

Cigarroa: Higher education is our most valuable investment

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By Francisco G. Cigarroa

As Texas, along with the rest of the nation and world, is experiencing seismic shifts in our economic landscape, we need to remain focused on the fact that higher education is what can best ground us in providing a rock-solid foundation for our economic sustainability. A stimulus package is beneficial for a limited time; learning and discovery, in contrast, enrich, reward and support individuals for a lifetime, thereby benefiting our state enormously from generation to generation.

Horace Mann, a revered American educator, observed that education is “the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” Some 200 years later, at a time when knowledge, creativity and innovation define our prosperity, education is calibrated as the balance-wheel of our economic machinery as well. It is what will energetically propel us toward recovery and sustained prosperity in direct proportion to our investment and faith in its return.

Every single one of the 15 institutions of the University of Texas System understands the vital role we play in ensuring the future of our beloved State of Texas and that our core missions of education, health care, research and service to the community are central to Texas' intellectual leadership, hand in hand with its economic leadership. The nine UT academic institutions award

degrees and certificates given by public universities in Texas in every imaginable field. UT also educates two-thirds of the health care professionals in Texas. We are one of the largest single direct providers of patient care in Texas. Our faculties offer medical care to more than 5 million outpatient visits and almost 1.5 million inpatient hospital days annually.

The research done on UT campuses saves countless lives. We create tremendous economic opportunities for our citizens. An excellent example is the \$14 billion biomedical industry in San Antonio that is largely the result of the collaborative work done at the UT Health Science Center-San Antonio and UT San Antonio. The institutions combined employ more than 5,800 dedicated faculty and staff and generate more than \$232 million in total research expenditures.

And there is more good news for Texas. Because our legislators have been excellent stewards of our resources in earlier years, we are in a stronger financial position than many other states, allowing us to recruit the best faculty from around the world to benefit our students and to create new knowledge. Additionally, the Emerging Technology Fund and the Texas Enterprise Fund provide powerful incentives to encourage the commercialization of campus research and the development of new Texas businesses to market our research.

The UT System board of regents has also done its part by creating the Texas Ignition Fund to jumpstart the transformation of new discoveries into successful business ventures. The Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas, funded with \$3 billion through Proposition 15, will also have a profound impact in recruiting international talent in our fight against cancer.

The board has placed great emphasis on the importance of recruiting and retaining the best faculty and researchers, and has approved programs to help our campuses attract stellar minds from throughout our country and world such as the STARS program. As a result, our students are working with leaders in their fields of study and are taking part in exciting discoveries that are empowering our intellectual caliber, even as they are strengthening our economy. This combination of events and incentives shall surely enhance our institutions and elevate them to recognized national and international excellence.

There is truly no greater gift we can give our children than the enduring legacy of an outstanding education — from their first day in school on as far as their abilities will take them. It is self-evident that our gift to them is also our greatest and surest investment in the future of Texas and our nation. Now, more than ever, economic progress and social advancement depend on the certain foundation

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can provide even in these
uncertain times. Our
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greatest gift to our Texas
children.