your vote for financial trusteeship over our children's education in Michigan.

Not surprisingly this gross mismanagement of the people's resources has given birth to the Reform Party. There is no reason why we can't afford the finest system of schools in the world, other than for the greed of a few globalists. We welcome all patriotic, well-meaning American citizens to join with us in ridding our government of this waste and corruption. The best way to begin changing our government starts with you: If you want reform, then vote Reform.

Eric Borregard
Reform Party candidate
State Board of Education
Farmington Hills

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