

## **Ann Arbor News**

### **Editorial**

#### **Universities can play major role in economy**

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One of the greatest assets our state holds is the strength of its universities.

From expertise in health care and business to the depth of research and the sheer buying power of these institutions, higher education plays a major role in Michigan's economy.

That role will be highlighted at a two-day regional conference this month in Ann Arbor, organized by the state's three major research universities: the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University. The Oct. 15-16 event is tied to a National Academies Study titled, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm." But for Michigan, the economic storm isn't just gathering - it's already here, in all its fury.

In a letter to participants, U-M vice president for research, Stephen Forrest, writes that all speakers have been asked "to put forward ideas that are 'revolutionary, not evolutionary.'"

Indeed, we hope this event is infused with urgency, with the kind of revolutionary ideas that Forrest calls for. If not, it risks becoming yet another in a string of let's-get-together-and-talk-about-what-to-do meetings, with little to show for the effort weeks or months later.

There's much potential on the impressive roster of speakers, with dozens of leaders from the corporate, government and academic sectors - including U-M President Mary Sue Coleman, MSU President Lou Anna Simon and Wayne State President Irvin Reid.

The agenda topics, too, are on point:

- How can a state or region transform from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge-based economy, while keeping the strengths of its traditional base?
- What role can research universities take in such a transformation?
- What collaborate steps can be taken to push this transformation forward?

Answers to these questions are key, as are concrete actions to achieve them.

These kinds of events are important to bring together people who all have a stake in Michigan's economic future. Even more important, though, is what happens after the event ends. And with the state's financial crisis deepening every day, we don't have long to wait for results.