

Louisiana Cuts Deliver Blow to Black Universities

Written by Forward Times Staff
Wednesday, 01 February 2012 14:08

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As Governor Piyush “Bobby” Jindal boasted at his inauguration about the progress Louisiana has made under the first four years of his administration, two leaders of North Louisiana’s Black Universities are bracing to fend off the effects of mid-year cutbacks imposed by the governor.

All of higher education is being impacted by the cutback. Both Grambling State University and Southern University at Shreveport have made major accomplishments during the past year. Both now face threats to that progress at the hands of an administration that has created a massive deficit by increasing tax breaks to the wealthiest of citizens.

Southern University at Shreveport is coming off of a year that included a major capital purchase which will allow expansion of its widely recognized medical programs and therefore an increase in self-generated revenues. It has also enhanced other academic programs. However the University cannot expect to be rewarded for the successful efforts of the previous year.

Because the Revenue Estimating Conference declared a budget deficit for the state for the fiscal year 2011-12, all of higher education has been ordered to reduce its budget by \$50 million. Each institution has to reduce its budget by as much as three percent. For Southern that amount comes to about \$300,000. Chancellor Ray Belton’s had his Office of Finance and Administration come up with plans for cutting operational expenses and other items; however it was just not enough to avoid impacting personnel. To avoid outright layoffs Southern will be furloughing most employees without pay for a small number of days over a four- to five-month

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period.

Non-tenured faculty will be furloughed a total of four days from February to May. Administrative and professional or unclassified employees will be furloughed a total of five days from February 1 to June 30. The administration believes that it can minimize the impact of the cuts on the operations of the school and on the lives of employees. Belton acknowledged to his staff that this was a tough challenge but was upbeat about the ability of the SUSLA family to overcome the cutbacks and still provide quality education to their students.

An hour's drive to the west of Shreveport is Grambling University which is facing a similar situation. The Sun spoke with University President Dr. Frank Pogue about the school's challenges and successes during the past year. Pogue was proud that 2011 was the year that Grambling State University advanced from having 98 percent of its academic programs that require accreditation by the Board of Regents to 100 percent of its programs accredited, and, Grambling State University successfully met 100 percent of the requirements of the LA GRAD Act. There was also progress in the area of sports with the return of Doug Williams to resume the head coaching position and their victories at the Bayou Classic and their defeat of Alabama A&M University to become the SWAC Champions.

Pogue was very clear about what he thought was the low point of 2011, "After experiencing drastic cuts in state appropriation over the past two years, Grambling State University was recently notified that we would undergo an additional mid-year reduction by almost \$1 million. Although these cuts are difficult to absorb, our primary priority is to protect the Mission of Grambling State University."

Pogue is concerned that "These frequent budget reductions will continue to make it extremely difficult for the university to plan for its future." The president does not see any relief in the near future, "It seems that cuts to higher education will continue, and although very harmful decisions are being made, we will continue to restructure the university to ensure that our mission is protected and that our students continue to have access to excellent educational experiences."

Pogue says the most important thing he wants to accomplish in 2012 is "to advance a very aggressive and successful five-year capital campaign with a goal to raise needed financial resources to support academic and athletic scholarships, campus infrastructure, facilities enhancement, University Lab Schools and other university needs."

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Across state leaders are concerned about the trend of cutting funds for higher education while raising fees. Senator Lydia Jackson described the fee increases as a de facto tax increase. Others are concerned about the survival of Black institutions of higher learning and about having educated leadership for the state in the future. Some leaders, like, Shreveport's Theron Jackson, are calling on the community to organize to provide direct financial support to the Black colleges, while fighting policies that threaten to eliminate Black higher education altogether.

By J. Kojo Livingston

Special to the Trice Edney News Wire from the Louisiana News Weekly



Commercial Farms to Displace Thousands in Ethiopia

Millions of acres of farm land are being leased to foreign investors for commercial export crops, under a nefarious plan that relocates indigenous villagers into “bantustans” lacking adequate food, farmland, healthcare or schools.

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The lands are leased for pennies on the dollar and resemble “land grabs” that displace the county’s poorest citizens.

Since 2008, six Indian, one Chinese, and Saudi Arabian companies have leased half a million acres in the state. A lesser amount is going to Ethiopians.

Critics say only foreign firms benefit, while ethnic groups such as the Anuak and Nuer are deprived of resources they have used for eons.

A lease agreement for the Gambela region was initially rejected by Ethiopian president Girma Wolde-Giorgis and the country’s Environment Protection Agency but Prime Minister Meles Zenawi gave it the green light.

Under the deal with Bangalore-based Karuturi company, investors would get some 3 million hectares – an area larger than The Netherlands -at \$1.25 per year per hectare for 50 years. The Oakland Institute, an advocacy group in California, highlighted its concerns, including the forced relocation of locals to resettlement of villages and transfer of land coming under the Gambela National Park to Karuturi.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch, in a recent report titled “Waiting Here for Death,” wrote: “The Ethiopian government ... is forcibly relocating approximately 70,000 indigenous people from the western Gambella region.” Critical views on the relocations can be found at the website of the Solidarity Movement for a new Ethiopia. www.solidaritymovement.org.

Special to the Trice Edney News Wire from GIN

Texas Capitol News

Abbott sues to speed approval of voter ID law

Attorney General Greg Abbott on Jan. 23 filed a lawsuit in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals to push the U.S. Department of Justice to approve the voter I.D. law enacted by the Texas Legislature last spring.

The law has not been given the required preclearance by the Department of Justice. Abbott said his intent is to spur a ruling that would allow the new law to take effect. The lawsuit dovetails with the state's efforts in the U.S. Supreme Court and the D.C. Court to have the Texas Legislature's contested House, Senate and U.S. congressional redistricting maps pre-cleared under Section 5 of the U.S. Voting Rights Act in time to meet deadlines for the April 3 party primaries.

On Jan. 20, the Supreme Court said the U.S. District Court Western District of Texas in San Antonio erred in its remedial redistricting plans created last year and ordered the three-judge panel of the San Antonio court to revise the plans. The San Antonio court on Jan. 27 asked opponents in the redistricting cases to work together and present them with agreed-upon solutions in hopes of speeding the process.

Texas is among several states and other jurisdictions subject to Section 5 because of a history of discriminatory election practices.

Texans, if the law takes effect, would have to show a government-issued photo I.D. along with their valid voter registration card in order to cast a ballot, and those who do not have a driver's license, passport, military I.D. card or other approved form of identification can get a state-issued voter I.D. free of charge from the Texas Department of Public Safety. And anyone who is disabled or over 65 can vote by mail, a method that does not require photo identification.

Supporters of the voter I.D. law said during the legislative process that it would help stop

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election fraud. Opponents said the legislation, if passed, would discriminate against minorities, the disabled and citizens who live in rural areas of the state.

Abbott last week said the law is not discriminatory and to support his position quoted a U.S. Supreme Court ruling: "The inconvenience of making a trip to the (Bureau of Motor Vehicles), gathering the required documents and posing for a photograph surely does not qualify as a substantial burden on the right to vote, or even represent a significant increase over the usual burdens of voting."

Several other states passed voter I.D. laws last year, but more than 30 states do not have voter I.D. laws.

Comptroller unveils info site

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs on Jan. 25 announced the launch of TheTexasEconomy.org, a website featuring state revenue and spending data, and more than a dozen economic indicators.

Combs said the site uses info-graphics, video interviews, tables and snapshots of key data to present information on an array of topics, such as Texas industries and jobs, the effects of drought on the economy and the impact of obesity on businesses and taxpayers.

Grain indemnity fund is goal

Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples on Jan. 26 said a discussion on grain warehouse failures and what can be done to avoid them was the focus of the first meeting of the agency's newly appointed Texas Grain Producer Indemnity Board.

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Bryan Black, a spokesman with the Texas Department of Agriculture, said that the word “failures” in this context means bankruptcies caused by grain market volatility. The board is looking at ways to set up a grain indemnity fund that would help cover losses for producers caught up in a warehouse bankruptcy, he said.

A grain warehouse operator who is unable to cover the open contracts he or she has purchased can get caught in margin calls. “With the amount of grain some of these warehouses trade, one or two big margin calls can sink them pretty fast,” Black said.

More reward money is offered

Gov. Rick Perry on Jan. 25 announced his decision to increase rewards for the Texas 10 Most Wanted Sex Offenders program to \$2,000, with some rewards reaching up to \$5,000. Managed by Texas Crime Stoppers and the Texas Department of Public Safety, the rewards are meant to encourage citizens who have information to bring it to the attention of law enforcement. Previously, any person who provided information that led to the arrest of one of the listed sex offenders received \$1,000 cash. According to the DPS, since the Texas 10 Most Wanted Sex Offenders program began in July 2010, 12 arrests have been made, with seven arrests coming from tips, and the governor’s office has paid out a total of \$3,300 in rewards.

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