

# EDITORIAL *A Conversation With the President*



On March 28, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning named Robert H. "Doc" Foglesong as Mississippi State University's 18th president. He assumed his duties at MSU April 16.

President Foglesong served 33 years in the U.S. Air Force before retiring earlier this year. His most recent assignment was commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe.

A West Virginia native, he earned a doctorate and master's and bachelor's degrees in chemical engineering at West Virginia University. He and his wife, Mary, have two grown sons.

Soon after arriving at MSU, President Foglesong began visiting classrooms, laboratories and other facilities on campus, including those in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine. He also announced a bottom-up strategic review of the university.

The following are excerpts from an April 28 interview about his observations during his first two weeks on the job.

## *On the agricultural programs:*

I've said that I want to do a bottom-up strategic review to assess our strengths, capabilities and emerging capabilities. I did come with some prejudices, and one is what I heard many years ago about the strength of the agricultural programs here. My view hasn't changed any and maybe has even strengthened since I've come here....Clearly, we are providing great services to the state of Mississippi. Whether you're talking about our veterinary medicine programs, research support for virtually all agricultural activities or the youth programs and other educational activities of the MSU Extension Service, this university has its fingerprints all over the state, which is an aspect of a land grant school. A question we do need to ask ourselves is "do we have this sized right?"

## *On how the strategic review will be used:*

I anticipate the strategic review will identify areas where we have emerging capabilities and where we can take a leadership role. There will be areas with gaps and where we can improve. Those will require resources, and they will have to compete with other areas. At the end of the day, we will let everyone put their case for resources forward, and we'll make decisions based on what is best for the state of Mississippi and best for the United States of America. If an area competes favorably it will get the resources it needs; if it competes less favorably, it will have to wait.

## *On encouraging investment in the university:*

The measure of a nation's greatness has a direct relationship to its willingness to invest in the education of the young men and women who will one day lead that nation. Fortunately for the United States, we have made that decision and agreed to invest in our youth and educate them so they will be the next great generation. You have to find those people, corporations and agencies that are willing to support you and convince them

first you are going to put resources to work educating the people of the state of Mississippi or into research that will benefit the state and nation. Investors in the university also have to have confidence in what we are providing, so we have to hire faculty with national reputations and young people who can become national leaders in research and teaching. Give them a fair salary and provide them with the opportunity to do research and to teach.

## *On student recruiting:*

We have a character we should be very proud of. Other schools have their character, but if you want to be an expert in the agricultural field or forestry, you want to come here. If you want to be a great engineer, we have an incredible engineering school. Our character may have to constantly change somewhat to meet the demands of the workforce and develop those capabilities necessary for society, but for the most part we have our own character, and I believe it is very attractive to a lot of young men and women.

To attract those students, however, is not a passive activity. It must be done with enthusiasm. You recruit both the individual coming to school and their parents. If mom and dad feel good about their son or daughter and feel someone will pay personal attention to them, worry about their safety, their moral well-being, and of course see to the thing that they send them here to do, which is develop a skill to join the workforce, then they are more likely to support their son or daughter coming to this institution.

You also have to capture the individual and make them feel like if they come here they will be treated in a respectful way as a young adult. So you recruit at both those levels, and you retain at both those levels as well. Not only do you retain the student, you have to work to retain the mother and the father by remaining true to your word.