



President's Weekly Perspective

Good morning.

If you were in the SUB on Friday you may have noticed many community and business leaders gathered around the meeting rooms. They came to UNM to participate with some of our faculty, staff, leaders of other state universities and government in our Rainforest in the Desert economic development summit. This summit was part of my 120 days of listening campaign and an effort to engage with those leading efforts in moving New Mexico's economy forward. During the day we were able to hear from many of the best and brightest business and civic leaders in the state. My goal was to start a dialogue across the community about economic development, and particularly, generate some innovative thinking about ways in which UNM and our other research universities can become catalysts in growing our economy and fostering knowledge jobs.

You may recall that recently I talked about the two questions posed to me at the ASUNM Senate meeting that I attended: first, how do we attract the best and brightest to UNM; and second, what are we doing to support graduating students entering the workforce. I answered the first question two weeks ago, and today I would like to address the second question because the economic development summit is a fundamental element of the answer.

Clearly, economic development is top of mind for many leaders in our state, and we were fortunate to have both Governor Susana Martinez and Albuquerque Mayor R.J. Berry join us. Other contributors to our dialogue included New Mexico Secretary for Economic Development Jon Barela, the leaders at Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories, and the Air Force Research Laboratory. Representing the university experience, we heard from fellow research university presidents Dr. Dan Lopez from New Mexico Tech and Dr. Barbara Couture from New Mexico State. Provost Chaouki Abdallah led a panel discussion of our Deans. Lisa Kuuttila, facilitated a discussion regarding the role of the STC. UNM, which plays a vital role in New Mexico's economic development as an innovator in technology commercialization. Ed Poppell, innovator and former Vice President of Business Affairs and Economic Development at the University of Florida (UF) shared the compelling story of Innovation Square, a partnership between the City of Gainesville and UF. While Ed and I were colleagues and shared a passion for cycling while at UF, he was here at UNM to provide compelling examples of what we can achieve through a town and gown partnership that aligned goals of the University with those of local government. He also used his access to the microphone to share stories that should have stayed in Gainesville.

The challenge I laid before this impressive gathering of community, business, government and university leaders was how to better capitalize on UNM's role in economic development. One only has to look at places like the Research Triangle in North Carolina to see how a powerful and effective collaboration between research universities, business communities and state leadership can be in launching economic development juggernauts. Two things are consistent in these kinds of engagements: the facilitating role of the research universities, and the vision to capitalize on the unique characteristics of a particular region.

In returning to my home state of New Mexico after years working in other parts of the country, I have been struck by the extraordinary resources we have here. We live in a beautiful place, full of cultural richness and creativity. People want to live here. Albuquerque is a hub of opportunity for economic growth. Our city sits right at the base of the Sandia Mountains and is home to a strong research university that includes a research and teaching hospital. We have unparalleled access to resources at the national laboratories that surround us.

The opportunity does not stop at the edge of Albuquerque, however. Extending down what I like to think of as the backbone of our state, the Rio Grande corridor, we have New Mexico Tech in Socorro and New Mexico State in Las Cruces, which both bring their essential and specialized contributions to the economic development equation. Leveraging the resources and networks of our three research institutions, we also have the ability to extend not just along the I-25 corridor, but to branch out into rural communities so that our vision for economic development embraces our entire state.

We have all the essential elements for a knowledge economy ecosystem right here. The extraordinary attendance at our program on Friday, with so many key players in New Mexico suggests that this may be a pivotal moment in our history. At UNM we can “step up and step out” to lead a renaissance of economic growth based on nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship. UNM cannot do it all, because fostering an innovation ecosystem requires that everyone take responsibility for their role and their contributions, but we can take ownership of our role as a facilitator and leader. We can be the catalyst for new model. The economic development challenge can be solved if we add new factors into the equation. At UNM we must be part of the answer because our promise to our students requires it.

This brings me back to the question I faced from the student leaders at the ASUNM Senate meeting. Economic development is essential for our state, for our community, for our faculty and staff, but most of all, it is important for our students. I want them to have the choice to stay in New Mexico. I would like every one of you to have the option to put the excellent education you earn at UNM to work in our state. We cannot do it alone, and it will not happen overnight. We can, however, begin today to create a world of opportunity in our Land of Enchantment.

For more on the economic development summit, visit:
<http://news.unm.edu/2012/09/economic-forum-live-blog/>.

Those of you who joined me in watching the Lobos play against the Aggies in Las Cruces saw a team with heart, spirit and almost flawless execution that lead to a 27-14 win. This type of great coaching and great playing makes me proud to be a Lobo.

Have a great week and Go Lobos!

Bob