The challenges facing our nation this new decade are mighty, complex and dispersed. Moreover, we face these challenges with increasingly limited resources.

What is our future? Not rosy, according to pundit forecasters. Some refer to the recently departed 20th century as the “American century,” implying that the American successes of the past cannot be sustained in a global marketplace with rising political power of other nations and an ever increasing world population.

Others point to American job loss and consider the impact of advanced technologies and the internationalization of business on American industry.

Rosy future or not, one thing is clear. Change will come. What’s needed is change that can address the broad spectrum issues facing our country — fundamental change that will affect both individuals and the nation for the good.

Only one resource in American society is large enough — with enough significant impact, vigor and perseverance — to drive this epic change. It is the power of education, as verified by history.

In the late 19th century, an educational movement — compulsory education for all American children — fueled the industrial revolution by creating an educated work force for the new factories, mills, foundries and plants that transformed American agrarian society, leading to greater prosperity. In the 20th century, the rise of the American research university fueled the postindustrial society with new discoveries and a work force with broad knowledge for rewarding professional-level careers.

The time is right for investment in public education to fuel the future economic and social development of our country.

Like the complex issues facing our country today, this new education solution needs to be multifaceted, long range and creative. Some suggestions include:

- Prepare students earlier and better for demanding 21st-century careers with education, beginning with prekindergarten classes.
- Recognize that merely the willingness to work hard will not support a family well in the 21st century without at least a high school diploma.
- In a post-postindustrial society, plan for career preparation beyond high school to become more important for individual success and the future of the nation.
- Provide continuing education through adulthood for citizenship, healthy living into the senior years, and protection of the environment, which will save scarce resources in the long run.
Nurture not only a source of national pride but a valuable economic resource by supporting the American university system that has long been recognized as the world’s most comprehensive.

Underwrite advancement in university research, including consortiums among universities within Kansas and across the nation, to leverage new knowledge for science, new industries and community advancement to stimulate longterm economic growth.

The problems facing our nation today are really big ones. As we create an agenda to prioritize and deal with them, let us, as a nation, take a long view and allocate the resources we have not only to solve immediate issues but also to protect and foster the mighty educational capital we currently possess to lay the foundation for our nation’s future growth and prosperity.

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