

Guest Opinion: Globalization and knowledge - our future

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WATKINS

The Detroit Regional Policy Conference on Mackinac Island had a theme that should follow everyone off the island and be drilled into the psyche of everyone in Michigan and America.

The message from the island: In this century, knowledge, talent, creativity, entrepreneurialism and innovative spirit are going to drive everything. This is the same message I have been preaching for some time. Put simply - talent matters!

Former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, now an economic adviser to Sen. John McCain, told the 1,700-strong crowd of business, civic, political and community leaders: "No job in America is safe from competition from around the globe."

Fiorina's message needs to be drilled into the heads of leaders who think we can afford to dawdle in making key decisions that will drive our future. It also needs to be internalized by every parent and student in Michigan.

We need to understand that Michigan's past success is not a guarantee of future success.

Knowledge will drive opportunity. Education is the best investment we can make as a state and nation.

Other presenters throughout the conference had similar messages. Lou Glazer, president and founder of Michigan Future Inc., has been stating "talent matters."

The workshop "Dropping Out of the Factory School Model" had two of Michigan's top educators, State Superintendent Michael Flanagan and Detroit Public Schools Superintendent Connie Calloway. The conclusion: We do not have one child to waste in Michigan and America if we wish to be economically competitive in the future. A high school dropout will be a burden on himself and greater society.

Consider these statistics provided by panel member and former West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise, leader of the Washington, D.C.-based Alliance for Excellent Education: The 47,500 students who didn't graduate last year will lose lifetime earnings of \$12.3 billion.

Each class of dropouts costs Michigan an additional \$750 million in health care costs over their lifetimes.

Education also levels the playing field. Our public schools and community colleges are the true Statue of

Liberty in this great country.

Is there a "shared vision and common agenda" for Michigan's future?

Perhaps the closest thing to a roadmap for Michigan's future was laid out by The Center for Michigan, the "think-and-do tank" founded by Phil Power and led by John Bebow. The center's objective "is to assist our state through its current period of wrenching economic trouble and lay the foundation of informed hope for a better future Michigan."

The Center for Michigan unveiled its report, "Michigan's Defining Moment: A Common Ground Agenda for Michigan's Transformation," at the conference. It is must reading.

Fiorina struck the correct tone of urgency and optimism at the conference. No, our best days are not behind us. "If we are inspired by a common goal - everything is possible," she said.

-Tom Watkins, education and business consultant

Categories: [Opinion](#)

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Footer