Lincoln’s Far-sighted Legislation

Dear Friends,

This year, the University of California and land grant universities throughout the country celebrate a birthday of sorts: the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Morrill Act.

On Monday, UC will commemorate this sesquicentennial milestone with a half-day event to be held in Sacramento. Speakers include UC President Mark Yudof, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross, and State Senator Carol Liu. Their focus will be on the many ways in which the Morrill Act has served our state and nation.

Later, a panel will discuss the future of the Morrill Act and the role of land grant universities in the 21st century, and I will have an opportunity to share some thoughts that bridge past and present.

So what is the Morrill Act? In my mind, simply one of the most farsighted and far-reaching pieces of legislation ever passed by the U.S. Congress. Signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, the Morrill Act provided each state 30,000 acres of federal land for each member of Congress. This land, or the proceeds from its sale, was to be used toward establishing and funding a public university focused on “agriculture and the mechanic arts.”

The vision for these land-grant universities was nothing short of brilliant.

Vermont Congressman Justin Smith Morrill, who introduced the bill, never had a college education. But he had a passion for extending this opportunity to the average person. Prior to the passage of the act that bears his name, higher education was a privilege reserved for the elite.

Morrill foresaw that enabling a college education for the many, rather than the few, would provide not only a personal advantage, but also a public good. A highly educated workforce would, in turn, result in greater productivity, more rapid advancements, and a higher standard of living for all.

So, too, would a focus on agriculture and the mechanic arts – the mainstays of the economy at that time – serve to advance our nation’s early progress. By focusing research on these areas, the land grant universities came up with solutions to real-world problems. This, in turn, led to advances to help drive the economy.

From an early focus on applied research in agriculture, the mission of the land grants has expanded with emphasis on basic and applied research and creative activities in many disciplines and professions. Consequently, they address issues of transportation, health care, the environment, energy, education, arts and culture – to name a few.
The final piece of the land-grant promise was outreach: providing a mechanism to ensure that research conducted in university laboratories would make its way into the real world. Through technology transfer, extension, and other forms of community engagement, the land grant universities became agents of change.

Sound familiar? Teaching. Research. Public service. The tripartite mission of the University of California and other land grant institutions. Whether we recognize it or not, virtually every aspect of our lives has been touched by the advancements made by our land grant universities. That is why you may hear me from time to time refer to our efforts as the University for California.

Sincerely,

Tim

Tim White, Chancellor

Share your thoughts:  http://fridaylettersdev.ucr.edu/leavefeedback

Sustaining UCR
UCR has a powerful commitment to sustainability in our teaching, research and operations. You’ll be impressed with this short video that highlights several of our efforts. The narrator is one of our undergraduates, Cameron Booth.
http://youtu.be/S84JpQbmX4U

Sustaining a Community
Professor Edward Chang is one of the foremost experts on the effect of the 1992 Los Angeles riots on relationships across the entire ethnic landscape. As Southern California marks the 20th anniversary, UCR’s Young Oak Kim Center leads a consortium of partners in a Los Angeles conference on Saturday entitled: Hope out of Crisis: Lessons from Sa-I-Gu.
http://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/3789

Sustain-A-Drain
Our engineering students have come up with an award winning practical idea to keep oil out of storm drains by designing a reusable, recycled storm drain filter. Take a look.
http://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/5235

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