

## CONCLUSION:

# At the Brink of Utah's Economic Future

**W**inds of change are stirring in the national economy. In the past few years, issues of high-technology, globalization, recession, and recovery have changed the way we think about and do business, and have clearly shown

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that states wishing to be competitive in the new economy must stay abreast of the changes—or fall behind. Utah, too, is at the tipping point. We must choose now—between stagnation and investment—and set the path for Utah's economic future.

**The goal, of course, is clear: continuing economic prosperity.** But the path to long-term economic prosperity in Utah still awaits an action plan. It is not that the path is vague. Urban planner and economics professor Richard Florida argues compellingly in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* that major research universities are

a basic infrastructure component for a state's competitive advantage in the future—more important than canals, railroads and freeway systems that drove growth in past periods of prosperity.

An important recent analysis, the Employers' Education Coalition report, distinguishes Utah's Research 1 institutions as significantly, and importantly, different than other institutions in Utah because their economic return-on-investment is critically different than those institutions. Simply put, the state's Research 1 universities already bring home close to a half billion federal dollars each year for the citizens of Utah

It should be clear that merely planting a research university in the middle of a desert will not lead to knowledge-based economic growth. The strategies that university, policy and business leaders employ, can affect how well a region can appropriate the returns from university RD&E investments.

Utah's future is not stalled; in fact, this is a time for optimism. But now also is a time to make decisions. Utah has the proven university firepower to champion its economic future and to make the state competitive with any other in the nation. Utah's business leaders are working hard to ensure a prosperous economic future for the citizens of the state, and they are leading the call to action at this important time. The business community has promised to share the investment bill because it, perhaps most directly, will share the payoffs down the road. But the entire state will share in the profits of this investment.

And the word "share" is key to the conversation. **Long-term economic growth means that prosperity will be shared with all of Utah's citizens.** We must make this investment now to ensure that Utah wins its fair share of tomorrow's job wars.