

PRESS RELEASE

Higher Education Partnership

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On Thursday, April 5, 2007, the Higher Education Partnership, representing the advocacy voice of the students, faculty, staff, alumni and other university supporters, hosted the annual Higher Education Day Rally in Montgomery at the Alabama State House. The event, attended by 2000+ students, faculty, alumni and staff, is the capitol city's largest annual advocacy rally. The rally featured rousing enthusiasm from the diverse audience representing all 13 public universities. The message centered around a call for equitable funding.

Plus, today was a day to celebrate the Higher Education Partnership's 10th anniversary as the advocacy organization for the public universities. Partnership Chairman Jim Bennett received the birthday recognition from the STARS Committee.

Governor Bob Riley, Lieutenant Governor Jim Folsom, Speaker Seth Hammett. Senate Pro Tempore Hinton Mitchem, Representative Richard Lindsey and Senator Hank Sanders spoke to the crowd. Each of them illustrated their belief in the state's public universities. Dr. Gordon Moulton of the University of South Alabama gave a university welcome. Ms. Ashley Hays of the University of Alabama represented the Student Teams Advocating Realistic Solutions (STARS Committee) and spoke on the benefits of engaging of all of the students in advocacy. The students had the benefit of presenting science materials for the Akron High School in Hale County. As a result of the BlackBelt Initiative of the Partnership, Alabama's students did a great job of raising over \$33000 of valuable science class materials, supplies and resources.

The theme of the day was "Equitable Funding Opens the doors of Opportunity for All." It was an outstanding illustration of the need for supporting the 13 public universities in Alabama. The leaders spoke to the overflow crowd. The over 1500 attendees delivered a strong message to the state's elected officials: "Equitable Funding Opens Doors of Opportunity."

According to Gordon Stone, Executive Director of the Higher Education Partnership, "The university message is clear and is supported by exuberant and enthusiastic voices of the people: 'Provide equitable funding', 'open doors of opportunity' and 'do not sell us short' are common denominator themes for the day's activities. With the proposal for a large capital bond issue and the need for additional facility improvements on the campuses, it is clear

the university community is locked into the need for their campuses to receive a fair supply of the funds.”

Stone further commented, “The formula calling for ‘one-third for higher education and two-thirds for K-12’ has been a message that has followed the Education Trust Fund for the past 10 years. Today, it still holds true.”

“Universities understand that without a benchmark that guarantees equitable treatment, they tend to suffer from disproportionate funding. Therefore, the crowd of supporters and the speakers from the podium clearly indicate that there is still a strong desire for the return to an appropriation formula where the one-third (higher education) to two-thirds (K-12) is applied. Better university funding makes for a better Alabama and more opportunities for ALL!” said Stone.