

June 22, 1983

STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MINNESOTA
Elmer L. Andersen, Chair

Thank you for the invitation to share our thinking with this commission.

The 1983 higher education legislation is getting generally favorable reviews. It is worth noting that, compared with most decisions coming out of this session, these policies stand out. They reflect thoughtful analysis prior to the session; they are essentially a coherent, integrative set of emphases; and they constitute a change in direction. Students will pay more of the direct cost. Institutions, public and private, must earn more of their revenues. And financial aid is aimed more selectively as a means-tested program.

These policy directions were recommended in 1977 by the Citizens League in a report (a copy of which is attached to this statement) entitled, "Declining Enrollments in Higher Education: Let Consumers Make the Choices!" It is then not surprising to find our organization enthusiastic over this change in course.

What, then, is the next step? Why do the Legislature and the Governor need another group to make an additional study? Certainly not to produce more verbiage. And not to provide counterpoint to the HECB.

No, the need is twofold: 1) To rethink the fundamental nature of the investment the people of Minnesota have in the systems of post-secondary education; and 2) to suggest the next strategic steps for legislative policy.

You should take at least a snapshot look at the current inventory of educational opportunities. What kind of picture is it? Does it fit the demands of students and the needs of the emerging economy? What adjustments are in order in balancing the historic tension between these factors? How much exporting of trained persons is acceptable public policy for the state, and in what cases should we consciously import the trained person as an alternative to producing the training here? In the mix of institutions, their locations, and their viability, what public intervention makes sense? (Should the state lease out, or sell, say, one of the public institutions; should it buy out one of the private colleges?) And what should lawmakers do specifically as next steps. Some questions before us are not likely to go away and will inevitably see some legislative action. Examples:

- *How to insure an adaptive system of training for jobs.
- *Whether to distinguish, by price or program, first training for young people from re-training for mature adults.
- *What to do with excess institutional capacity.
- *What to do about the still rising percentage of students certified by Minnesota as graduates who are substantially unready for the first college courses.
- *How to insure, even with limited resources, the educational opportunity for every Minnesota citizen.
- *How to hold and build quality as institutional size and public funding patterns change.

This commission, though, cannot do everything. It's effectiveness probably depends upon shrewd selection of a deliberately narrow focus. Our suggestion: working with the assumption that we must build quality in each institution the public is supporting, HOW MANY INSTITUTIONS, OF WHAT TYPE AND LOCATION, ARE WE GOING TO NEED? Perhaps the Commission cannot produce a definitive answer here, but it could advise the Legislature on what mechanism to use to make these decisions.

We urge you to remember why commissions are established: to shape policy changes that must move through political barriers. If you fail to take on the toughest questions, the Legislature will be let down and the public trust will go unfulfilled. We wish you well and stand ready to help in any way we can.