We’re All In This Together

As another legislative session gets underway, Aggies and Longhorns rise above their rivalry to seek a brighter future for Texas.

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I always smile when I pass a home where one of those half-maroon, half-orange flags is displayed. “A House Divided,” the flag reads. I keep smiling as I consider that despite what goes on in living rooms across Texas each fall as the year’s gridiron bragging rights are determined, our two universities are a “house divided” only on the playing field.
Aggies and Longhorns arrive at the Capitol for Orange & Maroon Legislative Day in February 2007.
At all other times—and especially when we go before the Texas Legislature every two years—Texas A&M and the University of Texas are a house united. After all, our universities were established for one reason: to improve the lives of people in Texas and beyond through teaching, research and service.

As the state’s two flagship universities, Texas A&M and UT have much in common. UT President Bill Powers and I have met several times to discuss how we can leverage our shared purpose of educating the next generation of leaders and promoting economic growth in Texas. We and many others will meet at the Capitol on orange-Maroon legislative day March 3 to help our state policymakers understand the importance of increasing funding for higher education.

There is no doubt that public higher education has a profound influence on our state. For our two universities alone, the state appropriates about $700 million annually ($372 million for UT and $327 million for Texas A&M). And when all Texas universities are taken into account, higher education generates more than $25 billion in economic activity for the state each year.

This investment is impressive, and we have always been grateful for it. But now is the time to significantly increase it for the benefit of our citizens. Texas is at a crossroads, and our future as a leader in technology and as an economic engine will be determined in large part during the upcoming Legislative session.

Both Texas A&M and UT are poised to move to the next level of prestige and excellence at a time when our state’s budget surplus makes this possible.

For Texas to remain economically prosperous, it must provide consistent funding so that its flagship universities remain leaders in science and engineering.
Legislative Day, we will ask the Legislature to enhance their investment in higher education through support of our two universities. As Texas A&M's part in this effort, we need to enhance our research capabilities in specific areas where our expertise can be matched with the needs of the nation, such as achieving energy independence and cancer prevention. To accomplish this, we will ask the Legislature to double the amount appropriated in the Competitive Knowledge Fund to $190 million. The resulting addition of at least $40 million in allocations to Texas A&M through this fund would enable us to recruit and hire established “superstar” researchers from all over the country in order to carry out the type of work that can improve the lives of virtually every Texan.

As the number of faculty and students at Texas A&M continues to set new records, we will need to focus on our physical infrastructure. To support this growth, we will request a Tuition Revenue Bond of $95 million to begin a Facilities Renewal process, which is expected to span several Legislative Sessions. We will use this funding to begin the process of bringing our 500-plus structures up to the latest standards of safety and efficiency and to make them more conducive to learning and discovery.

We will also work with the Legislature to support new and innovative initiatives to retain top graduate students here in Texas and recruit additional undergraduate students from underrepresented groups.

Frankly, the great State of Texas simply cannot afford to fall further behind. For this reason, Texas A&M and UT are behind the effort to elevate one or more public universities in Texas to “tier one” status, as long as appropriations for our two existing flagship universities are expanded.

The future of Texas depends on higher education, and we all have a stake in it. If you are interested in helping us on Orange-Maroon Day, go to www.orange-maroon.org. In the meantime, Gig ‘Em, Aggies! 🏈