

Legislative UPDATE

Vol. 4 No. 20

Summer 2001

July 6, 2001

Current News About Legislative Issues Affecting The University of Alabama System

SUPREME COURT AFFIRMS HIGHER ED'S POSITION IN PRORATION CASE

Fairness and equality: from day one, that has been our request of the Alabama Legislature, the Siegelman Administration and, ultimately, the Alabama Supreme Court in all matters related to education funding. In their June 29th decision regarding the proration lawsuit, the Court affirmed Higher Education's argument that all segments of public education must be treated equally. We are gratified by the Court's decisive action, which upheld Higher Education's interpretation and holds proration budget cuts to 6.2%, across the board, for the current fiscal year.

The UA System Office of Counsel and others throughout the University community deserve a huge vote of thanks for their tireless efforts to achieve a fair and equitable solution to the funding crisis that is affecting all segments of public education in Alabama. In presentations before the Court on June 20, the Universities reiterated their arguments that neither the Alabama Constitution nor state laws place K-12 in a more favored position than Higher Ed. The K-12 plaintiffs, who initiated the lawsuit, argued unsuccessfully that Constitutional provisions exalt K-12 to a more protected plane and that two state statutes preclude the Governor from prorating K-12 salaries.

Symptomatic of confusion surrounding the case, Trustees at The University of West Alabama, who initially voted to withdraw support for the Higher Ed position in the proration lawsuit, overturned that position in a meeting June 18. On June 4 the UWA Board had passed a motion introduced by Trustee (and Siegelman chief of staff) Paul Hamrick condemning the Universities' position as "segregationist." But then, in their meeting two weeks later, the group readdressed the issue and passed a new motion stating: "The Universities' position in this case has nothing to do with segregation... We are not relying on any provision in Amendment 111 relating to segregation." The statement said Higher Ed is relying on the Amendment's provision that there is not special status afforded K-12 over Higher Education; "That is exactly what the Alabama Supreme Court has said, just as the United States Supreme Court has ruled in interpreting the United States Constitution."

2000-2001 CURRENT YEAR BUDGET

As you recall, the Legislature provided for a bond issue as a result of the Supreme Court's decision, regardless of which side won. The bond money may only be used for capital projects and is intended to be of assistance on this year's budget. Information regarding distribution of the bond issue should be known soon and we will keep you informed of those developments.

UA SYSTEM TRUSTEES APPROVE TUITION INCREASES

UA System Trustees approved campus recommendations for tuition and fee increases that will take effect with the Fall 2001 academic year. Hearing reports from campus budget officers and presidents about the impact of proration and bleak forecasts for next year, the Board approved a 9.2% increase at UA, 7.7% at UAH and 8.2% for UAB (all based on in-state undergraduate rates).

Tuition and fees will be increased to help cover the projected \$11 million shortfall in UA System budgets for 2001-2002; unfortunately, the outcome of the proration lawsuit will not have any impact on the budget deficit we face in the coming fiscal year. The Alabama Legislature reduced our appropriation by 3-4% for 2001-2002

in an effort to deal with the anticipated shortfall in the Education Trust Fund. The prognosis for increased revenue next year has not improved.

While UA System campuses managed to hold tuition increases to single digits, at least five other public universities (Montevallo, Athens State, South Alabama, Jacksonville State and Alabama State) will experience increases of 10% or more for the fall.

MEREDITH TO CHAIR COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS

Chancellor Tom Meredith has been elected to a two-year term as chairman of the Council of College and University Presidents. He succeeds Troy State University Jack Hawkins. The Council of Presidents is comprised of the heads of Alabama's public senior universities and the Postsecondary Institutions Office and serves as an advocacy and communications body to advance issues related to Higher Education in Alabama.

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