

Places of Public Purpose

Michael T. Benson, president of Eastern Kentucky University, and Hal R. Boyd, then a J.D. candidate at Yale Law School, wrote an article for the Summer 2015 issue of *Thought and Action*, the journal of the National Education Association, titled, “The Public University: Recalling Higher Education’s Democratic Purpose.” Their article centers around three figures—George Washington, Justin Morrill and Harry Truman—and their visions “for higher education and democratic engagement.” Benson and Boyd write, “The university...is a sanctuary of citizenship where young and old come to expand their skills, broaden their horizons, and prepare themselves for the rigors of 21st century citizenship.”

This issue of *Public Purpose* features an article on AASCU’s American Democracy Project (ADP)—which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year—a program that has, at its very core, the “sanctuary of citizenship.” I do not believe that those of us who were at AASCU at its inception could have imagined how critical the program has become in the 21st century.

Two commentaries related to the public purpose of public higher education follow the ADP article. The first is by Robert Caret, chancellor of the University System of Maryland. It is an excerpted version of the keynote address he presented at the American Academic Leadership Institute luncheon at the 2017 Annual Meeting. At the conclusion of his address he said, “Education, particularly public higher education, is a vital part of—and has a significant responsibility to—the republic. We must make it part of our mission to educate men and women who will keep it. The fact that so many aspects of our civic life have become dysfunctional makes this effort all the more important and imperative.” The other commentary is by Constantine W. (Deno) Curris, a former university president and president of AASCU from 1999-2009. He focuses on AASCU campuses as places of public purpose, the erosion of that commitment, and what should change.

We regularly seek contributions from our members for *Public Purpose*. I want to call your attention to pieces by three AASCU leaders who have contributed to this issue: Montclair State University (N.J.) President Susan A. Cole, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Chancellor James C. Schmidt, and West Texas A&M University President Walter V. Wendler.

Beginning on page 20, you can read an excerpt from President Cole’s President-to-Presidents lecture delivered at the 2017 Annual Meeting (the entire speech is available on the AASCU website). During the course of my career I have heard—and read—many speeches by university leaders about what it means to be a public university president. Susan Cole’s is one of the most powerful.

Collaborations among AASCU institutions, businesses and communities are increasingly important for many campuses. They enable universities to undertake projects the institutions could not manage independently. Chancellor Schmidt offers key lessons his campus learned about communicating “with complex collaborations” in the development of the community’s Confluence Arts Center.

EndSights focuses on regional universities. President Wendler urges regional universities to embrace their mission and lists six ways “responsive regional university leaders must step up.”

We welcome member contributions to the magazine, as well as your suggestions regarding editorial topics and features. We look forward to hearing from you.

S.M.C.

