

April 26, 2001

Name  
Organization  
Address  
City, State

Dear Name:

Mississippi needs your personal participation on a project vital to the future of our State.

I am very pleased to announce that the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has chosen Mississippi as the first state for a State Leadership Summit on Higher Education. Over the past several months, staff from AGB have visited Mississippi, held meetings, and had conversations with individuals and groups to assess support and interest in such a summit that would develop a “public agenda” for higher education. They have talked with me and my staff, with members of the legislature, and with members of the business and higher education communities. The AGB staff concluded that Mississippi and its opinion leaders are ready, able, and eager to develop a future orientated public agenda for higher education that meets the needs of Mississippi and its citizens.

The leadership summit and the process leading up to it will bring together leaders of state government, the business community, and higher education, as well as other civic leaders on a neutral common ground for a candid and goal-oriented dialogue about the future of our State. The purpose is to outline what all of higher education (public and private and two-year and four-year institutions) can and should do to advance the competitiveness of our State and to improve the quality of life of our citizens.

To guide and oversee the leadership summit process, I am asking a number of notable Mississippians to volunteer their time and effort by serving on a Steering Committee for the project. The Committee will meet three or four times over nine months. I will co-chair this Committee along with Aubrey Patterson, CEO of BancorpSouth, and we need your contribution as a member.

AGB’s Center for Public Higher Education Trusteeship and Governance, with the assistance of the Rockefeller Institute of Government, will provide the staffing for the Steering Committee. They will facilitate the process, provide analysis and gather any necessary data to inform our deliberations, and prepare us for a concluding 2-day summit

meeting in December. At that concluding summit, a larger group of state opinion leaders will convene with the Steering Committee to review and endorse the product of the Steering Committee's work: a Public Agenda for Higher Education in Mississippi. The Public Agenda will be widely disseminated after the summit.

The public agenda will be determined for Mississippians by Mississippians. We are not starting with a blank slate. Several commissions, reports, and projects have already suggested ways that higher education could respond to the particular needs of our State and its regions. We can build on these good beginnings.

The Steering Committee will have its initial meeting on Thursday, May 31, from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. in University Center Room 4-1 at the Educational and Research Center located at 3825 Ridgewood Road in Jackson. Our tight timeline for the project means that we must receive your swift response to my invitation. Please return the enclosed acceptance form to Kelly Riley of my staff by Friday, May 4.

Please join with us in this vital endeavor. The success of our State in the era of knowledge and information will depend on the graduates, research and services from our colleges and universities. I know we can count you!

Very truly yours,

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RM:klr

Encl.