

John D. Dingell

Introduction by Cynthia H. Wilbanks

It's terrific to have so many of you with us today. There are participants in the conference today and tomorrow that come from every corner of the state of Michigan, and I think it speaks volumes about the importance of this topic to our state and to our region. I'm Cynthia Wilbanks, Vice President for Government Relations at the University of Michigan. It's my pleasure to join Homer Neal in chairing this section of the program of Day 1.

This morning we could've started a contest at the beginning of our sessions and asked each person to record how many times they heard the word knowledge, innovation, competitiveness, global economy, and so on. And I think the theme throughout the next several days will be focused on the way in which all of these concepts are integrated and so important for our future. The crossroads of change, which Steve Forrest spoke of in his beginning remarks, are in full view of all of us. And all of us in this room and hundreds elsewhere in our state and region are confronting the unmistakable and irrefutable truth, that we must take charge of our future or face the possibility of becoming a stagnant state and region, ill equipped to compete in the global economy. But I am an optimist, as Homer Neal, Chuck Vest, and Steve Forrest are, and I think all of you by your presence here today also are optimists.

Our next speaker, Congressman John Dingell, brings a wealth of experience and wisdom to his work in Congress and on our behalf that very few can match. Congressman Dingell's tenure in Congress spans more than half a century. He has witnessed enormous change and has been the architect of profound change in nearly every facet of public policy that our country has had to confront and to shape. A full bio, at least the part that you can fit on half a page in our program, is something that you can read for yourself. But at the University of Michigan and our surrounding region, we are privileged to call John Dingell our own. He is fully accessible to his constituents, and he fully embraces the creativity and the innovation that we need to accelerate in our state and region. It is a pleasure to welcome Congressman John Dingell to the podium.

Dingell

Bless you, Cynthia. Thank you for that gracious introduction. I always begin by asking, "Can you hear me?" I remember I did that one time and a fellow in the front said yes he could and a fellow in the back said no he couldn't, at which point they offered to change seats.

I want to pay a particular word of complement and congratulations to Professor Homer Neal. That was a very fine presentation, and I want you to know that I appreciated that very much. And I want to thank Cynthia Wilbanks, a wonderful public servant and a wonderful part of this university, for her gracious introduction. And I want to say how delighted I am to be here and how pleased I am to be with my friend, Vern Ehlers, even if he is only going to be here electronically. And I also would like that I'm pleased that Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Sandy Baruah is going to be here, because he will give an important level of information and approach to the discussions. I want to thank Professor Gibala for his work and to pay a particular word of tribute to President Coleman and also President Lou Anna Simon of Michigan State and President Irvin Reid of Wayne State for their involvement in today's exercise.

I think the question that you have asked is a very interesting one, and I'd just like to read it so we have it before us. How does a state or region that has had it's economic focus on manufacturing itself into one based on a knowledge economy that maintains a complimentary to its traditional base? How can universities assist in the goal? What steps must be taken?

Before I begin to address those questions I'd like to make a point. First of all, we are in Michigan and we are very much in our universities a knowledge economy. We are a manufacturing economy and for that I say, thank goodness, and I intend that we shall remain so, as I think everybody in this room does. And I have every belief and every reason to believe that we can and will remain so during my lifetime, at least, and I intend that that shall last for a goodly period of time.

Having said these things, Michigan has had bad times before, and we will have bad times again. We have invariably fought our way out of those difficulties. We provided the muscle that won World War II. We have been at the forefront in all manners of scientific, technological, and engineering, mechanical and manufacturing approaches that have benefited this country. We have created the car economy for this nation. We have led the nation in manufacturing. We produce steel and chemicals and all matter of other good things.

At the same time we provide a high quality of life for our people. We have no shame at what we have done, and we have no reason to be concerned in our ability to address this. What we need to have is the will to commence addressing these questions and to put behind gloom and doom and to begin to address the concerns which we confront. The automobiles, which we produce today, have a higher level of technological confidence in terms of their computer capability than did the first lunar lander. And that is a remarkable thing. And they [autos] will do almost everything, including talking to those who work on the cars.

As a matter of fact, because my lack of computer literacy and the fact that I can't afford the doggone equipment that has to be used, I've had to quit being a shade tree mechanic. Because I have found that I need now an ability far beyond what I have or what I had when I used to be able to tune an automobile with a screwdriver, two pieces of wire, and an electrical light bulb.

But that tells us we have come a long way. It tells us also that we have the capacity and resilience to come out of the bad times that we saw in the 70s, the 80s and the 90s, because we always came through. And I think approaching those things in the proper way will lead us into the new successes that we seek and we deserve. And I remind all that the Chinese word for crisis is two things: one, opportunity and two, problem, with emphasis on opportunity.

We are here in a great school. This school has led in large numbers of enterprises, opportunities, and undertakings that have bettered this country. In the area of health, we are the best. In the area of science and technology we are superb. And this school does a splendid job of salting this nation and this state with high quality graduates, but also with projects and things of that kind that make it possible for us to do well here in the state. Obviously it is a task of the university to educate our young people, and that is done in superb fashion. Not just by the University of Michigan but by the partners of the University of Michigan in our efforts to make this a technologically advanced state, which in fact it now is, although it is true that it can be better.

Having said that, Michigan's unemployment rate is high. Michigan's unemployment rate is high because we are a manufacturing state, and I would observe we intend to remain so. But we're a high unemployment state because we are witnessing jobs moving from this country abroad to other nations. And we intend to address that question the proper way. Obviously there is no way that this state or this country can fight to preserve the jobs that are going to go abroad because of the impossibility of meeting the wage differential that confronts us as we do this. But it is possible for us to see to it that we make a fight to preserve the high-quality, high-value jobs that are so important to us, and that have been the basis of Michigan's growth and Michigan's economy throughout the years. And I propose to give up on none of those and I propose to allow no one else to give up on any of those until such time as we have understood that we have made every effort to preserve them.

The task of this great university and other universities in the state of Michigan is to see to it first that we educate our young people. That you do here magnificently as we do at the other great schools in this

part of the state and in this state. We also have the duty to see to it that we properly fund the other two great functions of the university. First, we see to it that we do do the basic science research and the technology that is necessary for that. And last of all, to see to it that we create the spin off of this knowledge into the American and the Michigan economies so that it can best serve our country and our state in terms of growth.

In any event, our state is doing good things. We've increased the minimum wage. We've done things to see to it that under the leadership of our Governor there is going to be a program for No Worker Left Behind offering money and assistance to displaced workers to obtain degrees or certificates in high-demand occupations and in emerging industries.

This is great, and I would note that in this district, in the city of Dundee, we now have a highly advance engine production facility which requires at least two years of college for a job in that facility. And that particular employment is something, which has been done not just by one industry, but a number of industries and that has been done also by the industries working with the UAW, the union which will represent the workers there.

As mentioned, the Congress has passed the COMPETES Act. And I won't go into that in great detail, but it is designed to help create engineering and technology jobs for the hardworking people of the United States and most especially for the hardworking people of Michigan. As mentioned, my colleague, Vern Ehlers, was a major leader in that. And that is an extremely important undertaking because if you look, you'll find China, India, and the other developing countries are putting their time, their resources, their money and their effort into seeing to it that their workers are properly trained and ready and able to move in to new jobs with low-wage scales and other advantages which they have, and which confer the benefits on their economy that they want to have conferred.

Now, is this secure to turn around? No, but it will help. And certainly it will help us particularly if Michigan takes the lead in taking advantage of it. And if our legislature and our state government will begin to move to undertake the things that are necessary to drive the benefits that is required of Michigan to continue our program of growth and economy development. I'm sure that everybody here is aware of the University Research Corridor and the benefits that it has brought to Michigan.

That is very good, but one thing that has to be understood in the Research Corridor and in the COMPETES Act. My predecessor on the podium here mentioned something: see to it that the appropriations are available because a piece of legislation without funding is no legislation at all. And I would observe to you that one of the ancient games in Washington and in Lansing is to come forward with programs and then not to fund them. You get the advantage of going to the people and saying we have this wonderful program, and then you don't have to confront the fact that taxes or money will be available to support them. There is a small drawback to this approach, and that drawback is simply that the program never takes off. And as a result the benefits that everybody expected, everybody understood and everybody supported do not become available to the state or to the community or to the country. Clearly a wrong approach.

Now having said these things, the University Research Corridor is a great program, and it has the possibility of conferring significant benefits. URC announced that Michigan saw the creation of 68,000 jobs. That is wonderful. Furthermore, URC has produced graduates that constitute a very large percentage of our health-related degrees, 54 percent of the state's science and engineering degrees and 100 percent of MD, DO, veterinarian and nursing PhDs. But more importantly it has produced graduates that stay here in Michigan. More than 556,000 of them live here. This is good news because we keep hearing about how our young people are moving abroad. Well, that is, of course, something that has an element of truth to it. And it is necessary, therefore, for us to reinforce our efforts.

Now how does this come about? This the university and the others in URC are uniquely placed to be able to see to it that this state and that these universities begin to provide the jobs through the

development of new spin off companies. That is a tremendous contribution to our well-being and is something on which massive support is needed both from the federal government and from the state and, indeed, from the university. Because these are the places where new jobs, new opportunity and new chances for this state to move in the direction that we say here this morning we want to move; and that is into technology.

Well, you have done superb work, but as Churchill once observed when he was called upon to cease his drinking, he had a group of ladies who appeared before him and they came in and they said, "Mr. Churchill, we think it is absolutely scandalous that you have drunk so much whiskey and so much brandy." And they said, "It would fill this room up to this point." Churchill looked at them in the eye and then he looked up at the mark on the wall that they had indicated and then he looked back at them and he said, "So much to do, so little time."

Regrettably we stand today with Churchill, so much to do, so little time. This school does a superb job in terms of educating our young people. And as your Congressman in Washington I am keenly aware of the fact that you are constantly working to see to it that the school's capability to do the other great things that have to be done by universities--the scientific research, the development of industry by the spin off and the dissemination of knowledge--is done in a superb fashion by the University of Michigan and by your partners in URC.

We have to see to it that URC has an adequate level of funding. One of the things, which I told my friends in the legislature and told the Governor when I saw the budget troubles looming on the horizon, is we can make cuts in a lot of places but cuts to the universities, particularly on the scientific research and other things which create jobs and their spin off effort, is one of the most counterproductive, foolish and unwise actions that this legislature can take.

Unhappily we see that not only is this a problem with regard to the state, but it is not infrequently a problem with regard to the federal government. One of the very interesting things about the federal government is that maintaining some of the federal participation in the undertakings you are depending upon, in terms of research or in the dissemination of knowledge and information, is, of course, money and research.

Having said that, it is interesting to note that the great NIH [National Institutes of Health] does a superb job, but its revenues and its ability to make extramural grants is constantly under attack by different forces in the administration saying we've got a war or something else which requires that we cut back and that we can do more by being lean and mean. I found lean and mean doesn't necessarily produce either in Iraq or in Washington or, indeed, in Ann Arbor or in any other seat of learning in this country. I also observe that a not dissimilar philosophy exists in Lansing.

The end result is that you find yourself here at the university and other universities, too, dreadfully impinged upon by the difficult attitude of those who serve you in legislative and in executive positions. And you do confront not just a desire to save money there, but very frankly, a desire to see to it that a particular philosophy is superimposed upon your activities. And you find yourself constantly confronting little or big difficulties on things like stem cell research or other things which preclude you from doing the necessary research to really provide the growth that has to be done here in Michigan or at this great university.

Having said those things, you also confront a real problem in that there is a lack of understanding on what it is that a university should do or how these undertakings should best be spun off to become a matter of public earning and a public opportunity for our people here in the state of Michigan. And that is something on which you have to provide a major effort here at the school and at the other universities in this state. One of the things that I find is the most difficult in Washington is the fact that I do not have, and that my colleagues in the Congress do not have, the capability of identifying what it is that you can do, should do or want to do. We have the capacity to help you achieve those purposes, and we have the

capacity to work with you and to open doors and to see to it that you have the opportunity to address these problems. But we also lack the size staff or the skill or the knowledge or the background, which you happen to possess as just a simple innate part of being a great university of higher learning and higher education.

Having said that, your efforts then are to see to it that when you are developing information and when you are preparing to move, to see to it that that information is disseminated. That you do it with a full understanding of what it takes, and that you provide from within the tremendous resources and the tremendous assets and opportunities, which you have here at the university, to see to it that those things are done in the best way possible. This is a university which has not only a superb school with regard to engineering or physics or basic science, but it is also a superb university with regard to health and a large number of other undertakings which are so important to the future of human kind, but also to the economic development of this state and this country.

You have, though, within your borders, then, something else. You have a magnificent business school, one which could provide you with the assistance so that, as you move towards the development of your other disciplines, it should assist with an in-house development of a program of cooperation between your university's people in the area of science and technology with the area of business and business development. Because the thing that I constantly hear from people who work with me in Washington is, "What we really have to have is good, solid, complete programs presented to us."

Beyond that, we also find that there is a tremendous need for something else, and that is the ability of you to see to it that you attract the development capital and the other things that are necessary. The previous speaker made a very interesting point. Nobody bought the existence of Highway 128 or Silicon Valley, but what they do has to be paid for.

But the climate, which created the opportunity for people to become the kind of entrepreneurs that could do those things, was there. You here at this university, and this university and the others, especially in URC, have the capacity to develop that kind of capability, that kind of opportunity for out people.

And if nothing else comes from here, at least in so far as what it is that John Dingell tells you this morning, I would observe to you this is what I hope you will take, that you will insist that, first of all within the House, we develop the kind of programs that will enable you to do the best job of making these presentations. And that you do the best job of seeing to it that you develop the kind of entities that you see down in the Research Triangle or that you see up off of Highway 128, or that you see of other places where people recognize that the future of the country lies in technology and advancement of knowledge and dissemination of that.

And to see to it that you help those who are in politics and public life, particularly those in the legislature, understand that this is something of desperate importance, not to this university, but to this state and each and every one of us. And if you will take from this meeting that thought and begin that kind of development, I'm comfortable that you will help people like me in public life--legislators and others in government--to work with you and to provide you with the services that you need at the state and the federal level to see to it that we can really take advantage of the wonderful skills and abilities, which you possess, right here in Ann Arbor and at the other great universities that we have in this state of Michigan.

Our forbearers gave us this wonderful university system, this wonderful education system, and I think it would be a great thing if we could not just preserve and protect it, which we strive on a daily basis to do, but to see to it that we have those that serve in public life, particularly your legislators who have to address the question of budget, that these things we talk about today are not expenditures. They are investments. They are investments in our kids. They are investments in our business. They are investments in our future. They are investments in our well being, and unless we assert the things that we must to see to it that those become a reality, I don't think our future is good. But I think with your

leadership and the intelligent effort that this university and others can give, and that well-thinking and well-meaning people, not just in the university community, but in the business world can bring to this, I think we will be successful. In that, you have my good wishes and my thanks for the privilege of being with you this morning.