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From: Carolyn Bahm <cbahm@olemiss.edu>
Subject: Adequate Budget for Higher Education

Dear Governor, Lt. Governor, and Legislators,

I am writing to you as a private citizen, NOT as an authorized representative of the state agency that employs me.

Mississippi's budget for higher education is apparently not adequate for its needs, given that staff members here at the University of Mississippi typically make low salaries and many are facing yet another year without raises -- not even to keep abreast of cost-of-living increases. Some staff members have been making only \$13,000 to \$17,500 per year, and this is for capable and dedicated full-timers, some of whom hold college degrees. That is unreasonable, and it causes high staff turnover, extra expenses in advertising to fill those low-paying jobs, and decreased operating efficiency as the most experienced employees move away into higher-paying jobs elsewhere.

I am asking you for both a short-term solution AND an awareness campaign for a long-term solution.

Personally, my salary as a University of Mississippi staff member is lower than I would like, but it's adequate (although I'm as eager as the next person for a raise). But I wanted to bring this important issue to your attention.

I am requesting that you tap into the state's very large rainy-day fund of \$275-\$300 million for a short-term solution, since it's already a rainy day for people on the lower end of the economic scale.

AND ...

We need to face the facts. We need long-term solutions for higher education's needs. How long is Mississippi going to go on trying to spread itself so thin with so many major universities in a low-population state?

In my opinion, our long-term solution to a stretched-thin budget (in an increasingly expensive world) should have three components:

- 1- fewer major universities in Mississippi, to reduce duplication of costs in duplication of administration, facilities, etc. for the remaining schools. We really only need one or two major universities and the community college system to take care of our population's needs. People will fight this ferociously, but high schools in rural Mississippi have realized this and consolidated over the years so they can provide better services to their students. Higher education should do the same, although I fear it will never happen. (Is it possible that we could even LOWER taxes while improving educational quality if we consolidate universities and reduce expenses?)

PLEASE CONSIDER IF YOU CAN BEGIN A CAMPAIGN TO ACCOMPLISH AWARENESS OF THIS NEED FOR CONSOLIDATION OF UNIVERSITIES. If the people get behind this idea, legislators won't fear to vote for what they MUST already know that we need.

At the very least, I wanted to let you know that I would support such a move for having just ONE publicly funded Mississippi university -- and I'd suggest we build a new one rather than the nightmare of trying to pick one of those we already have.

On a related item: FYI, the idea of the University of Southern Mississippi's expansion on the Gulf Coast absolutely infuriates me because the LAST thing we need is MORE university campuses and staffs to support on a slim budget!

2- larger budgets. If this state has a demonstrated commitment to excellence at the grade-school level, it should show the same dedication to higher education. Our universities need more money, and our budgets need expansion! This need is not only in the area of salaries, but also in the area of building maintenance, new technology, and other operating expenses.

3- increased emphasis on private fund-raising. Ole Miss already does a fabulous job at this, and our public relations director recently suggested that we turn toward raising funds to supplement staff salaries. (Wouldn't it be nice to have some endowed staff "chairs" or at least an endowment that would guarantee some cost-of-living raises for every staff member -- the ones most likely to be overlooked at budget time.) This, of course, is not something the state should handle, but it should be part of the solution.

And as for the state's funds, I agree with many others who say that a rainy day fund is wonderful, but some people are already in need of assistance. Just at Ole Miss, some departments are losing valuable staff positions when budgets don't allow for those salaries or they are losing people who go to higher-paying jobs at other universities; other departments (such as mine) are holding salaries flat AGAIN this year. Also, most departments are not able to expand their operations for improved and modernized service to the students -- who are your future taxpayers and current voting public.

I am requesting that you pay even closer attention than you have done previously to the crying need for more higher education funding in Mississippi. This lack not only holds back Mississippi's economic and educational development, it hurts families -- real people. Your constituents.

Thanks for listening to my comments.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Gaddy Bahm
Staff member at The University of Mississippi

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