



Contact:
Jessica Fletcher
Communications Manager
502-848-8731
jfletcher@kychamber.com

Strategic leadership needed to address postsecondary controversies

An Op-Ed by Dave Adkisson

President and CEO, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

The recent controversies and conflicts surrounding the 2008-2010 postsecondary education budget, the institutions' proposed tuition increases, and the presidency of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education could be viewed as the inevitable results of the state's failure to implement a key piece of the 1997 postsecondary education reform act (House Bill 1).

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce established a task force last year to provide a 10-year review of the state's progress and continuing challenges in postsecondary education. The report adopted by this group of leading CEOs identified a number of barriers to progress, including affordability and a lack of alignment between the different levels of education.

But the report was particularly pointed in its observations that the 1997 objective of instilling policy coordination, discipline and accountability within the postsecondary system had not been met.

That element is considered critical to ensuring that the state's postsecondary institutions operate within a coordinated structure that truly advances Kentucky's work to improve the education attainment and quality of life of its citizens.

This structure had two key elements under the 1997 legislation:

- The Council on Postsecondary Education, charged with developing a strategic agenda and recommending a strategic budget in line with that agenda to the Governor and General Assembly
- The Strategic Committee for Postsecondary Education (SCOPE) comprised of the Governor, legislative leaders and others to ensure that the state's elected leaders had full ownership and support for the agenda and budget priorities – a strategy designed to help keep the agenda on track in the heat of the legislative process.

Today's reality is that SCOPE has not functioned as intended since just after the passage of the 1997 reforms.

There are significant concerns that the CPE, as a result, has drifted away from the policy leadership mission intended in the legislation. That leaves the institutions essentially in a position where they believe they must operate as independent entities to advance the missions created for them under House Bill 1. Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that Kentucky isn't making more progress.

The Chamber task force called for the re-establishment of a mechanism to ensure the full participation of the Governor and the General Assembly in shaping the strategic agenda for achieving the goals of the 1997 legislation.

We believe it is critical that, whether this mechanism is SCOPE or a reconfigured, smaller entity, our elected leaders take an active role in developing, approving, and sustaining an unwavering commitment to the strategic agenda and budget for our postsecondary institutions.

In short, if the Governor and a few key legislators decide collectively that the system should function strategically and with appropriate discipline to support that strategy, the CPE – indeed the entire postsecondary system – can function effectively for Kentucky. If they don't, it won't. Without a strategy and discipline, we will continue to experience a biennial free-for-all, with each university fighting its best political fight for scarce dollars.

We hope that Kentucky's elected officials will work to reclaim their place as the strategic leaders of Kentucky's postsecondary education system.

###