

President Irvin D. Reid
Wayne State University
House Subcommittee Testimony
April 2008

I would like to second Dr. Simon's remarks, and emphasize that Michigan's research universities are our most important assets for developing the talent we need to excel in a knowledge-based and increasingly worldwide marketplace.

In Ann Arbor, Detroit and East Lansing we have three vigorous research universities, collectively the centers of knowledge, discovery and creativity that are fundamental to Michigan's economic renewal.

But several years ago our three institutions realized that working individually is not enough to spur the kind of transformation Michigan needs. That was the genesis of the University Research Corridor.

As members of the URC, we are working together aggressively to bring about change. We have a shared goal to encourage and accelerate the state's economic development, something in which every Michigan citizen has a stake. Our basic plan of action has three parts –

- to encourage collaboration among our three universities,
- to facilitate interdisciplinary research on our individual campuses,

- and to increase our partnerships with business and government.

We are committed to strengthening technology transfer as well as our cooperation with regional economic development organizations. As many of you know, all three of our universities have invested heavily in both these initiatives over the past several years. Each of us has played a major role in regional economic development – through Ann Arbor SPARK, Prima Civitas in Lansing, and Detroit’s TechTown.

Each of these robust operations is part of a growing technological and intellectual infrastructure that is supporting the development of a knowledge economy in Michigan – and which will help pull our state out of the economic doldrums.

I think we can all agree that Michigan's economic development is closely linked to its ability to provide new, high-technology products and services. The future's new jobs will come from discoveries in the biomedical sciences, alternative energy, nanotechnology, information technology and other fields that are the basis of university research.

Consider just one example: research and development in alternative energy. All three universities are working industriously to expand our research in this field, which is increasingly important to our national security.

- Michigan State recently received a \$50 million grant to help establish the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center, and opened a \$10 million alternative energy research facility last fall.
- Wayne State has established the National Biofuel Energy Lab, and its TechTown research and technology park houses the NextEnergy Center, which is designed to stimulate an alternative energy industry in Michigan.
- The University of Michigan has established the Michigan Memorial Phoenix Energy Institute, part of a \$35 million per year investment in energy research.

The creative resources available at our research institutions bring both individual and corporate talent to the state: We have helped attract such influential companies as Toyota, Google, Hyundai, Aeronova Aerospace and alternative energy developer Chemrec AB to Michigan.

At the same time, by collaborating on career revitalization programs we often can keep skilled workers in Michigan even when businesses close. For example, each of our universities has programs to prepare Pfizer employees for new careers and keep their irreplaceable talents in Michigan.

We even have found ways to keep value in Pfizer's infrastructure: MSU will be taking ownership of a Pfizer facility in Holland, while the University of Michigan and Ann Arbor SPARK plan to fill a Pfizer facility with U-M researchers and life-sciences companies to create a wet-lab incubator.

The URC institutions engage in collaborative projects from technology transfer and commercialization to entrepreneurship and urban policy. Our alliance also has given us an innovative way to share ideas and technical resources.

With this in mind, we are looking at ways to use technology to enhance our researchers' ability to collaborate. We recently announced a project, backed by National Science Foundation grants, that will use the latest technology to make participants at different universities feel as though they're in the same room.

This initiative takes advantage of our jointly produced Michigan LambdaRail network, which connects our institutions via high-speed broadband. All three URC universities are helping set up a high-definition videoconferencing system with images 100 times better than standard TV screens.

This sort of collaboration is good for our students, for our universities, for Michigan and for the country – but it would have been inconceivable only five years ago.

Though we have created a powerful alliance for research and development, we are aware that the enabling spark of Michigan’s ultimate economic renaissance will be people -- the students we graduate. And each year, our institutions provide Michigan more than 26,000 superbly prepared men and women including 3,800 new engineers, 1,300 PhDs, 1,400 MBAs, more than 1,000 new doctors and nurses and more than 50 percent of the state’s science and engineering graduates.

Some people have speculated that Michigan's sluggish economy is leading to a "brain drain" in which our best minds leave the state to find opportunities elsewhere. But our research-intensive universities are populating Michigan with thousands of well-educated, well-prepared entrepreneurs, engineers, physicians, teachers, scientists, nurses, social workers, information specialists, politicians and others in professions that will lead Michigan into a more prosperous and stable future.

In our faculty, our expertise, our classrooms and our laboratories, Michigan's research universities have tremendous assets for the growing knowledge economy, and we are powerful magnets to attract businesses and talented people.

Now, as the University Research Corridor, we have a unified vision that enables us to partner more effectively with each other, as well as businesses and government.

Michigan's economy may be struggling, but our three universities are working together every day to make things better. With your support, we can do it.

Thank you.

President Reid
Closing remarks to the House subcommittee
April 2008

Madame Chairman, I appreciate your allowing me a few moments' personal reflection on the occasion of my final appearance before the subcommittee.

Among the many things I will miss after stepping down as president of Wayne State University is the opportunity to know and work with our friends in the legislature.

Michigan's public universities have been asked to be the best thing our state has going for it in the new high-tech global marketplace -- but we face a profound dilemma: We have been asked to take on this crucial challenge with declining or at best virtually static support.

I appreciate the hard, steady work of our elected representatives, but I also will admit to disappointment at the partisan divisions that often have hindered sound funding of higher education in Michigan. The stakes are so critical, the costs in human terms so high, that cooperation is the only reasonable option.

We in Michigan's public universities will do all we can. But you are on the hot seat with us, you and everyone else in Michigan government. Our public universities are the powerful engines that drive Michigan's future, but you build those engines and control the fuel on which they run.

As I leave the presidency of Wayne State University,
my wishes for you are

- the vision to see clearly into a better future,
- the courage to resist a “quick fix,”
- and the resolve to make unpopular decisions for the common good in spite of the possibility that some of your constituents may call for your head.

Renewing our state will take more than just commitment. It will take action -- concerted, bipartisan action -- and a great deal of money. To pull Michigan’s economy out of the depths will require a major investment in higher education.

Michigan's public universities have excellent records of service to the people of this state, but we depend entirely on a productive partnership with you and your colleagues in the Senate and the governor's office.

The importance of your role cannot be overestimated. A prosperous future for Michigan begins with you and with us. We cannot afford to do less than our very best, and to do it together.

Thank you, and farewell.