

Legislative UPDATE

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Current News About Legislative Issues Affecting The University of Alabama System

Historic Announcement In Montgomery Unites Education And Challenges Candidates

An Important Message To The UAS Community From Chancellor Tom Meredith

Dear Colleagues:

Last Wednesday, October 17, in Montgomery, representatives from all segments of education in Alabama held a press conference that can only be described as monumental. I want to give you a firsthand report on the event and its implications for the future of Alabama.

First, some background: AEA Executive Director Paul Hubbert and I have been talking since last May about making a strong and unified statement directed to **all** candidates for state office in the 2002 elections. After another contentious and unproductive Legislative battle over scarce dollars, we knew it was the right time to take an unprecedented stand, to end “business as usual” in Montgomery! Joining Dr. Hubbert and me at the podium for the press conference last week were State Superintendent of Education Dr. Ed Richardson; Troy State University Chancellor Dr. Jack Hawkins representing the Higher Education Partnership; and Southern Union Community College President Dr. Roy Johnson representing the two-year schools.

MESSAGE: SUPPORT TAX REFORM IF YOU WANT OUR VOTE

Our message to candidates was clear: **“If you want our support, take a strong stand for tax reform now.”** Any candidate who says “no new taxes” or who opposes tax reform will not have the support of any segment of public education in the State of Alabama.

Standing shoulder to shoulder, Drs. Hawkins, Hubbert, Johnson, Richardson and I pointed out that public education in Alabama is doing its part to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. Now it is time for elected officials to do the same. Candidates for public office who want our vote must first demonstrate their commitment to a tax structure that will adequately support the public education system in Alabama from pre-school to graduate school. We will accept no less.

THE FACTS ABOUT TAXES

As we reminded our audience last Wednesday, state taxes to fund public education in Alabama have not been increased in 30 years. The current tax base is inadequate to sustain basic education services, which means paying for program improvement and growth is simply out of the question.

If Alabama had the same tax structure as Mississippi, we would generate \$500 million additional dollars annually. If we adopted Georgia’s tax structure, Alabama would produce \$2.5 billion in additional dollars every year to improve education and public service programs.

CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Another key component of our message was a call for accountability in funding public education for the citizens of Alabama. **That means spending education tax dollars only for education purposes.** It also means establishing a fair, stable and productive tax structure that will give adequate funding for ALL levels of public education in our state.

From pre-K to Ph.D., Alabama's public schools have reached new levels of accountability. We have raised academic standards and established rigorous measures to ensure financial and academic accountability. We are doing our part. Now it is time for elected leaders to do the same!

We ask the Governor to appoint a commission that will recommend long-term permanent solutions for the education-funding crisis.

We call on members of the Legislature and the Governor to come together NOW to solve the immediate funding crisis for education.

A NEW ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION

A powerful new coalition came together last Wednesday in Montgomery. The group is united in its message, dedicated to the goal of moving Alabama forward, and resolute about keeping candidates on notice: The support of the education community could determine who wins next year—and we will be watching your position on tax reform closely!

I hope this semester has been your best ever. Good luck as you now head into the home stretch toward the holidays.



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