national average. Per capita income is also up—to 83 percent of the national average. Up is the right direction, but we have to acknowledge that we’ve been losing some of our most valuable human resources and reverse that loss.

Regional infrastructure and competitive labor have worked to Alabama’s great advantage in attracting and growing new and existing industries. Examples include aerospace, science and technology, automotive, and logistics industries. Our research universities and network of 2- and 4-year regional colleges and trade schools have played major roles in growing existing and attracting new industries to our state.

However, wage and unemployment rates in our metros are now paradoxically signaling that skilled human capital is in increasingly short supply. If workers are needed, why then are skilled professionals leaving our state in relatively large numbers? For the reason of low expectations. Parents, school officials, government executives, and employers have got to convey in a united front that Alabama’s pastures are as green as anybody’s.

By not being willing to invest in our youth, we lower expectations for future economic growth and opportunity. Lowered state university funding, less-than-needed spending on high school facilities and programs, and higher-than-desired dropout rates combine to weaken our capacity to educate tomorrow’s workforce. There is nothing that will pay more dividends to Alabama’s economic well-being than the investments made in education resources.

A well-educated workforce, beginning with qualified high school graduates, greatly increases the likelihood of continuing to attract new industries that demand highly skilled workers, pay high wages, and create high value-added products. Equally important is increasing the number of graduates who choose to stay in—or come to—Alabama after they complete their education. These investments create a labor pool that will keep Alabama in the site locators’ playbook.

Business and government throughout Alabama understand the challenge. We intend to become a destination state for the creative class, not a supplier state. Time will judge how well we handle the test.

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The center you know...
75 years of research and service

The Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) turns 75 this year. Since its organization by the School of Business at The University of Alabama in November 1930, CBER has focused on collecting, analyzing, and disseminating socioeconomic and demographic data. While the Center’s mission still involves these activities, the fulfillment methods have certainly changed. We have gone from typewriters, carbon paper, and adding machines to personal computers, electronic data bases, and web-based products.

The Center established a web site in early 1995. Our site, cber.cba.ua.edu, now averages around 80,000 hits a month. The site contains news and announcements as well as articles that present and interpret socioeconomic data. To more efficiently handle information requests, we have posted our most requested data series. From the Data and Maps section, users can read, print, or download current and historical data on Alabama’s population, employment, and income, as well as view maps of various geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic constructs. Users can also register to receive notification when the site has been updated. The site was honored by the national Association for University Business and Economic Research (AUBER) as the “web site of the year for 2003.”

In addition to posting data to our web site, the Center has developed a web-based program, Alabama FactFinder, to make the state’s census information available in such a way that people who have not had special training in obtaining and using statistical information can easily find and use it.

The Center’s quarterly publication, Alabama Business (which has been ongoing since 1930), is available online in .pdf format in addition to its traditional printed version. In 2000 the Center formed a partnership with Compass Bank that led to the development of the quarterly online Alabama Business Leaders Confidence Index® survey. The survey results are published as an insert in Alabama Business.

The Center’s data resources are enhanced by its participation as Alabama’s lead agency in the U.S. Bureau of the Census State Data Center Program, a role it has filled since 1978, and in the Federal-State Cooperative for Population Estimates and Projections. CBER is also a member of the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis’ State User Group.

In the late 1970s, the Center developed an econometric model for Alabama and in 1980 published its first Alabama Economic Outlook, a publication that continues to date. The Outlook, which contains short-term forecasts of output and employment in Alabama, has been honored by AUBER on three occasions. Forecasts are updated quarterly and a summary is published in Alabama Business and placed on our web site. In 1989 the forecasting program expanded to include an annual economic outlook conference. The 2005 conference was the largest to date with 178 participants. In addition to our conference, the Compass on Business partnership provides for four additional seminars around the state.

Over the years we have developed skills in a number of areas. We have focused on conducting economic impact studies, identifying socioeconomic characteristics of an area, analyzing and forecasting the course of the Alabama economy, and developing specialized population projections.

We have a diverse and dedicated staff and we are proud of our accomplishments. My own journey with the Center began in January 1977. I have gone from using keypunched cards, to magnetic tape and dedicated mainframe terminals, to personal computers and web-based services. What’s next? While I’m sure there will be more changes, I am also sure we will do our best to provide you with quality products and service.

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