

Affirmative Opportunity in Nebraska

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We are the presidents of two distinctly different universities, both of which have rich traditions in and deep commitments to Nebraska. Both institutions are committed to extending opportunities for higher education to qualified students—regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or national origin. We believe this is essential not only for the success of our universities, but for our state. Nebraska’s future will depend on our ability to attract and retain talented individuals who will work, raise families and contribute to our communities. We must start at home, by ensuring educational access for all Nebraskans and we must be open to attracting and developing the talents and gifts of all people.

Nebraska has always been a place of promise, openness and opportunity. But we believe Nebraska’s ability to continue providing the opportunity necessary to succeed in the future may be threatened by a petition drive being conducted in the state. While the supporters promote the goal of “ending preferential treatment,” which may at first blush sound appealing, we are convinced that the so-called anti-affirmative action initiative would actually have the effect of limiting opportunity for our citizens and the attractiveness and competitiveness of our state.

Nebraska’s population is changing significantly. The African American, Native American, Asian and Latino populations are all growing, and our elementary, middle and high schools reflect that change. Five years ago, the school population in Nebraska was about 10 percent racial and ethnic minority. In 10 years, it will be 30 percent minority. The question is not whether Nebraska will change, but how well we will manage the challenges and opportunities that accompany that change.

It is unfortunate that some of our colleges and universities are changing more slowly, because that reveals a disturbing fact—minority students have much higher high school dropout rates and much lower college-going rates than other students. The consequences of that phenomenon will be significant—indeed, devastating—and will continue unless we do everything in our power to change the patterns of educational attainment and college going.

Our goal is to increase the college going rate to benefit the state. One important way that both our universities do this is through programs that encourage college participation for underrepresented populations. It is likely that many of these programs would be prohibited if the so-called anti-affirmative action constitutional amendment is adopted in Nebraska. In fact, while supporters call the measure “anti-affirmative action,” we urge Nebraskans to consider whether it is really “anti-opportunity.” The playing field is still not level, extreme pockets of poverty and inequality exist and special outreach programs are needed to help close the gap. The proposed amendment seeks to exclude and divide and it will limit opportunity and access to those who need it most. These programs do not displace qualified students, but rather encourage participation. And unlike some public institutions in California, where seats in the freshman class are limited, Nebraska’s public colleges and universities will make a place for every qualified Nebraska high school graduate.

The petition drive – which originated in California and is almost entirely funded from outside Nebraska – seeks to change our state’s Constitution. We believe that those who take the time to understand its real purpose and impact will recognize that it does not represent the values of Nebraskans.

The amendment would take control away from Nebraskans to operate their institutions in the most successful manner possible. Being a private institution with a 17 % enrollment of minority and international students, Creighton would not be directly affected by the amendment; however, we believe all institutions in our state would be affected directly or indirectly. We should continue to be known for our commitment to providing access, fair treatment and opportunity to all people. In addition, there are major educational benefits to our campuses in having a diverse faculty, staff and student body, not only in creating a rich educational experience, but in preparing our students for work in a global environment and in educating our state’s future teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs and political leaders.

We ask Nebraskans to become educated on this issue. We hope you will share our view that we have an obligation to promote access to higher education and ensure the economic future of our state.