

# CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Connection: New England's Journal of Higher Education and Economic Development* is published quarterly by the New England Board of Higher Education, 45 Temple Place, Boston, Mass. 02111.

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Vol. VI, No. 1 Spring 1991

ISSN 0071-3643

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**Subscription Information:** \$16 per year (4 issues);

WI, SP, SU issues \$2.50 each, Fall/Facts issue \$12.

Printed by Wellesley Press, Framingham, Mass.

Advertising rates available upon request.

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## EDITOR'S MEMO

With this issue, CONNECTION begins its sixth year exploring links between higher education and New England's economy, recounting the successes of shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration among the region's educators, business leaders and policy-makers — and prodding them to do more.

The "Thinking Environment" section of this issue tells a story of collaboration if ever there were one. It seems a growing number of New England companies are proving you can turn a pigsty into a silk purse. These "envirotech" companies are thriving in this corner of the United States for two reasons: New England's tough environmental regulations demand innovation. And the region's unparalleled concentration of colleges and universities provides it.

The rise of this environmental technology is good news for the recession-wracked New England economy and the sickly planet. But it should not inspire overconfidence about the condition of either, nor diminish the work left to do.

Richard Barringer, director of the University of Southern Maine's Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Affairs notes: "Science and engineering and technology are not the whole answer to [environmental] problems. There are whole sets of policymaking and management considerations that have to be addressed at the same time."

On all fronts — science, policymaking and management — the tasks are considerable. For starters, today's students are choosing to pursue science and engineering fields in ever-decreasing numbers. Who can blame them? Prestige and money are lacking. And to further complicate matters, the American public tends to take its advice on environmental issues from well-known entertainers, whether scientists agree or not.

As for policy leadership, the environment — like education — gets plenty of attention during elections, but short shrift when budget battles begin. The filth of Boston Harbor helped elect President Bush. But when the Persian Gulf War threatened U.S. oil supplies, what was the White House response? Look for oil in Alaska's fragile Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Meanwhile, recent reports indicate that Vice President Dan Quayle, in his capacity as chairman of the Council on Competitiveness, is leading an effort to water down last year's stringent clean air legislation. The "New World Order" — made popular while oil fires in Kuwait threatened global climate change and the United States stood alone with its go-slow approach on global warming — apparently does not include a major new environmental commitment.

Many businesses, on the other hand, are indeed cleaning up their act. They had better. In one national poll, 30 percent of consumers said they had boycotted a company because of its environmental record. And the prospect of passing on to consumers the cost of environmental cleanup is dimming as prosecutors seek prison terms, rather than fines, for the worst polluters. Still, few businesses are engaged in environmental efforts that go beyond the mandates of federal and state regulations. And the overall message to consumers remains mixed as illustrated by Exxon's latest jingle: "Turn the key ... Feel free."

To be sure, business innovation will be pushed to a new level as society moves beyond "end of the pipe" pollution-control strategies and emphasizes pollution *prevention*. Creating clean production processes to avoid pollution from the start will require wholesale changes in the way companies work — and increase the need for partnership among business, government and higher education.

CONNECTION in its five years of publication has served as the place where New England higher education comes together with business and government to build an agenda. We are grateful to the distinguished environmental scholars, entrepreneurs, public officeholders and authors who have used the pages of this issue to offer perspectives on the environmental issues facing the region. If we don't address these issues, there won't be any agenda. □

*John O. Harney is editor of CONNECTION.*