



Wednesday, December 15, 2004

OU president lauds Cherry Commission report as a blueprint for higher ed in Michigan

December 15, 2004, Rochester, Michigan – Oakland University President Gary D. Russi today called the report of Lt. Governor John Cherry's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth a vital business plan for Michigan's move from a brawn to a brain economy. The Cherry Commission, on which Russi serves, was charged by Governor Jennifer Granholm with, among other things, developing ideas on ways to double the number of college graduates in Michigan. The commission presented its recommendations to Granholm today.

"This report serves as an important blueprint for Michigan's economic future," said Russi, who is also chair of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan, a nonprofit higher education association serving Michigan's 15 state universities. "It recognizes the importance of dramatically increasing the number of college graduates in the state, and that the state's investment in its 15 public universities is critical to our economic future.

"I'd like to thank Lieutenant Governor John Cherry for his outstanding leadership on this initiative, and all the members of the commission for their commitment to developing meaningful recommendations to present to Governor Granholm."

The report found that "the only way to create a vibrant economy is to make higher education and innovation the top economic priorities for Michigan." The commission contends that these two priorities are "the only path to higher paying jobs for Michigan's students, workers, and families, and it is the only route to greater prosperity for its communities, its firms, and the state."

But the universities also acknowledge that they must adapt in several key ways to the changing realities of Michigan's demographics and economy, as outlined in the report's recommendations.

"Michigan public universities, including Oakland, are already making changes to implement key segments of the report, including stepped-up assistance to help ensure more students graduate and graduate faster, and incentives to attract adult students to complete degrees," Russi said.

Maintaining the high quality education, workforce training and research activities that define our public universities, while also ensuring access to our institutions of higher education is a challenging goal, acknowledged Russi. "We are facing major challenges on all fronts. This report affords us an exciting opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of higher education in Michigan. We can be the engine that powers the economy. Oakland University looks forward to working with the governor, the legislature, school districts and the private sector to help get Michigan's economy back on track, and to help provide workforce ready individuals for an increasingly knowledge-based economic environment."

The Cherry Commission report can be viewed in its entirety at www.cherrycommission.org.

SUMMARY

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