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The message I'd like to offer you today can be fairly summarized by one of Aesop's fables. The Greek writer tells one fable about a man and a lion coming across each other in a forest where each of them soon began to boast about how his kind was better than the other one's in both mind and strength. Getting nowhere with their argument about whether man or lion was superior, the pair happened onto a statue of the great Hercules tearing the jaws of the Nemean Lion.

"See," said the man smugly, "that's how strong WE are! The king of Beasts is like wax in our hands!"

"Ho!" roared the lion. "A man made that statue. It would have been quite a different scene had a lion made it!"

I am here today to tell you that on this one, I quite agree with the lion that a lot depends on your perspective. For instance, while from one "sculptor's" point of view, the state of Michigan's funding for higher education looks quite impressive at an all-time high of $1.25 billion last year, and between 1980 and 1990 state and local tax for state Universities and community colleges support increased by 3% more than inflation. Yet like Aesop's lion, looking at those numbers from quite another viewpoint, the fact is that the state's spending for public universities and community colleges last year accounted for only 7.7% of Michigan's total revenue of well over $16 billion.

And what that means from a national perspective is that only 15 states in this country allot less of their revenue to higher
education than does Michigan. Two-thirds of the states in this country outspend Michigan in the share of their resources they invest in higher education. In other words, Michigan, nationally and internationally recognized for our outstanding system of public universities and community colleges, ranked third by University Presidents throughout the country, last year devoted a lower proportion of its total budget for higher education than did 34 other states.

California, whose higher education system is often compared to Michigan's for the caliber of its public universities, spends 10.6% of its revenue on higher education. And the state of Alabama, not a national name in higher education, devotes almost twice as much of its income to its universities and colleges education than does Michigan.

The fact that Michigan dropped last year to 35th among the 50 states in the percentage of state revenue it spends on higher education is part of a larger, frankly frightening, pattern of financial erosion that has developed over the past decade. During the 1980s, the paucity of Michigan's annual increases for higher education put us in 45th place out of all 50 states. Between 1988 and 1990 appropriations fell 17% behind inflation and for that two year period Michigan ranked 42nd among the states.

The irrefutable result is that if Michigan practically bottoms out the country in terms of state support, we make the top ten in dependence on tuition dollars, coming in seventh highest in the whole country!
But this transference of funding responsibility from the state as a whole to the individual college student raises a moral question for our system of higher education in Michigan. If we are indeed to keep our college doors open to every citizen who aspires to higher education, can we ethically afford to price anyone out of the opportunity by raising tuition beyond his and her grasp?

Michigan has made great inroads serving the broader public with more minorities, women, and students over 25 enrolled in our 15 universities and 29 community colleges than ever before. But if the state of Michigan continues to decrease its share of the costs for operating those colleges, thus forcing an escalation of tuition, we will lose the ground we've made not only in absolute numbers but also in moral power.

Aesop's lion would also ask us to consider one other perspective on this state's tax support for higher education. It is true that Michigan residents pay among the highest property taxes in the country. In 1985, for example, property taxes consumed 39 cents of every in-state tax dollar Michigan residents paid, compared to 30 cents as the national average. But at the same time, when Michigan taxpayers buy a new couch, car, or computer, they add on only 4% in sales tax compared to states like Connecticut with an 8% sales tax. And if Michigan residents do pay more property tax dollars than people in many other states do, they also pay a lower rate of state income tax than do many taxpayers in the rest of the country.

But let the lion sculptor's hands not mislead or be unfair to
Michigan's good taxpaying public. Indeed, Michigan's total tax burden is well above the national average at almost 13% of personal income, making Michigan the 11th highest taxing state in 1985.

Yet as a university president, I think it's significant to compare the fact that the same 1985 year Michigan ranked 11th in total taxation, we came in 35th among all states in per-capita spending for four-year public universities. To put it in one more context, the same year Michigan ranked 35th in spending on four-year universities, it ranked 15th among all states in spending for prisons! One place that doesn't have to worry about declining enrollment is a Michigan prison, with 250 inmates coming in every month. Between 1983 and 1989, funding for Michigan prisons went up 121%. During the same period, funding for higher education in Michigan rose 33%.

And if we are to compete with prisons for state dollars, we in the business of higher education in Michigan must somehow convince taxpayers they're getting their money's worth...that the product they are in effect buying enhances their lives too. Maybe we need to do a better job of linking up the research our universities are doing--whether for safer cars or artificial ear drums--with their tax chits.

Maybe we need to tell a clearer story on the quality of our product--the college graduate who's been taught to think critically, solve problems, communicate, find information, work with others--who's learned how to learn because the explosion of information now requires lifelong learning.
If once our ivory towers allowed us to run our universities regardless of what the citizenry wanted, those days are no more. We must be, and I think rightly so, accountable to the folks from the Upper Peninsula to the Indiana border who pay our bills. We must tell our story better if we are to persuade our constituency that education is a necessary and practical asset to the well-being of our entire state.

In the heyday of auto profits in the 1950s, before anyone ever heard of a Honda or Toyota, Michigan residents flourished along with the auto industry. The state's per capita income was 16% higher than the national average and jobs were plentiful. But the energy crisis, a recession, and the Japanese changed all that and by 1985 Michigan's per capita income of $13,608 was below the national average.

Michigan is and will continue to rebound from its dependence on the auto industry. But the significant economic forces that will drive the rest of this decade are the increasing capacity to gather knowledge and provide systems to process it. And that means education. Every year there are fewer new jobs in the industrial sector of Michigan, because the growth companies are high-tech and service. And that means education. Information and how to use it, like Westinghouse, is becoming our most important product. And that means education.

The world is becoming smaller with every headline from Eastern Europe, and the global economy is no longer a buzz word but a reality. Our planet's resources are being pressed to the limits and
only an educated populace can solve our environmental problems.

Perhaps most important of all, we in higher education must make sure our taxpayers are reminded of the mission we have as a free society of equal opportunity to provide access to the best education possible to all our state's citizens. In his book *A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University*, the late Bartlett Giamatti, former Yale President, but better known as the baseball commissioner who finally pulled the rug on Pete Rose, wrote of this higher purpose.

"...higher education in fact serves a democracy not by re-creating a class of micro-mandarins, strenuously emulating Socrates, but rather by maintaining faith with a national history that at its best aches for equality as well as quality, for accessibility as well as excellence."

The 15 four-year universities and 29 two-year colleges in Michigan intend to continue offering that accessibility as well as that excellence in our institutions. We need to make sure the public knows what we're about.

We need, in short, to make sure that Michigan's taxpayers and legislators have the opportunity of seeing Hercules and the Nemean lion from the lion's point of view.