

BREAKING NEWS

Digging suspended in Rachel Cooke missing persons case



Commentary: The real cost of defunding higher education

OPINION

By Todd Maclin and Will O'Hara - Special to the American-Statesman





Emmanuella Egbonim and Gifty Arhin take a photo of themselves before a commencement ceremony at the University of Texas last year.

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Why are nearly 160 people a day moving to Austin? Why has our state surpassed California as the No. 2 state for Fortune 500 companies? How did Texas become host to more than 200 of the 1,500 companies that have fled California since 2008? If you have the good fortune of coming to work in the heart of UT's campus like we do, the answer is staring you right in the face.

The University of Texas and the other institutions of public higher education are the engines that power the growth of our great state and churn out a strong, well-educated workforce. UT produces groundbreaking research that brings real, tangible benefits into our daily lives. This university creates the entrepreneurs of tomorrow by educating the students of today with hands-on opportunities. When Texas public research universities are nationally competitive, when they serve as hubs for innovation and technology, all Texans benefit from the employers and jobs they attract to the state.

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Are we doing everything we can this legislative session to support this engine of economic growth for the continued advancement of our state?

Public higher education is a lot like your personal 401(k). If you invest now, you will be exponentially rewarded later. When times are tough, it may be tempting to withdraw funds, but you are hurting your prospects in the long run. A college education gives students valuable new skills, critical problem-solving abilities and leadership experience, which increase their likelihood of success after graduation. But beyond just the benefits to students, public higher education means increased tax revenues and innovation for our communities. In 2013 alone, UT generated a whopping \$8.8 billion — the equivalent of more than 133,000 new jobs — to the state's economy. Over just the last two years, an additional \$1 billion — or 8,000 more jobs — were added to the Texas economy from UT's government research grants.

Unfortunately, much of the debate on higher education does not consider these big-picture benefits of tier-one research institutions like UT. Case in point: funding. When adjusting for inflation, our flagship university has experienced a more than 40-percent drop in general appropriations from the Texas Legislature over the last 30 years.

We are all experiencing a crisis of conscience for Texas. The Senate's version of the budget cuts 10 percent for UT, or \$48 million. Some of Texas' crown jewels — such as the McDonald Observatory which has one of the strongest education outreach programs to K-12 students in the state; the Bureau of Economic Geology, which directly supports the oil and gas industry in conducting their business; and the Texas Natural Science Center — are left unfunded as special items. Decreasing our investment in this critical economic driver will only create new problems for the state.

Some argue that we are already doing more than enough to fund higher education, casting public universities as squanderers — but this just isn't the case. We are all concerned about the affordability of higher education for Texas families and realize the need to continue to make steps toward greater efficiency in administrative cost. However, we cannot afford to sacrifice the quality of public college education in Texas. UT has one of the lowest rates of tuition in the state and stacks up strongly against national competitors on this front, too.

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Of course, public universities did receive an increase of \$282 million last session. But when this figure is broken out across the 38 institutions in the state — and the increased costs to operate in today's environment are factored — it doesn't come close to making up for the divestment of the past.


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We can't take the thriving economy of Texas for granted; it must be nourished and protected for future generations. If we continue divesting from public higher education, we won't be counting the number of people moving here every day; we'll be looking around and asking where everybody went.

Maclin and O'Hara are interim co-executive directors of Texas Exes.

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by Editorial Board, Special to the American-Statesman

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by David Brooks, The New York Times

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by Charles M. Blow, The New York Times

It is hard to calculate the grievousness of the wounds that James Comey's testimony will inflict on Donald Trump. On Wednesday, representatives of Comey, the consummate showman whose own flair for the dramatic rivals Trump's, requested the release of his

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by Ruben Navarrette, JR and Beth , The Washington Post

SAN DIEGO — It's now clear that James Comey is a highly capable lawyer with only one client: James Comey. The former FBI director may not need an attorney. But he could really use a public relations firm to help him rehabilitate his image. That's because, if you paid attention to Comey's testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee...

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