

Legislative UPDATE

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Current News About Legislative Issues Affecting The University of Alabama System

Governor's Budget Released Today Higher Ed Day Set For Next Thursday

The 2003 Session of the Alabama Legislature opened Tuesday with Governor Bob Riley's first State of the State address. The Governor painted a grim financial picture, warning of draconian budget reductions if Alabama continues "business as usual." He called on State agencies, including public education, to eliminate all waste from budgets and to implement cost-cutting efficiencies wherever possible. He said he will not consider tax increases until these streamlining measures are accomplished.

Today the Governor submitted his FY2003-04 budget, which includes a 6.34% cut for The University of Alabama System. The proposed budget also includes an increase in funds which the campuses are mandated to pay into the Teachers' Retirement System.

House Education Finance and Appropriations Committee Chair Richard Lindsey said the initial budget released today will probably change dramatically during the session. He indicated he doesn't expect his committee to consider the budget for at least a month.

Accountability and reform are the mantra in Montgomery. We are faced with two options (or some combination of the two) in dealing with this budget crisis:

- Option 1: to implement cost-saving measures that will free up existing dollars for reallocation to high-priority areas such as faculty and staff salaries; and implement new accountability measures to show the Governor, the Legislature and the public they are getting full value for every dollar invested in higher education.
- Option 2: to champion revenue-positive tax reform that will create a fair and equitable tax system that generates new funds for all of state government -- including higher education. The Governor has made it very clear he will not support Option 2 until we have implemented Option 1 fully.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

It will take the efforts of all education supporters to get behind Governor Riley, the Legislature and their reform efforts. The first major action you can take is to come to Montgomery for Higher Education Day, Thursday, March 13. This rally is crucial to show our elected officials there is true grassroots support across the state for higher education. Details about next week's event in Montgomery are available on all three campuses. If you need a ride to Montgomery, transportation will be provided from campus locations. For details or to sign up for bus transportation from your campus call 348-4767 in Tuscaloosa, 934-9354 in Birmingham or 824-6084 in Huntsville.

The University of Alabama System needs you in Montgomery on Thursday. Your participation in 2003 is more important than ever before. PLEASE be here and express your support for your university.

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