

HIS VIEW: Work together to lead Idaho forward

By Duane Nellis

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Nellis

The first 15 days of my presidency at the University of Idaho included a statewide "listening tour." I met nearly 1,500 people at some 35 events and logged more than 1,500 miles.

I've been immersed in the UI for the past few months, learning so much about its depth and breadth. The listening tour, though, showed me the university's effect is far greater than I had imagined.

What is Idaho but a state of opportunity? The UI can be the model for the innovative and effective 21st century land-grant institution, serving this state and the nation. We must take advantage of the tremendous opportunities before us.

One avenue is the transfer of our intellectual property into marketable capital that further benefits the economic development of this state. We have a \$100 million research enterprise at the university, which provides some \$750 million in economic benefits to Idaho. But that's just part of what we can become.

For example, at Hagerman, our researchers are developing new resources to better cultivate fish. Their research directly affects aquaculture around the globe and could counter declining fish populations. In Kimberly, scientists are developing special varieties of drought-resistant potatoes. Those breeds can have a stunning effect in global areas that suffer from lack of rainfall.

In Moscow, researchers are developing a virtual educational environment to collaborate with others around Idaho and beyond in the delivery of online education and research.

Our research is collaborative. At the Center for Advanced Energy Studies, we partner with the Idaho National Laboratory, private industry and other universities on energy solutions. Without a doubt, the work at CAES is leading the national agenda on nuclear energy and sustainable energy initiatives. When we pool our resources, we all benefit, as do the state, national and global economies.

Idaho ranks near the bottom for the number of its high school graduates who attend college, yet the UI has an outstanding retention and career placement rate for students who enroll at our university. We need to lead our state's efforts to actively prepare high school students for greater levels of success. Partnerships with community colleges provide a seamless transition for students to complete four-year degrees. We also complement undergraduate programs at other universities with top-quality graduate programs in our strength areas, such as nuclear energy. This, in turn, benefits industry by providing qualified employees.

We need to establish joint venture opportunities since business partners are set to benefit from our success. The reality is that state budgets are declining; we need to be more entrepreneurial and innovative, seeking creative funding sources. With strategic partnerships, we can generate revenue for the university while making education more accessible to more students via scholarships. The return on investment for business -- realized through a highly qualified labor pool and our research - is enormous.

I'm passionate about economic development and enhancing the quality of life in this state. From my tour, I know that sentiment is echoed by many. Let's work together to lead Idaho forward.

Duane Nellis is president of the University of Idaho.