

The Dallas Morning News

Monday, June 20, 2016

Viewpoint

Funding science can boost Texas' economy

Robert Rowling and **James Huffines** share their vision of the state as 'the apex of innovation'



John Overmyer/Special Contributor

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has seen the future of Texas, and its name is research.

Speaking during a recent Southwestern Medical Foundation event, the governor offered a bold vision of research as key to improving medicine, health and the Texas economy. He said research will transform our state "into the largest aggregation of intellectual capital and the apex of innovation in the world."

That's a pretty dramatic prediction. And we give that vision our fullest support, especially here in North Texas.

One part of the plan, launched in February, is the Governor's University Research Initiative. It will provide matching grants to recruit brilliant scientists, researchers, Nobel laureates and National Academy members to Texas' public colleges and universities.

This is a forward-thinking idea because it will bring talent and innovators capable of elevating higher education in Texas and improving the rankings of our higher-education institutions.

Even more important, the initiative will build our capacity to conduct world-class research and change the future of medicine and technology, not in California or New York, but here at home. The goal is for Texas to be the prime location of future innovation.

And this is not the only lever that can drive the innovation economy of Texas. For example, the University of Texas

System has established its Science and Technology Acquisition and Retention program to recruit the best and the brightest.

The ball is already rolling in Dallas. Resources provided by the STARS program were critical to recruiting Bruce Beutler back to UT Southwestern from California shortly before he received a Nobel Prize for work he began as a member of the UT Southwestern faculty early in his career. His laboratory has since brought tens of millions of dollars in funding to Texas as he works on new potentially life-changing discoveries.

Since STARS was launched in 2004, its investment of \$178 million has yielded a return of \$1.3 billion. The initiative has resulted in thousands of scientific articles, hundreds of patents, five members of the National Academy of Sciences and a wide array of groundbreaking research.

But research and innovation need more than public funding. Private citizens help make these discoveries possible by recognizing needs, taking action and using their talents and treasure to fill important gaps in talent acquisition and early-stage research.

For example, the Hamon Center for Regenerative Science and Medicine at UT Southwestern, led by Eric Olson, is discovering new approaches to healing, including advances in stem cell biology, tissue engineering and organ fabrication, thanks to investment from the Hamon Foundation.

And just last year, Peter and Edith O'Donnell gave \$36 million to create a new brain institute at UT Southwestern and recruit Marc Diamond, one of the

world's leading researchers in the field of debilitating brain diseases. Today, Diamond's team at the Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute at UT Southwestern is unlocking the mysteries of the brain and applying these discoveries to the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's and other brain illnesses and injuries.

Public funding, artfully woven with private donations from North Texans, changes and improves the trajectory of medical history.

"These are the architects of the future of health care in our nation," Abbott said of the UT Southwestern researchers and scientists on a recent visit. "The remarkable inventions they are working on are going to lengthen the life of virtually everybody. This particular region of the entire world is going to be the location of innovation for the future, and the more we are able to capitalize on these opportunities, the more it will serve as a self-

fulfilling prophecy, attracting even more researchers to come here and establish projects."

We need to employ the most brilliant researchers and scientists at UT Southwestern and colleges and universities across Texas. We need to continue to make great advances in health and science for the benefit of people around the globe, for generations to come.

And we need your generosity and insights to keep us at the forefront.



Robert Rowling is chairman of Southwestern Medical Foundation.



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