

# Higher-education cuts spur New Jersey's brain drain

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Gov. Jon S. Corzine has released his budget proposals for the state and, surprise, there are budget cuts for everyone. Irresponsible government spending is a tradition in New Jersey, as are short-term fiscal fixes, pay to play, politically motivated spending, and the resulting highest taxes in the nation.

Therefore, while neighboring New York is having discussions about how to give back to its citizens a multi-billion-dollar surplus, New Jersey is working on how to distribute the cuts that are a direct result of decades of political mismanagement by both political parties. How do they get away with it? The people allow it by voting into office the same politicians, almost without exception, every election.

Are we too wealthy to worry about the waste and corruption? It seems so. We do not seem to worry too much about higher taxes; we say we do, but we really do not. We say we worry about congestion, long commutes, pollution, run-down roads, expensive public schools that do not perform well, and the list goes on. But worrying and doing are two different things. What can we do, you ask? Well, for starters, don't vote for the same people who got us into this mess in the first place.

One cannot blame the governor for trying to deal with the problem. I am sure that his budget is a starting place for negotiations with the Legislature. But I would like to note that throwing the baby out with the bathwater is not a good starting point when it comes to supporting higher education.

Of course, the reader will note that I have a stake in higher education, because of my affiliation with Rutgers University. That is true, but I am here because I think that as a faculty member I can make a significant difference not only in the lives of the students I teach but to the benefit of the community: local, state and nation. The universities are the magnets for highly productive and educated people, ones who can attract corporations and jobs that require a highly trained, educated and motivated population. Education and knowledge are to be prized for their own sakes. But the great thing is that education and knowledge are the foundations of a modern society. One cannot solve any problems or create wealth without education. Universities are the lifeblood of the economy.

So why the heavy cuts for higher education in the proposed state budget? Do we cut off a part of our body when we try to lose weight? It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But that is what we are doing by cutting state support for institutions of higher education. And this is not new; New Jersey has a dismal record of supporting its colleges and universities, whether times are good or bad. The price we pay is that many of our brightest high school graduates go to other states where education is more valued and end up contributing to their economies. The companies follow the talent.

We are one of the wealthiest states in the nation. Why do we care so little about our state university, Rutgers? Why aren't we as proud of Rutgers as Georgians are of Georgia Tech, or Californians of Berkeley and UCLA, or Texans of the University of Texas system, or Wisconsinites of the University of Wisconsin at Madison? And the list goes on.

I know that when I travel to meetings across the nation, Rutgers attracts attention and respect from people far removed from New Jersey; many do not know that Rutgers is the flagship university of the state's higher-education system. Little do they know that very few in New Jersey have ever been on the Rutgers campuses. Rarely is Rutgers a part of the life of the state. It certainly is not a priority, with proof given by the severe budget cuts proposed for the coming fiscal year.

So if anyone really cares about the prosperity of this state, they should realize that the universities, especially Rutgers, are at the forefront of creating that prosperity and are a primary reason why companies locate here. Elite universities are the kernel for growth and prosperity. I hope that the governor and the Legislature keep that in mind when they weigh their options. Do they invest in the future by supporting their state university or do they undercut the future with short-term fixes.

Are we at a tipping point of no recovery? Time will tell. The final state budget will have an important impact on whether we have decided to eat the seeds rather than plant them.

Haym Benaroya is a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at Rutgers University and directs the Center for Structures in Extreme Environments. He is a resident of East Brunswick.