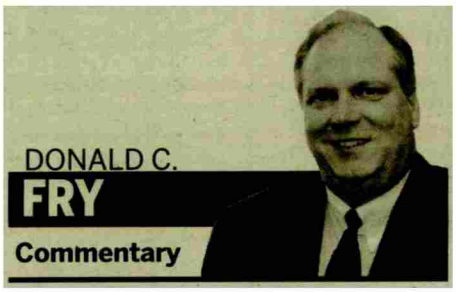
THE DAILY RECORD

Date: Friday, March 20, 2009
Location: BALTIMORE, MD
Circulation (DMA): 6,111 (24)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 17
Keyword: Greater Baltimore Committee

Md. education system is key to tomorrow's work force



There is plenty of evidence that Maryland is a state to watch as the nation's knowledge-based "new economy" takes shape and that Maryland's education institutions are playing a central role in our state's rise to prominence.

Maryland's abundance of research, high tech and education resources clearly positions it well to thrive in a business-development era that places a high value on producing a knowledgeable work force.

Gov. Martin O'Malley and economic developers regularly, and rightfully, promote our state's highly educated and skilled work force.

The California-based Milken Institute ranks Maryland second in the nation for overall technology economy preparedness and first in human capital investment.

"Today, a state or region's most important competitive advantage is the knowledge embedded in its people," the 2008 Milken report notes. "Maryland excels by virtue of its highly educated workforce," the report continues.

Last November, the Washington, D.C.-based Information Technology and Innovation Foundation came to the same basic conclusion in publishing its New Economy Index, ranking Maryland third overall and second for work force education.

Such prominence brings with it high expectations and substantial requirements for maintaining and strengthening our education and work force development systems that will, in many ways, define the parameters of our economy.

No time for complacency

It's fair to say that Maryland's leaders in business, government and education understand the serious nature of our joint responsibility to our future work force. Structured teamwork between business, government and higher education is clearly in place. But we must not be lulled into complacency by the high national rankings we have achieved and the competitive progress we have made.

Despite the recession, O'Malley is continuing his strong commitments to both K-12 and higher education funding. Amid substantial fiscal challenges, he is sticking to the K-12 Thornton funding plan.

Meanwhile, as many other states are reducing aid to higher education, Maryland has significantly strengthened its higher education funding over the last two years. This, in part, has enabled tuition to be frozen at University System of Maryland institutions for three consecutive years which, in effect, has made higher education more affordable and, therefore, more available.

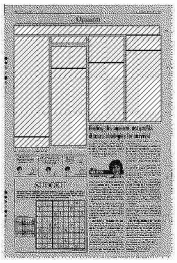
In 2007, the governor and state lawmakers created the Maryland Higher Education Investment Fund, which dedicates a revenue stream from business taxes to higher education. Businesses, recognizing the importance of a highly educated work force, supported the fund's creation.

Business leaders are working on education issues through the Greater Baltimore Committee and other business advocacy organizations and by participating on the Governor's Work force Investment Board and on the P-20 Leadership Council, whose mission is to align the state's K-12 through post-graduate education system with today's work force requirements.

Remaining challenges

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain in developing Maryland's work force for the future. Here's my own "to do list" for policy makers, business leaders, educators and students in Maryland:

• **Better teamwork between higher education and secondary education.** Currently 30 percent of students in Maryland who complete high school college prep courses need remedial math in col-



THE NEW DAILY RECORD

Date: Friday, March 20, 2009
Location: BALTIMORE, MD
Circulation (DMA): 6,111 (24)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 17
Keyword: Greater Baltimore Committee

lege, according to the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Among non-college prep students, 41 percent need remedial math. More than 15 percent of high school graduates need remedial reading courses and more than 12 percent need remedial English.

Ideally, colleges should not be in the "remedial education business." This is a serious disconnection that college educators, secondary educators, students and parents must commit to resolving.

• **Better understanding of work force requirements.** Maryland's bioscience employers say that many graduates of our state's four-year colleges generally are not ready for the jobs they enter. While this is one of the focuses of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board, and progress is being made, we need to develop a more organized, effective method of assessing curriculum and matching it to real-world work force needs.

• **More science and technology students at Maryland's colleges.** In 2008, Maryland colleges graduated 667 students with bachelor's degrees in math or physics, compared to more than 8,700 with degrees in business administration or social sciences, according to state data.

Currently, less than half as many students earn technology-related degrees as those who earn degrees in non-technology subjects.

As someone with a social science degree myself, I'm not suggesting that we don't need business and social science majors, just that we should strive for a better balance to meet Maryland's future work force requirements.

• **More math and science teachers in Maryland's secondary schools.** Lawmakers could help by finding a way to enact effective, compelling incentives to develop more highly qualified math and science teachers and to place them in Maryland's public school classrooms. More emphasis on alternative teacher certification processes would also aid in addressing this challenge.

We're on the right track, but success will not occur automatically. We must keep working hard to ensure that our work force development strategy stays fresh, well-coordinated, productive and relevant.

Donald C. Fry, president & CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee, writes a monthly column for The Daily Record. His e-mail address is donaldf@gbc.org.