

Invest in Higher Education: Talking Points for Legislators

- 1. Investing in higher education is the fastest and strongest way to leave a recession.**
When people are unemployed, they need access to higher education to upgrade credentials and expand skills. When they enroll in academic or vocational programs, they use their time constructively during a recession, generate revenue for the state through federal student loans and work-study jobs, and are ready for a better job when the economy recovers. Without higher education courses and programs available, the unemployed are idle, rely on costly social programs to make ends meet, are more likely to require intervention from law enforcement, and emerge from a recession less able to find work and pay taxes.
- 2. Investing in higher education is also the best way to build a strong state economy in the long run -- one that produces revenue for all the needs of the state and insulates it from the worst effects of future recessions.** Across the nation, the states with the strongest economies are states that invested heavily in higher education over the years -- a direct result of educating students for the challenges they face. North Carolina is an example of how much it is possible to improve a state economy by investing in higher education.*
- 3. A knowledge-based approach is the key** to building a strong, diversified, and healthy state economy that can generate the revenue needed to improve the quality of life. A knowledge-based economy would be the last to enter a recession -- not first like Florida is now with its heavy reliance on tourism and population growth. A diversified and resilient knowledge-based economy would be the first to leave a recession -- not the last like Florida is now when growth is impossible, and tourists are not spending money.

*Statistical evidence can be found in the SREB Fact Book 2010, published by the Southern Regional Education Board, the accrediting agency for schools, colleges, and universities in the Southeast. Visit www.sreb.org and click SREB Publications.
- 4. A knowledge-based economy is the only state economy offering solutions to meet demands on resources.** States throw away money and raise prices for everyone with the inefficient use of vital resources like energy and water. The economy of the future will design, use, and market efficiencies, save on the cost of resources, and see a better quality of life. In other words, states save on resource costs and also generate new revenue with changes coming from a knowledge-based economy.

5. **Preparing a workforce through education in a knowledge-based economy is the way to retrofit an entire state for the most efficient use of resources.** All states need an educated and trained workforce to retrofit environments that are wasteful in the use of energy and water. Public universities and colleges prepare students (through degree and certification programs) for entry into the economy with credentials suitable for the task of retrofitting the state. We need to invest now in higher education to reap the benefits of an educated and fully-employable workforce that is up to the task.

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