



## Investing in higher education pathway to turning Michigan's economy around

**FLINT**

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About two weeks ago, the University of Michigan-Flint and the surrounding community celebrated as we broke ground on our first residence hall. The public support we received was outstanding. More than 700 people attended. This demonstration of solidarity with higher education was symbolic. It was a "tipping point."

Author Malcolm Gladwell describes "tipping points" as the moment when an idea or movement is infectious and takes hold, causing a dramatic change. I believe the time is now for a dramatic change in favor of investing heavily in higher education in our state.

The final report by the Cherry Commission on Higher Education - which was headed by Lt. Gov. John Cherry of Vienna Township - clearly identified our shared mission: "Michigan must transform itself once again to be a leader in an era where knowledge is the key ingredient in economic success." It has become a universal truth: Education equals prosperity and opportunity.

Unfortunately, it's been difficult to pursue such a strategy because of another "tipping point" a while back, when state appropriations for higher education started to decline at an alarming rate.

Twenty years ago the state funded 67 percent of the University of Michigan-Flint budget, and tuition accounted for about 33 percent. This year tuition will fund about 69 percent of the university's budget, while state funding is less than 31 percent.

Our budget has been cut in half over the past two decades, and it's imperative for the governor and the state Legislature to reverse the devastating trend.

Unfortunately, just like in your household, fixed costs such as energy and health care have been on the rise. This situation has left us with no choice but to raise tuition on an annual basis.

This year, the tuition increase for undergraduate students at the University of Michigan-Flint will be 6.4 percent, among the lowest tuition increases set by the 15 public universities in the state.

We worked hard to keep our tuition increase as low as possible, expressing great faith that the governor and the Legislature will spare our university from further cuts. We must maintain high academic standards for the sake of our students and our state.

The state of Michigan is one of seven states currently facing budget deficits. A recent New York Times article reported that more than 40 states have budget surpluses, and one of the first areas benefiting from this additional cash is higher education.

Leaders in these states understand that the basis of prosperity is investment in education for all citizens. Michigan must be the preeminent leader in higher education, or risk a "tipping point" that puts our economy and society at risk.

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