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Chamber task force releases report, recommendations for Kentucky postsecondary education

Louisville, Ky. (Dec. 4, 2007) – Recommendations addressing affordability, student preparation, economic development efforts and the overall management of the system were among those included in a report released today by the Kentucky Chamber’s Postsecondary Education Task Force.

The blue ribbon task force of business leaders was convened last spring to assess Kentucky’s progress toward achieving its goals in postsecondary education as they were established in legislation enacted in 1997. Those goals included moving Kentucky to the national average of education attainment and per capita income. The task force, headed by E.ON U.S. Chairman, CEO, and President Victor A. Staffieri, concluded its work with the release of an extensive report and recommendations during an education summit held in Louisville.

The report was prepared by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a Colorado-based consulting firm engaged by the task force to conduct a review that included data analyses, interviews with policymakers and elected officials and a series of nine regional meetings held last summer throughout Kentucky. The task force accepted the NCHEMS report and approved the recommendations.

NCHEMS’ findings—the basis for the recommendations—included the following:

- Kentucky has made progress in building the capacity of its postsecondary institutions and system as reflected in increased enrollments and degree production.
- The state faces considerable challenges in ensuring students’ success through the education “pipeline” – of 100 Kentucky ninth-graders, only 12 receive either an associate degree in three years or a bachelor’s degree in six years.
- Kentucky has made progress in improving education attainment and per capita income, but its position relative to the national average has changed little over the past decade because other states have also improved.
- The goals of the 1997 reforms remain as important to the future of Kentucky as they were when adopted. Many pieces of the program are in place, but Kentucky will need to work aggressively to achieve the ultimate goals of education attainment and per capita income.

The NCHEMS report also identified several significant barriers to the state’s progress:

- A lack of appropriate connections, also called alignment, between the levels of education. Examples include the misalignment of the state assessment for high schools students (the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System or CATS) with expectations for postsecondary-level study and inconsistent policies governing the transfer of credits from community and technical colleges to universities.
- Weak links between postsecondary education and state and regional economic development.
- Inadequate policy coordination, discipline and accountability in the overall management of the system.

- Threats to affordability as students and families bear a higher percentage of the cost of postsecondary education.
- Comparatively low productivity by the postsecondary institutions.

The task force recommendations include several for the governor and General Assembly as well as those for the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to pursue. The group called on the state's elected leaders to:

- Reaffirm the state's commitment to the 1997 goals both to build the institutions' capacity and to raise Kentuckians' standard of living and quality of life. This recommendation includes support for the Council on Postsecondary Education's Double-the-Numbers campaign to increase education attainment.
- Address the state's need for an integrated strategy that improves the alignment among all levels of education, beginning with early childhood and continuing through postsecondary and lifelong learning.
- Make the partnership between postsecondary education and economic development a central priority at both the state and regional levels.
- Comply with the budgetary framework for postsecondary education established in 1997 to provide discipline and accountability to the process.
- Guarantee affordable access to postsecondary education for all qualified Kentuckians on a "last dollar" basis and simplify and consolidate student aid programs.
- Re-establish a mechanism to ensure the full participation of the governor and General Assembly in shaping the strategic agenda for postsecondary education.
- Re-establish the CPE as an independent policy leadership entity.

The task force called on the Kentucky Chamber to:

- Establish an entity to monitor the progress of the postsecondary reforms.
- Support, in collaboration with the governor, a renewed public campaign focusing on the value of education.
- Encourage local groups to create regional strategic plans on economic development.
- Communicate to employers the key ways they must send stronger signals to current and prospective employees about the importance of education.
- Sponsor an annual summit to review postsecondary progress.

The full report, including details on the recommendations and NCHEMS findings, is available online at www.kychamber.com. A list of task force members is attached.

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