

SREB

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EDUCATION
AND PROGRESS
IN THE SOUTH

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

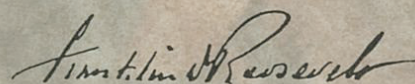
July 1938

No purpose is closer to my heart at this moment than to obtain a statement – or perhaps I should say restatement, as of today – of the economic conditions of the South, a picture of the South in relation to the rest of the country, in order that we may do something about it – in order that we may not only carry forward the work that has been begun toward the rehabilitation of the South, but that the program of such work may be expanded in the directions that this new presentation shall indicate.

My intimate interest in all that concerns the South is, I believe, known to all of you, but this interest is far more than a sentimental attachment born of a considerable residence in your section and of close personal friendship for so many of your people. It proceeds even more from my feeling of responsibility toward the whole Nation.

It is my conviction that the South presents right now the Nation's No. 1 economic problem – the Nation's problem, not merely the South's. For we have an economic unbalance in the Nation as a whole, due to this very condition of the South. It is an unbalance that can and must be righted, for the sake of the South and of the Nation.

Without going into the long history of how this situation came to be – the long and ironic history of the despoiling of this truly American section of the country's population – suffice it for the immediate purpose to get a clear perspective of the task that is presented to us. There are questions of taxation, of education, of housing and of health.



*Portrait of President Franklin D. Roosevelt
painted by Frank O. Salisbury, 1935*

1938

“THE SOUTH

PRESENTS

RIGHT NOW

THE NATION'S

No. 1

ECONOMIC

PROBLEM.”

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT



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SREB

50th Anniversary

June 1998

Governor
Paul Patton

Chairman

The report of President Franklin Roosevelt's National Emergency Council in 1938 was a tale of social blight, educational deficiencies, health problems and transportation difficulties – in short, a tale of poverty. The report disclosed a "third world" country within our borders. And President Roosevelt was right: Progress begins with the recognition of the problem, and 60 years ago the South was the nation's No. 1 economic problem.

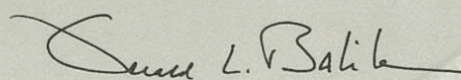
What about today? Problems remain, to be sure, but I believe that President Roosevelt would marvel at the progress, strength, dynamism and vitality the South possesses today. Certainly, he would concur that, on the 50th anniversary of the Southern Regional Education Board, it is appropriate to reflect on the remarkable progress of the South, to assess how far we have yet to travel and to recommit ourselves to focused, long-term educational investments and improvements.

Today people are moving to the South in record numbers. This dynamic growth means that early in the next century half of the nation's metropolitan areas with more than 250,000 people will be in the SREB states. More than half of America's job growth in the 1990s has been in the SREB region, as has been nearly half of the nation's growth in college enrollment. The South is a new U.S. banking center. The SREB states are leaders of education reforms.

The absence of attention to racial issues in the 1938 report of the National Emergency Council is notable. There are in the SREB states today continuing challenges of racial inequities, along with poverty, health, education, transportation and environmental issues. But there is an optimism in the South, an uncommon aptitude for facing problems and working together to solve them, and an economic engine that will permit these challenges to be faced, fought and conquered.

Today, the South is a place of remarkable progress and momentum. It will continue to be if we recognize that our infrastructure now is as much intellectual as it is physical and that our progress and momentum depend upon a continuing commitment to sustained investment in the "new infrastructure" of education, transportation, communications and information technologies.

There is no better goal for Southern leaders today than that of the SREB's Commission for Educational Quality: "We want to make clear the connection between education and economic growth, between education and sound progress, between education and a responsible citizenry, and between education and the future."



Commission for Educational Quality
Gerald L. Baliles, Chairman and former Governor of Virginia

1998

**“THE SOUTH
IS A PLACE OF
REMARKABLE
PROGRESS AND
MOMENTUM.”**

SREB COMMISSION
FOR EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

SIXTY YEARS AGO, THE SOUTH WAS AMERICA'S NO. 1 ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM.

This is how the National Emergency Council described the South in 1938 to President Franklin Roosevelt and the nation.

The paradox of the South was that while it was blessed by nature with immense wealth, its people as a whole were the poorest in the country. The population problems of the South were the most pressing of any America faced.

Many thousands of the South's families were living in poverty comparable to that of the poorest peasants in Europe. The low-income belt of the South was a belt of sickness, misery and unnecessary death.

1938: THE SOUTH'S POPULATION PROBLEMS CONTRIBUTED TO ITS EDUCATION PROBLEMS, STARTING A VICIOUS CYCLE.

The fact that the South was the source of a considerable part of the rest of the nation's population made the South's difficulties in providing school facilities a national problem.

In the United States as a whole it was more possible than ever before to supply training for children and young people. In the South,

however, owing to the higher birth rate and to the migration of adult workers, there were 10 adults to six children, compared with 10 adults to four children in the North and West. In the rural regions of the South, particularly, there was a marked disparity between the number of children to be educated and the means for educating them. This disparity in the educational load bore heavily on the South.

The South's excess of births over deaths was 10 per thousand, compared with the national average of seven per thousand, and the South already had the most thickly populated rural area in the United States. The largely rural states of the South

supported nearly one-third of their population in school, while the industrial states supported less than one-fourth. There were fewer productive adult workers and more dependents per capita than in other sections of the country.

Moreover, in their search for jobs, the productive middle-age groups left the South in the greatest numbers, tending to make the South a land of the very old and the very young. Migration took from the South many of its

1938
IN THE SOUTH

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1938
IN THE SOUTH

*The poorest state
outside the South
was richer than
the wealthiest
Southern state.*

ablest people. Nearly half of the eminent scientists born in the South were now living elsewhere. The export of population reflected the failure of the South to provide adequate opportunities for its people.

1938: THE SOUTH'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CONTRIBUTED TO ITS EDUCATION PROBLEMS, ACCELERATING THE VICIOUS CYCLE.

The richest state in the South ranked lower in per-capita income than the poorest state outside the region. The average income in the South was 52 percent of that in the rest of the country. The average annual wage in industry was only 71 percent of that outside the region. By the most conservative estimates one-half of all families in the South should have been rehoused.

Since the South's people lived so close to the poverty line, its many local political subdivisions had great difficulty in providing the schools and other public services necessary in any civilized community.

The assessed value of taxable property in the South averaged only 34 percent as much as the Northeastern states. In other words, the Northeastern states had three times as much property value per person to support their schools and other institutions. Consequently, the South was not able to bring its schools and many other public services up to national standards, even though it taxed the available wealth as heavily as any other section.

The state and local governments of the South collected only 56 percent as much per person as the state

and local governments of the nation as a whole collected. Although the South had 28 percent of the country's population, its federal income-tax collections were less than 12 percent of the national total.

Low industrial wages for men in the South frequently forced upon their children as well as their wives a large part of the burden of family support. The South led the nation in the employment of children in both farm and industrial work. One hundred eight out of every 1,000 children between 10 and 15 years old were employed in the South, compared with 47 out of every 1,000 children of these ages in the country as a whole.

Employment of children affected school attendance. If consideration was given to the number of days of school attendance, the disparity appeared much greater; the school term generally was shorter in the South than in other sections. The upper age for compulsory school attendance throughout the rest of the country was generally 16 to 18. However, two Southern states required attendance only to 14, one to 15, and only in two states did the upper age extend above 16 years. All permitted exemptions that materially lessened their effectiveness.

Low wages and poverty were in great measure self-perpetuating. Its people had been living so close to poverty

1938
IN THE SOUTH

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that the South found it almost impossible to scrape together enough capital to develop its natural resources for the benefit of its own citizens. A glance at the bank

1 9 3 8
IN THE SOUTH

The assessed value of taxable property in the South averaged only 34% as much as the Northeastern states.

reports showed how difficult it was for the Southern people, whose average income was the lowest in the nation, to build up savings of their own. Although the region contained 28 percent of the country's population, its banks held less than 11 percent of the nation's bank deposits. Savings deposits were less than 6 percent of the national total.

The presence of malaria, which infected annually more than 2 million people, was estimated to reduce industrial output of the South by one-third. The health-protection facilities of the South were limited. For example, there were only one-third as many doctors per capita in South Carolina as there were in California. The South was deficient in hospitals and clinics, as well as in health workers.

1938: THE SOUTH'S INABILITY TO ADEQUATELY SUPPORT EDUCATION SEALED THE VICIOUS CYCLE.

Since adequate schools and other means of public education are indispensable to the successful functioning of a democratic nation, the country as a whole was concerned with the South's difficulty in meeting its problem of education. Illiteracy was higher in the Southern states than in any other region. The South had to educate one-third of the nation's children with one-sixth of the nation's school revenues.

Although Southern teachers compared favorably with teachers elsewhere, the average annual salary of teachers in not one of the Southern states was equal to the average of the nation. In few places in the nation, on the other hand, was the number of pupils per teacher higher than in the South. Overcrowding of schools, particularly in rural areas, lowered the standards of education, and the short school terms of Southern rural

1 9 3 8
IN THE SOUTH

The Southern states spent about one-half of the national average per child in school.

schools further reduced their effectiveness. In the South only 16 percent of the children enrolled in school were in high school, compared with 24 percent in states outside the South.

Higher education in the South lagged far behind the rest of the nation. The total endowments of the colleges and universities of the South were less than the combined endowments of Harvard and Yale. Meager facilities existed in the South for research that might lead to the development of new industries especially adapted

to the South's resources. As for medical schools, the South did not have the facilities to educate sufficient doctors for its own needs.

But the poor educational status of the South was not a result of lack of effort to support schools. All Southern states fell below the national average in tax resources per child, although they devoted a larger share of their tax income to schools. The Southern states spent about one-half the average for the country per child in school.

That was the South 60 years ago.

The National Emergency Council, advised by

a group of 22 noted Southern leaders,

pulled few punches in its stark portrayal

of a South that constituted a

“national emergency.”

Today, the South is a place of remarkable progress and momentum.

1998
IN THE SOUTH

NEARLY
ONE-HALF OF
THE NATION'S
POPULATION
GROWTH IS IN
THE SOUTH.

The South's progress over the last 60 years is nothing short of remarkable. The South today is a leader in educational improvement and economic growth fueling America's 21st-century economy. Today the South is a dynamic region with momentum and a history of achievement in the last half of the 20th century. The South's momentum and dynamic progress, of which education is a crucial part, are vital to America's continued progress and global competitiveness in the 21st century.

The South is not without problems. There are continuing challenges of racial inequities, poverty, health, education, transportation and the environment. But there is an optimism in the South, an uncommon aptitude for teamwork and an economic engine that will permit these challenges to be faced, fought and conquered.

1998: | *The South's population mirrors the nation's.*

The South is now home to more than 92 million Americans, constituting 35 percent of the nation's population — up from 31 percent when the National Emergency Council report was written. Like the South

of 60 years ago, today's South grows more rapidly than the nation as a whole. But unlike 60 years ago, when the reason for growth was the excess of births over deaths, today the South grows more rapidly because large numbers of people are moving to Southern states. Nearly one-half of the nation's population growth is in the South.

One of the most striking differences between the South of today and the South of 60 years ago is the difference in the way Americans move from region to region. Then, there was a great exodus from the South. Today, people are moving to the South in record numbers. The Northeast and the Midwest now both have more people moving out than moving in. The West, like the South, gains more than it loses. But the South has more than twice the net gain of the West — a population boost that soon may reach 500,000 a year.

The development of the cities of the South is a remarkable story in itself. If current trends continue, early in the next century half of the metropolitan areas in the United States with more than 250,000 people will be in the South.

Urban and business success stories abound across the South:

- Atlanta is home to one of the nation's busiest airports, which welcomed the world to the Centennial Olympic Games; Cable News Network, which reaches around the world 24 hours each day; and Coca-Cola, now the world's most recognized trademark.
- Mission Control in Houston is the central nervous system of the nation's space exploration, which gave rise to the name and exemplified the spirit that built America's first covered stadium, the Astrodome.
- Commercial successes have been built around the Grand Ole Opry music industry in Nashville.
- Entrepreneurship and creativity transformed the Inner Harbor in Baltimore, the Riverwalk in San Antonio and the Riverfront in New Orleans.
- At the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, two growing cities are connected via one of America's largest airports.
- Charlotte is one of America's largest banking centers.
- Miami is the nation's gateway to Central and South America.
- The Memphis Federal Express hub and the United Parcel Service hub in Louisville daily move nearly all of the nation's parcels.
- The Research Triangle Park in North Carolina remains the nation's premier example of the university-business research synergy that it pioneered four decades ago.
- Florida is the nation's No. 1 vacation destination and America's gateway to outer space.
- American retailing was transformed by Wal-Mart in the Arkansas Ozarks.
- Virginia's railroad giants, Norfolk Southern and CSX, stretch throughout the South, the Midwest and now the Northeast.
- In the mountains of West Virginia, Software Valley stretches along I-79 and businesses are commercializing technologies.
- WorldCom headquarters is in Mississippi.
- Some of the world's largest crude-oil refineries are in Texas and Louisiana.
- The Oklahoma plains are home to aerospace centers, the National Weather Service and Federal Aviation Administration training.
- The South has vibrant ports ringing its coastline — Baltimore, Norfolk, Charleston, Savannah, Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, Mobile, New Orleans, Port of South Louisiana, Houston, Texas City and Corpus Christi.
- One of America's most international stretches of highway, the I-85 international business corridor, extends through Spartanburg and Greenville, S.C.
- There are new world-class automobile-manufacturing facilities in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Because of the remarkable growth in the metropolitan centers of the South and the vitality of Southern businesses, there are more jobs and more productive adults. Today, like the nation, the South has

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**PER-CAPITA
PERSONAL
INCOME IN THE
SOUTH IS NOW
92% OF THE
U.S. AVERAGE.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**MORE THAN
ONE-HALF OF
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GROWTH IN THE
1990S HAS
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SOUTH.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**STATE AND LOCAL
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REVENUES PER
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APPROACH 90%
OF THE U.S.
AVERAGE.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**TWO OF
THE TOP FIVE
MANUFACTURING-
GROWTH STATES
ARE IN THE
SOUTH.**

three adults for every dependent under 18 years old. The national and the Southern age distributions are nearly identical. And, of most relevance to education, schoolchildren make up about 17 percent of the population in both the South and the nation as a whole.

And, even more important, the amount of education typical of Southerners today approaches national levels. More than 79 percent of Southern adults have high school diplomas and more than 21 percent have college degrees. This compares much more favorably with the national rates of 82 percent and 24 percent than in the days of the National Emergency Council, when only 19 percent of Southerners had a high school education and only 4 percent had college degrees.

In the National Emergency Council days, Southerners faced more than their share of health problems, in part because they had much less than their share of physicians, nurses, hospitals and university medical centers. The number of physicians for every 100,000 people in the South may reach the national average early in the next century; it was only 33 percent of the national average in the late 1930s. In terms of the number of nurses, the South now exceeds 93 percent of the U.S. average.

Health-science research centers no longer have to be concerned with malaria in the South, but today the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and Tulane University in New Orleans work to

stop the suffering that malaria still causes around the world. Other Southern university health-science centers have become world leaders in fighting disease.

*1998: The South's economy is
"a locomotive powering the
American economy."*

The annual per-capita personal income in the South now stands at 92 percent of the U.S. average. More than half of the United States' job growth in the 1990s has been in the South. Two of the top five manufacturing-growth states are in the South. These trends and other signs of economic vitality prompted The Economist to assert that the South is "a locomotive powering the American economy."

Now, the South accounts for a representative share (more than 30 percent) of the nation's gross domestic product. The assessed value of taxable property in the South now stands at 95 percent of the national and Northeastern averages, compared with only 34 percent 60 years ago. State and local government revenues per person now approach 90 percent of the national average.

Another sign of the economic progress is that today 28 percent of the nation's bank deposits are in the South, compared with the 11 percent reported by the National Emergency Council.

However, prosperity has not penetrated to every corner of the South. For example, there is a band

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**THE GRADUATION
RATES OF
AFRICAN-
AMERICAN AND
HISPANIC YOUTHS
ARE TOO LOW.**

of more than 600 counties across the midsection of the South with 35 percent of the nation's poor and 90 percent of the poor, rural African-Americans. Close to one-fifth of U.S. unemployment and more than half of all Southern unemployment is in these counties. In these counties and in the South's inner cities and rural Appalachia, there are enduring concentrations of poverty, joblessness, inadequate housing, low educational attainment, poor health, high infant mortality and social welfare dependence.

The absence of attention to racial inequities in the report of the National Emergency Council is notable. And it is in such inequities that the continuing challenge for a dynamic, prosperous South can be seen most starkly. The fact that the high school graduation rates and college attendance and graduation rates of African-American and Hispanic youths in the South are too low remains a cause for concern.

Forty percent of all Americans who do not have a high school diploma are in the South — about twice as many as in any other region. And more than half of all Southerners without high school diplomas are concentrated in the South's midsection, in its inner cities and in rural Appalachia. Frank Porter Graham,

University of North Carolina president and chairman of the Southern advisory group to the National Emergency Council, long ago proclaimed, "In the South two great races have fundamentally a common destiny in building a nobler civilization, and, if we go up, we go up together."

Unemployment, underemployment and poverty clearly remain, but it is equally clear that there are more dollars, resources and will in the South today to tackle these problems.

When it comes to the South's contributions to the federal coffers, there has been a dramatic change. Sixty years ago the South contributed only 12 percent of federal tax revenues. Today the South contributes 30 percent of federal income taxes collected. In the 1930s, the states and local governments collected about half as much per person as was typical nationally. Today, state and local tax revenues per person in the South approach 90 percent of the national average.

When Franklin Roosevelt was president, half of the South's population lived in substandard housing. The typical Southerner today is more likely to live in a newer house and is more likely to own that house than is typical of citizens nationwide.

1998
IN THE SOUTH

THE STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO IN THE SOUTH IS LOWER THAN THE U.S. AVERAGE.

1998
IN THE SOUTH

THE PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS IN THE SOUTH WHO HAVE ATTENDED COLLEGE IS HIGHER THAN THE PERCENTAGE WHO COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL IN 1938.

1998: The South's schools and colleges lead in educational improvements.

What is possibly most remarkable about education today in the South is not just the tremendous progress in moving schools and colleges toward national measures of excellence but also that the SREB states are leaders of education reforms.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the South was a national leader in the development of two-year college systems to expand opportunities for education beyond high school. Today nearly half of the nation's college students begin at two-year colleges. They take college transfer courses, receive job training and pursue lifelong learning for personal enrichment and job advancement or retraining.

Again in the 1980s, the South was a leader in emphasizing statewide goals and in developing coordinated statewide plans for colleges and universities, in strengthening the course requirements for graduation from high school and in reporting information on educational performance to the public school-by-school and college-by-college.

It was Southern states that began producing state-by-state results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress to give state leaders the most current national average information on student achievement results that are comparable across states. Now, all SREB states and more than 40 states nation-

wide participate. The latest mathematics results showed that North Carolina and Texas had the largest score gains of any states.

Today the percentage of adults in the South who have attended college is higher than the percentage who completed high school when the National Emergency Council reported 60 years ago.

The percentage of adults in the South who have completed a four-year college degree is now higher than the percentage who spent any time at all in college in the 1930s. Unlike 60 years ago, when fewer Southern children attended school than was typical nationally, today Southern children 5 to 17 years old attend public school at rates above the national average.

Financial resources in the South to educate children and adults also are catching up with the nation. In the National Emergency Council days, the South had to educate 33 percent of the nation's children with 17 percent of the nation's school revenues. Today, spending for elementary and secondary school students in the South averages 82 percent of the national average. Public colleges' and universities' per-student spending is closer to the national average.

In contrast to the days when teacher salaries in the SREB states lagged far behind the national average and teachers performed their work in schools where the number of students per teacher was among the highest in the country, teacher salaries in the South today stand at 86 percent of the U.S. average. Now,

the student-teacher ratio in the South is lower than the national average. Faculty salaries at public four-year colleges in the South stand at 93 percent of the national average.

Today, like 60 years ago, the Southern states spend a larger share of their tax dollars for education — about one percentage point more of tax dollars in Southern states goes for elementary-secondary education and for higher education than is the case nationwide. But these shares have been falling as competition for state tax dollars has intensified.

No longer can it be said that higher education in the South “lags far behind the rest of the nation.” Nationally, about 59 percent of high school graduates enter college within a year after completing high school. The college-going rate in three Southern states exceeds the U.S. average. Two other Southern states exceed 55 percent. And in nine of the 10 remaining Southern states the college-going rate exceeds 50 percent. Nearly half of the nation’s total increase in college enrollment was in the South over the last 10 years.

Focused, long-term commitment to educational improvement has been a Southern hallmark. Early SREB initiatives in interstate cooperation — such as the Regional Contract Program, the Academic Common Market and the Council on Collegiate Education for Nursing — are prime examples. Through these programs, opportunities for people to be educated in specialized

subjects not readily available in every state were expanded and scarce resources preserved.

This tradition continues today through the SREB’s new *Southern Regional Electronic Campus*. Students can take courses at scores of Southern colleges and universities without leaving their hometowns by shopping for courses in this electronic marketplace. The *Southern Regional Electronic Campus* will have more than 1,000 courses, more than two dozen full degree programs at the associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s levels, and more than 150 participating colleges and universities.

The SREB *High Schools That Work* initiative over the past 10 years has become the nation’s largest and fastest-growing effort to combine challenging academic courses and modern vocational studies to raise the achievement of high school students. More than 700 high school sites in 22 states actively participate in the *High Schools That Work* program.

While various “rankings” of individual colleges and universities have generated controversy, the number of Southern colleges and universities that consistently show up in these rankings does say something about how far the region has progressed. In the most recent U.S. News and World Report rankings of national universities, 24 percent of the top 117 were in Southern states, and 35 percent of the next 112 were Southern.

Compared with the days when there were inadequate medical schools in the South (20), today

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**NEARLY HALF
OF U.S. GROWTH
IN COLLEGE
ENROLLMENT IN
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THE SOUTH.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**THERE ARE
45 SOUTHERN
MEDICAL
SCHOOLS THAT
GRADUATE MORE
THAN 29% OF
U.S. PHYSICIANS.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**ONE-FOURTH
OF THE 100
COLLEGES AND
UNIVERSITIES IN
THE U.S. WITH
THE GREATEST
ENDOWMENTS ARE
IN THE SOUTH.**

1998
IN THE SOUTH

**29 OF THE TOP
100 UNIVERSITIES
IN FEDERAL
RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT
FUNDS ARE IN
THE SOUTH.**

there are 45 medical schools in the Southern states that graduate more than 5,000 physicians a year — more than 29 percent of the nation's medical school graduates.

And long gone are the days when all of the college endowments in the South added together did not equal those of Harvard and Yale combined. Today, the University of Texas System endowment exceeds that of Yale and is second only to Harvard. One-fourth of the 100 colleges and universities in the nation with the greatest endowments are in the South. A growing number of Southern universities are adding hundreds of millions of dollars to their endowments in successful fund-raising campaigns, and the University of Virginia is in the final phases of a \$1 billion campaign.

As to the South's meager facilities for research the National Emergency Council spoke of, today 29 of the top 100 universities in the nation receiving federal research and development funds are in the South. That is about \$3.3 billion a year for research conducted at universities in the South, whose facilities are often world-class. Close to one-fourth of domestic patents today go to Southerners.

The South's progress in research capacity was noted by former Florida University System Chancellor Charles Reed, who said that perhaps the single biggest accomplishment during his tenure in Florida was the

National Science Foundation's decision to move the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to Florida under the direction of Florida State University and the University of Florida. As Chancellor Reed observed, no one in President Roosevelt's day could have foreseen this kind of milestone for higher education in the South.

So, where are we in 1998? Americans are moving to the SREB states in record numbers. The amount of education typical of Southerners approaches national levels. University health-science centers in the SREB states have become national and world centers in fighting disease. More than half of America's job growth in the 1990s has been in Southern states. The South is a new U.S. banking center. The dynamic metropolitan growth means that early in the next century half of all of the metropolitan areas with more than 250,000 people will be in the South. The SREB states are leaders of education reforms. Nearly half of the nation's growth in college enrollment was at Southern colleges and universities in the past decade.

None of this is to say that the South is without problems and continuing challenges. But Southerners' optimism, coupled with an uncommon aptitude for facing problems and working together to solve them, bode well for ongoing progress.

*“This is today’s South.
Sixty years after being
the nation’s No. 1
economic problem,
the South is a place
of remarkable progress
and momentum.”*

How did the South come so far and how does it continue the remarkable progress?

It was with great insight that President Roosevelt's council noted that its findings were not a cause for pessimism because "the citizens of the South do not hesitate to face the facts. This would seem to assure that something will be done about it." Indeed, Southerners and the nation as a whole faced the facts and did something about them — setting a new course for the South and the nation.

In his 1998 state-of-the-state address, Georgia Governor Zell Miller reflected: "I was just a little older than my great-grandson Jacob when the president of the United States stood on the steps of the United States Capitol, looked south and said, 'I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad and ill-nourished.' That was the South I grew up in. But it is not the South my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will grow up in."

The progress of the South over the past 60 years is remarkable. President Roosevelt perhaps could not even imagine that some of those who heard his words about the South in 1938 would see the day when, as *The Economist* observed, the South would be a "locomotive powering the American economy."

One of the means, if not the chief means, by which the SREB states have come such a long way, and one of the means by which the South maintains its current momentum, is through focused, long-term investments — especially investments in improving schools and colleges. Yes, roads, railroads, waterways, airports, seaports, electrical power plants and communications systems are critical. But even more important have been the dogged investments in the South's human potential

— what the National Emergency Council termed one of the "two most important economic endowments: its people."

More than three decades ago, the Southern Regional Education Board said that "if excellence means anything at all, the South must be measured against the same criteria that are applied everywhere." In recent decades the SREB has pressed states to dedicate themselves to reaching national achievement benchmarks and goals for schools and colleges; to change public higher education to meet the demands of the emerging 21st-century economy; and to provide colleges and universities the support they need.

We all know the old Southern proverb: "If you feel you're green, you'll ripen. If you think you're ripe, you'll rot." A recognition of achievement is no time to merely celebrate. It is a time to push on to new accomplishments.

The continued vitality and progress of the South are not guaranteed. There remain formidable challenges that may thwart our aspirations. One of the reasons we are optimistic about facing our challenges is that there really is something special about the South, besides its world-renowned Southern hospitality. There is an uncommon sense of being Southern and working together to solve problems. For five decades the Southern Regional Education Board states have shared resources, ideas and lessons learned to improve education and the quality of life. The 50th anniversary of the SREB in 1998 is a perfect opportunity to reflect on our progress, to assess how far we have yet to travel and to recommit ourselves to focused, long-term educational improvement.

1998
IN THE SOUTH

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