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**EDUCATION**

## URI looks to aggressively grow 'knowledge economy'

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COURTESY R.I. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**THE URI COMMISSION for Research and Innovation, led by Robert G. Flanders, is making several recommendations to improve the university and increase its power to generate economic growth.**

PROVIDENCE – The University of Rhode Island Commission for Research and Innovation this morning unveiled a set of recommendations designed to make URI a more competitive research school in order to help boost the local economy.

Those recommendations include a \$100 million bond issue that would enable URI to recruit 20 to 30 world-class faculty members.

The panel's report and recommendations were presented this morning – at the quarterly meeting of the R.I. Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC) – by retired R.I. Supreme Court Justice Robert G. Flanders Jr., who chairs both the URI innovation panel and the R.I. Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education.

The Commission for Research and Innovation, a nine-member panel created through legislation in 2006 and made up of academics and business people ([READ MORE](#)), concluded in its 37-page study report that URI lags far behind similar schools in the amount of annual research and development expenditures.

State officials and business leaders have said that the university should be playing a key role in transforming the state from a manufacturing-based economy to one that is "knowledge based."

One commission member said that studies indicate that, on average, 36 jobs are created for every \$1 million of research and development expenditures.

"The commission unanimously agrees that to emerge as a nationally competitive research university, URI must expeditiously make progress on many fronts and that incremental changes will not be sufficient to drive this transformation," Flanders said in a statement released this morning ahead of the STAC meeting.

The URI Commission presented STAC with three major recommendations:

- Attract a new president with demonstrated experience in building university-based research capacity, and who is capable of leading a transformative change effort at URI. Current President Robert Carothers recently announced that he will be stepping down in June.
- Create a sustainable financial model for URI that provides university leadership and the Board of Governors of Higher Education with the flexibility to make necessary investments in building research capacity.
- Jump start URI's research capacity with a \$100 million public investment

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through a bond initiative to capitalize the attraction of 20 to 30 world-class research faculty members, and to provide state matching funds to catalyze federal research grant procurement efforts.

"We need to help URI fulfill its potential as an economic engine for Rhode Island," said URI Commission member Saul Kaplan, the executive director of the R.I. Economic Development Corporation (EDC). "Not only do strong research universities stimulate growth through tech transfer and commercialization activity, they provide access to higher education – an increasingly important aspect of producing workers ready for 21st-century jobs."

*The R.I. Science and Technology Advisory Council, or STAC, was created in 2005 to help turn Rhode Island into a regional hub for the life sciences, information technology and other research-based industries. For more information – including the full report of the University of Rhode Island Commission for Innovation and Research – visit [www.stac.ri.gov](http://www.stac.ri.gov).*

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