

## STATE POLICY AND UNIVERSITY RESEARCH:

### A PANEL DISCUSSION

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Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. This is a particularly important occasion for me because I believe our future will be largely determined by our collective research success. That puts our future in the hands of those of you at our research universities. There is no more important job than yours.

I have been asked to comment on the relationship between state policy and university research, especially from the perspective of the Board of Regents. To begin, I should offer a bit of context on the Kansas Board of Regents for those of you from our neighboring states. The Board is comprised of 9 members who are appointed by the Governor within parameters that tend to minimize political and geographic divisions. The Regents serve as the governing board for the state's six public universities—The University of Kansas, Kansas State University, Wichita State University, Pittsburg State University, Emporia State University and Fort Hays State University. As of July 1 of last year, the Board is also responsible for supervising and coordinating the state's 19 community colleges, 11 technical schools and a municipal university. In addition, the Board administers Kansas' state financial aid programs, Adult Basic Education program, and GED testing program.

I have been very public in my belief that university governance continues to be our central and most important role. That said, however, you can see from this list of responsibilities that there are many issues competing for the time and attention of the Board. Moreover, only three of the state universities (KU, K-State, and WSU) are designated as doctoral degree-granting, research institutions. Thus, the time and energy available to devote to research is necessarily limited.

Over its 75 years of existence, the Board has developed a fairly decentralized governance model, relying on institutional leadership to operate the universities in the most efficient and effective manner within the policies set by the Board. By its very nature, research is a "local" activity that does not easily lend itself to specific direction by the Board. Where many people would expect the Regents to offer specific guidance on the articulation of general education courses among the 37 public institutions in Kansas to ensure easy transfer between schools; few, if any,

would see us playing a similar role in specifying the nature and format of individual research projects across institutions.

If research is one of our most important activities, but we agree that it is largely a "local" issue, then what role should the Board of Regents play in the process? I would offer the following three broad responsibilities:

1. Determine institutional direction
2. Provide institutional support
3. Stay out of the way

*Determine institutional direction.* As stewards of the public trust, the Board is responsible for ensuring that the state's research efforts are effectively focused to meet the needs of the state. In large measure, this is accomplished through determination of institutional missions. In Kansas, for example, the University of Kansas has primary responsibility for medical education and research and Kansas State University has responsibility for agriculture and food science. Much is made about unnecessary duplication in public higher education and Kansas is no exception. By clearly defining missions, the Board works to minimize unnecessary duplication. Missions are reflected both in the programs offered at a university and the focus of those programs. For example, we are fortunate in Kansas to have three engineering schools, one at each of the three research universities. Over the years, however, the Board and the institutions' leaders have worked to ensure that those schools complement each other. As a result, the University of Kansas is known for digital communications, Wichita State University for aeronautics and Kansas State University for agricultural engineering. Compliance with university mission is monitored in many ways, with one of the more important being the approval of new academic programs. The Board has a rigorous program approval process, but it is most rigorous for doctoral programs. So, for example, the University of Kansas would likely have great difficulty receiving approval for a new degree in grain science and especially a doctoral degree. Given the Board's role in determining budgets, we also have considerable influence over legislative funding requests for new research centers and initiatives.

In addition to formal means for monitoring compliance with institutional mission, there are many informal mechanisms. In most cases, Board members are fully aware of any major campus initiatives well before they become reality. This is because no university president wants to surprise his or her Board with some bold, but unacceptable, idea and, in many cases, the president needs to enlist the support of Board members to ensure the success of the project.

*Provide institutional support.* The second broad responsibility that the Board of Regents has with respect to research is to ensure that campuses and their scientists have the resources necessary to be successful. Much of that support, of course, comes in the form of the basic state support provided to the universities. Perhaps as importantly, however, is the nature of policies the Board provides for utilizing those funds. The policy that comes to mind first in this regard is our insistence, for many years, that faculty salary increases be distributed based on merit, rather than equally distributed across the board to all faculty.

In addition to its base support, the Board can also play a role in providing more focused research support. A prime example is the Partnership for Faculty of Distinction Program enacted this year by the state legislature. This program uses state matching funds to encourage the creation of endowed professorships by private donors. While a case could be made for similar matching programs in other areas (e.g. scholarships), investing in world-class faculty holds the greatest promise for enhancing the quality of our institutions and advancing our research agendas. The Regents supported this measure, quite frankly, because Kansas is not keeping up with the competition. Many other states, including our neighboring states Missouri and Oklahoma, have long had in place programs to leverage private resources and the results have stimulated private giving and the creation of endowed and distinguished chairs.

Another program of pride for Kansans is the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation, or KTEC. KTEC is a quasi-public corporation established by the state of Kansas to promote advanced technology economic development. KTEC supports basic research through a variety of programs including five KTEC Centers of Excellence located at state universities:

- Advanced Manufacturing Institute at Kansas State University
- Center for Design, Development and Production at Pittsburg State University
- Higuchi Biosciences Center at the University of Kansas
- Information and Telecommunication Technology Center at the University of Kansas
- National Institute for Aviation Research at Wichita State University

The five Centers conduct innovative research and provide technical assistance with the overlapping aims of creating new companies,

strengthening existing companies and serving as expert resources to the communities and the state at-large. Viewed as part of a research and commercialization continuum, the Centers are investments in the early stages of the research pipeline and act as more immediate consultants and developers for modernizing manufacturing processes. Viewed from the perspective of the Board of Regents, these Centers are an excellent means of assisting the state of Kansas while enhancing the missions of our institutions.

From these two examples (Program for Faculty of Distinction and KTEC), it is clear that the role of the Board of Regents in enhancing research often takes the form of partnering with the legislature and the business community. In particular, I want to point out the key role of the legislature and the leadership of Representative Ralph Tanner, Chair of the House Education Committee and an important advocate for education and research, in creating the Partnership for Faculty of Distinction Program.

*Stay out of the way.* The third role for the Board of Regents in the research process is setting broad system-wide policies and staying away from the specific work of the academics. The very nature of the research enterprise demands freedom to experiment in the fullest sense of the word. Our faculty and scientists should, and do, have the freedom to explore and research without concern that the Board of Regents will attempt to steer or shape the direction of their efforts. As public servants, we recognize that science should be relevant to the needs of society as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our role in making that a reality is to provide an environment where the right **types** of research for our state can be undertaken, and then we must have confidence in those responsible for research, like many of you, who will find the specific answers needed to improve our future.

This is not an easy role to play, for the Board sits at the interface of two distinctly different timeframes. The public's timeframe demands a speedy solution to very real societal problems, while the scientific timeframe differs in that ideas are conceived decades or even centuries before their products become reality. As a result, the Board must act as both an advocate and cheerleader when dealing with research.

In closing, I want to emphasize that the Kansas Board of Regents is committed to the primary role that research plays at our universities and will continue to advocate for its support.