

The Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette, March 15, 2011 (Page 1 of 2)

## **Kennedy: Research universities key to helping state's economy**

Tue, 03/15/2011 - 7:00am | Paul Wood

URBANA – Illinois should empower research universities, not cut them back, the chairman of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees said Monday.

Chris Kennedy spoke at the Beckman Institute about the state's gloomy fiscal picture, job and company consolidation, and how universities can create jobs that in turn fund schools that in turn fill those universities.

Asked after the meeting if he had any future political aspirations, Kennedy emphatically said "No!"

The university is political enough, he added.

Kennedy, who earned his undergraduate degree in Boston, said Illinois could learn from that city.

He said Boston has seen its economic well-being rise and fall over the years, from being a sea-trade capital to America's banker to a mecca for high-tech industries.

Each time an industry has failed, Boston and its universities, notably Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have provided the graduates necessary for a new endeavour, Kennedy said.

Research universities are Illinois' "greatest renewable resource," he said.

Kennedy noted that the Urbana campus will receive more than \$200 million for one project alone, the Blue Waters supercomputer.

Northwestern brought in \$485 million in federal and other grants last years, University of Chicago \$395 million and the UI Chicago campus \$250 million, Kennedy said.

That makes universities powerful job generators, he said, contributing to a cycle where universities create jobs that create wealth that creates tax money that creates social support networks, including education, he said.

Without higher education, he said, Illinois faces a bleak future, with the state and its biggest city losing the competition in population.

Chicago was once one of the 10 biggest cities in the world, and now struggles to stay third on the American city list, he noted.

Meanwhile, the state's fiscal crisis is one of the worst in the union, and threatening to worsen, he said.

"The state is weaker than it ever has been before," Kennedy said, after noting that "what happens to Illinois will happen to the rest of the country."

The Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette, March 15, 2011 (Page 2 of 2)

Kennedy talked up his own expertise as president of the Merchandise Mart.

The main building alone was once the largest building in the world, with its own ZIP code.

It is now the largest building in the world to be awarded LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification, Kennedy said.

Another Merchandise Mart building, the Apparel Center, is the second-largest LEED-certified edifice in Chicago, he said.

Kennedy also told the audience about coming onto the board in September 2009, at the height of the Category I admission scandal. He noted that the first vote of the board he headed was to eliminate Category I.

One of the board's next efforts was to hire a president who was strong enough to resist pressure – even from its trustees.

He said Michael Hogan was the right choice for a chief executive officer to lead the UI out of its problems, "to stand up against a board that might try to interfere in the future."