

Rice-Baylor merger would help Houston and Texas

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Last week, voters in Texas recognized the state's need for more top-level research universities when they passed Proposition 4. Tier 1 universities play a crucial role by performing the bulk of the nation's scientific research - work that drives economic growth and is crucial to solving major challenges in energy, health care and information technology. Today, Texas has only three Tier 1 universities and lags far behind California, with nine, and New York, with seven. Passage of Proposition 4 addresses this serious gap by making funds available to help up to seven more Texas universities achieve Tier 1 status, a long-term investment that will take a considerable amount of effort and time in addition to resources.

However, Texas lags in another important dimension of higher education. Not one of the state's Tier 1 institutions combines a comprehensive university with a medical school on the same campus. The geographic and administrative separation of its comprehensive universities and medical schools has put the state at a serious competitive disadvantage in biomedical research.

Why? Because continued progress in biomedical research is increasingly tied to the ability to collaborate across disciplines. Translating scientific discoveries from the lab bench to the patient's bedside occurs most effectively when universities can integrate and support interdisciplinary research in medicine and the physical and life sciences. To ensure future economic competitiveness and the health of future generations of Texans, we must not only develop more comprehensive Tier 1 universities, but we must ensure that a significant number of them include medical schools on the same campus.

The proposed merger of Rice University and Baylor College of Medicine could immediately address this shortcoming by combining one of the nation's top-ranked medical schools with one of the state's Tier 1 universities, both opportunely located near each other in the Texas Medical Center.

A Rice-Baylor merger would bring together expertise in areas at the forefront of biomedical research, including bioengineering, neurobiology, nano-biotechnology, stem cell biology and gene therapy.

Translational research in these areas will lead to the next generation of diagnostic and therapeutic tools in health care. New interdisciplinary degree programs will train the next generation of leaders in biomedical science. Placing these research and educational efforts in the context of Baylor's expertise in clinical medicine and Rice's expertise in public policy will shape the future of domestic and international health policy as we cope with global challenges to ensure that quality, affordable health care is available to all.

The potential return on this merger is great. States that built strong Tier 1 universities with medical schools compete more effectively for federal funding in biomedical research. Of California's nine Tier 1 universities, five have collocated medical schools. Five of the seven Tier 1 universities in New York have collocated medical schools. The investment has translated into

increased funding from the National Institutes of Health: In 2009, California institutions received \$3.9 billion and New York institutions received \$2.3 billion, while Texas institutions received only \$1.3 billion.

Moreover, investments in basic research often lead to significant commercial growth in the biotech sector. In 2007, there were 140 biotech public companies in California with a market capitalization of \$230 billion and annual research and development investments of \$13 billion. New York had 28 biotech companies with a market capitalization of \$12 billion and \$3.6 billion annual R&D investment. In comparison, Texas' 13 biotech companies had market capitalization of only \$1.5 billion and R&D investments of \$233 million.

A merger between Rice and Baylor would, in short order, strengthen both institutions, help Texas attract more federal biomedical research dollars, generate economic development in Houston and improve the overall competitiveness of our city and state. We support efforts to provide Texas with the first of more Tier 1 institutions that have strength in science, engineering - and medicine.

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