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Higher Education Helps Drive the Economy

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By Richard C. Atkinson and Charles B. Reed
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If, as the saying goes, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, then our university systems cannot afford a single moment of weakness in the coming century. The California State University and the University of California systems share a critically important role as the link between California's education system and its economy. As California's economy becomes increasingly information-based, this connection will become even more consequential. Our state's employers will rely on us more than ever to provide graduates who are well-prepared for the intellectually demanding jobs of tomorrow.

Fortunately, our universities have received outstanding support from Gov. Gray Davis and the Legislature. The partnership agreement signed by Davis and our university systems in May will provide the long-term funding that our universities need to build strength for the future. And the new state budget will give our two systems the opportunity to reinforce connections at both ends of the education-economy continuum.

The continuum begins with California's K-12 schools and community colleges, which prepare the vast majority of students who attend the CSU and UC campuses. Our universities are expanding outreach efforts to ensure better preparation and a smoother transition to university-level education.

The UC system has pledged to expand on outreach programs that currently serve more than 100,000 students. In addition, the university system will double the number of new teachers from 1,000 to 2,000 annually in its teacher education programs. Working with the community colleges, the UC system will increase transfer enrollment by 33 percent by 2005.

Similarly, the CSU system pledged to expand its K-12 partnerships. As the institution that prepares 60 percent of the state's teachers, the CSU system will recruit more prospective teachers through a newly budgeted \$9-million recruitment effort. The CSU system also plans to increase the number of community college transfer students it enrolls.

In addition, the CSU and UC systems are working together on professional development programs for K-12 teachers. In its new budget, the

UC system received more than \$70 million for professional development and student enrichment programs, which will be operated in collaboration with the CSU campuses and other institutions.

At the other end of the continuum are the businesses of California, which look to the UC and the CSU systems to supply highly skilled workers. California's unprecedented success in the rapidly growing high-tech and information industries has resulted in a massive statewide need for graduates in areas such as engineering and computer science. California businesses and industries have been forced to recruit graduates from outside California and abroad.

Both of our institutions have responded by accelerating efforts to meet California's work force needs. Under the partnership agreement with Davis, the UC system has agreed to expand enrollments in engineering and computer science by 50 percent by 2006. The UC system also is expanding its industry-university cooperative research program and creating the California Institutes for Science and Innovation. These cross-disciplinary centers will bring together faculty, students and industrial partners to focus on scientific and engineering research. Similarly, the CSU system received \$10 million in the 2000-2001 budget to launch a work force investment initiative in fields such as nursing, engineering, agriculture, computer science and biological sciences.

Our universities understand that the success of California's future economy depends on the effectiveness of our state's education system. As the link between our state's educators and employers, we are working to strengthen the education-economy continuum so that students receive the preparation they need to succeed.

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