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## Filling in the state's education gaps

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Recent Gallup poll findings that 20 percent of Americans are either unemployed or employed part time are a sobering reminder of the challenges ahead to remain competitive in the 21st century.

Gov. Charlie Crist and state education leaders recognize that universities are key to long-term economic growth as a consequence of their pivotal role in generating the talent and innovation critical to sustain Florida's viability in the global economy. Crist's proposed 2010-2011 budget has committed \$100 million in new funding for the New Florida Initiative, a long-term investment in state universities aimed at expanding higher education's ability to transform Florida's economy.

This approach to expanding the job base in Florida is far-sighted and recognizes that our public universities can be the new driving force in Florida's prosperity. Here in South Florida, the consolidation of FIU as an anchor institution is an investment in the community's future that will pay dividends for generations to come.

It is well established that someone with a bachelor's degree can earn, on average, at least \$1 million more in his or her lifetime than someone with a high school diploma.

Those with graduate or professional degrees will earn millions more during their lifetimes. We know that companies considering relocation will look first at the quality of the workforce. FIU hires faculty on the cutting edge of their fields who in turn provide their students with a global perspective and state-of-the-art knowledge and skills to compete in a global marketplace.

The proposed New Florida Initiative will enable us to graduate more than 100,000 students in the next 10 years, surely critical to sustained recovery of our economy.

We understand that the innovation economy of the 21st century means that our students must be prepared to not just take good jobs but to create good jobs. Advanced research that is applied to improving the quality of life will be a major driver of Florida's recovery. With high quality research comes funding, in the forms of grants and venture capital.

The research enterprise itself generates employment: An estimated 19 new jobs are created for every \$1 million of research. As South Florida expands its research base, more and more jobs in our community will be driven by cutting edge research focused in the health, environmental and advanced technological applications. The quicker we can make the transition into this new arena of job creation, the quicker the state will recover.

Words are not deeds. There must be unprecedented collaboration and cooperation among educational institutions to ensure that our students come first. FIU, Miami Dade College and Miam-Dade County Public Schools have been engaged in unprecedented dialogue to ensure that our focus is on students and that we are speaking with one voice during this critical period. FIU and the University of Miami have also deepened cooperation, particularly in areas critical to our community focusing on the Latin American and Caribbean marketplace and on medical education.

High unemployment in our community is unacceptable. If we do things right in the next few years, we can restore the jobs that we have lost and ensure that they are more directly related to the high value knowledge and innovation economy that will guide this new century.

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