



Chancellor Mark Rosenberg

**The Changing Landscape of Competitiveness:
Some Challenges for the 21st Century**

**Florida International Business Summit 2007
University Center at the University of North Florida
February 6, 2007**

Thank you President Delaney for hosting this meeting and thanks to the Coggin School of Business, I also want to thank my good friend and occasional mentor Terry McCoy.

This gathering exemplifies what we should be doing more of: bringing together leaders from the major sectors driving Florida's economy and well-being.

It is a perfect example of the collaboration and teamwork that we need if we are to advance this state and keep it competitive in the face of a rapidly changing global landscape.

This morning, I want to share with you some concerns and challenges that we will need if we are to improve state well-being and prosper in the 21st century.

First – the challenges:

The nature of competitiveness

Listen to a recent warning from the National Academy of Science:

“The dominant position of the United States [in the last century] depended substantially on our own strong commitment to science and technology and on the comparative weakness of much of the rest of the world...”

The National Academy of Sciences goes on to point out that many countries around the world are making “innovation based development a central economic Strategy.”

A companion study by the Council on Competitiveness stated that innovation will be the single most important factor in determining America's success through the 21st century. In this century, the seminal driver of innovation is knowledge. Knowledge is the key to innovation-based creation.

Given that universities are major producers of knowledge, they will play a key role in competitiveness. That is why I find this collaboration gratifying.

The key to success in this century will be our ability to compete in the knowledge economy.

Closer to home, we are reminded by Thomas Friedman in his seminal work that our students graduate into a global labor market.

What are the broader issues of the global economy?

No doubt, there is great change afoot and we need to be prepared. But I want to step back just a bit and examine some broader issues that will have an impact on our quality and competitiveness here in Florida:

- **Destruction of the atmosphere:** the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identifies greenhouse gases as major threats to sustainability;
- **We are in an energy crisis:** We need to find a quick exit from fossil-based fuels, particularly for transportation fuel. We should have moved to bio-fuels long ago!
- **Population explosion;** worldwide we are adding a country the size of Germany every year;
- **Diminishing land resources:** 45 million hectares a year we are losing; who doesn't feel the pressure in Florida?
- **Diminishing water resources:** the average American consumes 380 liters per person per day – compared to the world average of 83 liters per person per day

How do we fit in? I look at the State University System as an important source for solutions to these issues:

- We are 11 public universities with nearly 295,000 students;
- We graduate nearly 60,000 students this year;
- We have important partnerships with the community college system and both state and federal government; we are deepening our working relations with Enterprise Florida – they played a major role in centers of excellence and world class scholars initiative;
- We provide leadership, skill, and innovative solutions for the state.

But I worry that there is not really an understanding in this state about what it takes to move our public universities forward and our state forward.

Every year we are ranked and sized up by a variety of organizations and agencies – the NSF, the NRC, Carnegie and the US News and World Report. There are many variables that the publication examines:

Peer assessment, average freshman retention rate, % of class under 20; % of faculty who are full time, acceptance rate, and average alumni giving rate.

But if we were that good and that successful, I submit to you that we would be more highly ranked nationally than we are, and that we would not be at the bottom of the proverbial barrel in almost every indicator of national comparison in terms of funding.

What is needed?

Instead of an ad-hoc relationship between business and higher education that results in a periodic meeting or discussion about an isolated issue or two, the question before us is this:

Can we develop a more systematic approach that addresses global competitiveness in a knowledge-based economy?

I believe that I can speak for all of my colleagues when I say that we need sustained attention from the business community – because in good times or bad, our institutions will be key to keeping our state moving forward and providing the skills that will be critical to your competitiveness.

We acknowledge that we at times leave a lot to be desired:

- We are often slow to respond;
- Our faculty at times may give the impression that they are disconnected from time and place;
- The skills of our students are often quite uneven – as we vouch that they are ready to graduate.

The hope that we bring to this meeting as educators revolves around this belief that we can improve our systems and we can improve our competitiveness and company well-being if we accept the notion that we have a **shared responsibility** to work more closely and intensely than we have ever worked before.

I know that there are many instances of partnerships that are working and of engagement at the highest level of the cooperation spectrum.

So let me cut to the chase:

I want our business community to raise its expectations for what we in higher education can and should be doing to improve our working relationships with you to deepen our engagement in the challenges that we face;

I want our universities and community colleges to raise their expectations about how to deepen partnerships with the private sector and improve the prospects that our new cooperation will be good for our students, the state and ultimately our well-being.

There is no time to lose:

- Workforce dynamics will make it even more difficult to find the skills that we need to keep our companies and our institutions competitive at a global standard;
- The major drivers of well-being increasingly depend on knowledge-based resources at the cutting edge;
- Communities outside Florida are doing a better job at attracting the creative class –those who aspire to higher levels of performance and creativity – students at both graduate and undergraduate levels, and those already trained who seek quality of life first before they seek out employment.

Innovation won't wait on us to get our act together.

Now I do not want to reinvent the wheel or go backwards and point fingers.

We are ready to move forward, but we seek collaboration and a recognition that improvement is a shared responsibility.

Meetings such as this give testimony to the power of collaboration – I hope that your time is well spent today for there is no time to lose.

Thank you.