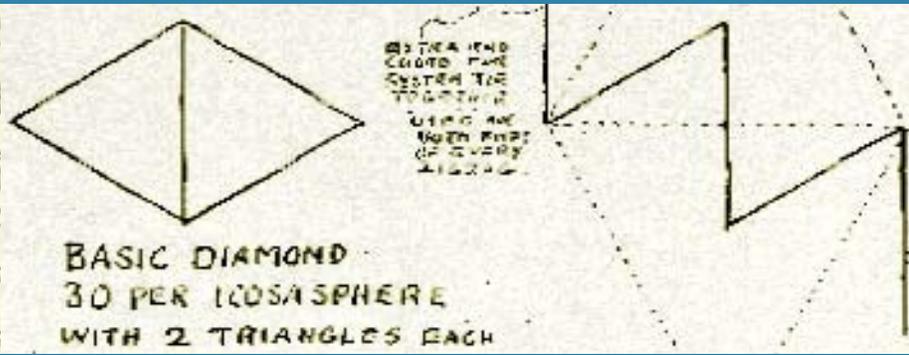


*R<sup>2</sup> for area and vol  
 fine when vol =  
 of R in load  
 VARD SIDE OF SQUARE =  
 we hold  
 possible to co  
 system*



## Higher Education and National Security

**Higher education today is being challenged on multiple levels. The U.S.** Department of Education formed the Commission on the Future of Higher Education in response to public concerns about high costs and low graduation rates. Its report calls for increased assessment and accountability on the part of the nation's colleges and universities. The American public is also increasingly dubious about the benefits of much university research and often sees technological progress as a threat to jobs. In addition, parents wonder why college costs so much and what their children will gain from it. Senator Bob Kerrey, currently president of The New School, points out that American higher education makes tremendous contributions to our nation's security. Drawing on his broad experience, including eight years as a member of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and, more recently, as a member of the 9/11 Commission, Kerrey urges college and university leaders to counter the challenges they face today by emphasizing the vital role their institutions play in enhancing our national security.

### NOTEBOOK

Higher education leaders can counter the concerns they face about the effectiveness of the nation's colleges and universities by emphasizing the vital role their institutions play in enhancing our national security.

Of all the factors contributing to the strength of the U.S. economy, higher education is the most important.

As frustrated as we may be with our government at times, it fares better than most other countries' governments due in large part to the educational backgrounds of those who serve in it.

A liberal education—one that frees students' minds from their preconceptions—broadens the possibilities for greater understanding of others in our nation and around the world.

## Challenges to Higher Education

A very real anti-intellectual sentiment is thriving in America today. Politicians play to it to connect with their constituents, and in the process, they nurture a negative climate for higher education. Large portions of the American public are antiscience, in part because advances in technology (along with increased immigration and trade) tend to put downward pressure on middle-class wages. Science can conflict with religious beliefs, too. A 2006 Pew poll found that 42 percent of American adults held strict creationist views, and two-thirds of the entire sample were open to teaching creationism in schools. Clearly, the antiscience movement is thriving in America today.

Another challenge to higher education stems from the conflicting agendas that institutions face. Public universities, for example, are trying both to train future workers to help states' economies and to offer liberal educations so as to graduate informed citizens who can contribute to our democratic way of life. Many institutions have broad offerings that not only compete for funding but that also overlap with offerings of nearby institutions. They also have key donors and important alumni weighing in. The multiple missions of institutions invariably lead to trade-offs, which means that key decisions will produce winners and losers and, therefore, unhappy constituents.

**A 2006 Pew poll found that 42 percent of American adults held strict creationist views, and two-thirds of the entire sample were open to teaching creationism in schools. Clearly, the anti-science movement is thriving in America today.**

international arrive on campus with no sense of entitlement. I believe that attitude translates into dedication and motivation to learn. We need to help *all* of our students develop character and the understanding that they can accomplish far more than they think they can when they arrive at college.

## Higher Education's Contribution to National Security

National security is a top public issue today. One of the most effective ways for college and university leaders to address current threats to their institutions' reputation and support is to focus on the relationship between national security and higher education. There are five key areas in which higher education has substantially enhanced the security of the United States.

*1. Higher education has transformed the nature of the American economy.*

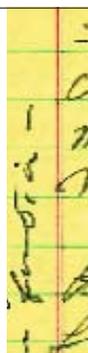
The United States is the most powerful nation in the world today because its economy is the strongest. Despite dire economic reports (not to be dismissed), the U.S. economy in the aggregate is massive: the U.S. increase in GDP in 2005 was over \$100 billion *more* than China's increase in GDP. Last year's increase alone was larger than the entire economy of Argentina and Thailand combined. Of all the

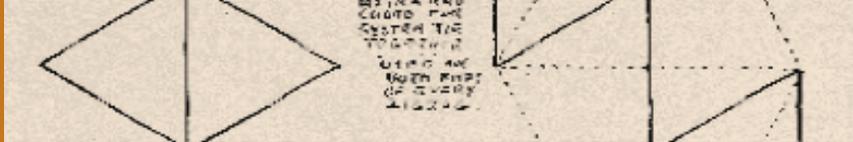
factors contributing to the strength of the U.S. economy, higher education is the most important. Strip away the cumulative benefits of the nation's colleges and universities—particularly given the development of professional colleges and research universities between the late 1800s and the 1940s—and I would argue that the United States would not be the leading world economy. Our annual gross national income is roughly \$12 trillion; I expect it would be half that without higher education.

Today, we spend 4 percent of our GDP on defense. Although I believe the purpose of higher education is much more than economic, I also believe that if we had not made the investment of public and private money to build our remarkable system of higher education, our GDP would be less than half of what it is today. Thus, there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the strength of higher education and our capacity to afford relatively high levels of defense spending. For all its faults, higher education has transformed the nature of not just our economy but of our society as well. I agree with the argument that there's a positive connection between economic growth (and the average standard of living that growth enables) and tolerant, open, democratic societies.

The political environment for higher education today is extremely challenging. The Spellings Report, while intellectually shallow in my view, stems from deep public concern about the effectiveness of the nation's colleges and universities. In a democracy, such concerns must be addressed; the alternative—ignoring public sentiment—could have serious legislative and rule-making consequences.

Finally, the last challenge concerns the motivation of young Americans today as they enter college. I came up against this issue firsthand when attempting to schedule one of my classes at 7:00 a.m. on Fridays. I was advised not to do so because Thursday nights are big party nights. The class is now held at 8:00 a.m. on Fridays. In contrast, I have found that roughly 20 percent of New School students who are





2. *Scientific and social research done at American colleges and universities has dramatically enhanced our security and improved the quality of our lives.*

It is very common to hear diatribes—from politicians as well as from the public—that so much of the research done in the United States is wasteful. I believe that the higher education community has to confront that argument forcefully. It is true that from time to time we waste money on research. The risk in demanding accountability at every stage, however, is that for every researcher whose work leads to a breakthrough that wins the Nobel Prize, there are a thousand others who did virtually the same thing but happened to take a wrong turn that took their voyage of discovery to a dead end. Research is enormously important to both the U.S. economy and the health and well being of our citizens. Therefore, it must be pursued at the basic and the applied level, even if we all don't understand it. We can't expect nuclear physicists or sociologists or political scientists to write papers we can all understand, but that doesn't mean we should devalue their research. That said, part of the challenge is to bridge the gap between research and the public. It is critical that members of Congress understand the importance and value of research to the nation's economic progress and security, because if they believe something is vital to the nation's future, they'll find the money to support it.

3. *Higher education improves governance at the city, county, state, and, most particularly, federal level.*

This area is often overlooked. Indeed, given today's state of affairs, it can be difficult to make this argument when our current president and the two preceding him are graduates of Yale and when every member of Congress is a college or university graduate. There is no question, however, that the quality of the judicial branch is better as a consequence of higher education. The caliber of the judgments being made about the many difficult issues that arise in a democracy is directly affected by the education of the judges who make them. The executive branch, too—leaving aside the commander in chief—better serves our nation through agencies as varied as the Department of the Interior, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Security Agency, as a result of the undergraduate and graduate programs completed by the men and women of that branch. As frustrated as we may be with our government at times, rest assured that it fares better than most—to a large degree because of the education of those who serve in it.

4. *Higher education helps create an informed citizenry vital to our democratic society.*

Higher education increases the potential for individuals to perform as citizens. Some would say that the most

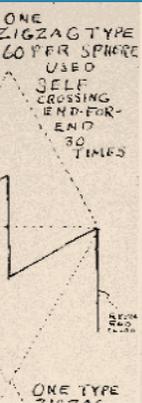
destructive force in America today is public opinion, and indeed I would argue that the weakest link in democracy is the election. Unfortunately, there are many examples of the public being misinformed and making bad decisions. Without higher education, however, the situation would be vastly worse. It seems that today, in an environment where talk radio flourishes, all one needs is an opinion—as opposed to the ability to critically examine an issue and articulate a reasoned position about it. Nurturing critical thinking is a key component of any college or university education. Further, a liberal education—one that frees students' minds from their preconceptions—broadens the possibilities for greater understanding of others in our nation and around the world. While it may be understandable, for example, that in 2003 Americans did not grasp the historical context of Iraq, it is critical that we have the interest and the capacity to learn that context and, likewise, to benefit from such knowledge. At this point, creating an informed citizenry may be the weakest link in the contribution of American higher education to national security, but the need to educate students about the world and to teach them to think critically about important issues affecting our future could not be greater.

5. *Higher education contributes to the level of discourse and public debate about the nation's economic and political future.*

This area is closely related to the previous one about educating and informing the citizenry, but it differs in that the contribution to the nation's future stems from people in academia publicly contributing to the important debates of the day. Many forces discourage academic leaders from taking public positions, and yet much is lost when these leaders are removed from the discussion. Faculty members, too, can and do raise the level of public debate by contributing the results of their research and writing to the discussion. Such contributions go well beyond writing op-eds or publishing in academic journals. Indeed, it is crucial that relevant research be made readily available and understandable so that it contributes to the resolution of issues and policy making. Many in higher education do actively contribute to public debates and policy making through their work and thereby make meaningful contributions to the nation.

### **Suggested Approaches**

We need not be defensive about the contribution that higher education makes to the nation. Higher education leaders can make a compelling argument for the vital role that colleges and universities play in enhancing national security—a top public issue. When Congress can draw a direct con-



nection between spending and addressing a high-priority issue, it will allocate funds. We need to respond to concerns about accountability, access, and costs, but we need not do so defensively. With regard to costs, for example, it is effective to simply note that the cost of training an officer at the U.S. Naval Academy is \$200,000—far higher than what the vast majority of American colleges and universities spend to educate each of our students.

I would suggest that the name of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act be changed, as it is too centered on higher education's interests. Instead, the name should capture what it is that higher education does and where it can take us. (The Patriot Act is a classic example of this strategy—it's hard to vote against something called the Patriot Act.) Along similar lines, in my experience, university presidents tend to lobby for all that they *need* as opposed to lobbying for what they are working to accomplish and how they are going to meet the challenges we face as a nation.

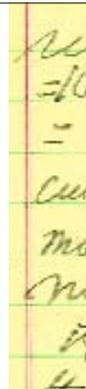
Social Security expenses. Therefore, one of the most important discussions that higher education leaders and researchers could contribute to is the one surrounding the delivery of health care in this country. Indeed, I believe that higher education has more to gain from reforming health care at the federal level than does any other sector of the nonprofit or for-profit realms.

## Conclusion

Colleges and universities provide something extremely important in the United States, something that is in a very real way the kernel of our civilization. Globally, universities are some of the longest-standing institutions, outlasting many nation states. But higher education is not a force of nature. To continue to exist and thrive, colleges and universities must enjoy public support. It is hard to imagine a few select universities disappearing, but thousands of

others in the United States are not so secure that they needn't be concerned about their financial survival. Articulating a compelling argument about their purpose to generate broad-based support is an important task for higher education leaders. At this point, our best argument is the vital role that the nation's colleges and universities play in enhancing national security.

**It is well known that for decades the growth in Medicaid expenses at the state level has been displacing dollar-for-dollar investments in higher education...I believe that higher education has more to gain from reforming health care at the federal level than does any other sector of the nonprofit or for-profit realms.**



SENATOR BOB KERREY is president of New School University in New York City. He served in the U.S. Senate for two terms, as governor of Nebraska, and as a member of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States (the 9/11 commission). Kerrey can be reached at [president@newschool.edu](mailto:president@newschool.edu).

Finally, it is well known that for decades the growth in Medicaid expenses at the state level has been displacing dollar-for-dollar investments in higher education. The same is true at the federal level with Medicare, Medicaid, and