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**BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING**

March 16, 2015

Dear Editor:

As the 2015 Legislative Session enters the final stretch, lawmakers are hard at work crafting the Fiscal Year 2016 budget. As a banker, I have spent many years looking at budgets, crunching the numbers and thinking about the bottom line. It is easy to forget that behind the numbers are people. As lawmakers finalize the budget for next year, it is important to remember the people behind the numbers.

As President of the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, the people that I focus on most are the students and what we can do to help them succeed in the classroom and upon graduation. I believe at the top of the list is to provide them with excellent faculty and staff to teach them, lead them and guide them. Faculty members both challenge and inspire our students, helping them to set and achieve goals and leading them to become the future leaders.

Attracting and retaining the best and brightest faculty and staff is no easy task. Our universities must compete with universities around the world. While there are many factors that faculty members consider when weighing whether to take a position at another university, including location, campus atmosphere, and support for research or programs, among others, compensation is also an important factor. Our salaries must be competitive if we are going to continue to attract and retain top-notch faculty and staff.

The faculty salaries earned at Mississippi universities are less than their peers earn at similar institutions in other states in the Southeast. The Southern Regional Education Board's *SREB Fact Book on Higher Education 2013* reported that from the 2006-07 academic year to the 2011-12 academic year, the SREB region's average four-year faculty salary decreased one percent when adjusted for inflation and remained below the average. The average salary in Mississippi fell three percent, ranking us next to last among SREB states.

The SREB report also noted that, while faculty have higher levels of education and higher pay than American workers overall, faculty salaries at public institutions have not grown as fast when compared to the growth of the average American wage. While the increase for all workers nationwide from 1982 to 2012 was 33 percent, faculty salaries at public four-year institutions in the SREB region only increased by 21 percent. Clearly, we are losing ground.

When the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning presented their budget request to the Legislative Budget Committee last fall, we asked for an additional \$36.2 million over the FY 2015 appropriation to be directed to faculty and staff salary increases.

I urge lawmakers to consider our students and the impact that faculty members have on them as they near the end of the session and weigh the budget decisions. While these decisions are certainly not easily made, it is important to remember that the pathway to growth for our state is through our university system. The pathway to a strong university system begins with having the best and brightest faculty.

Sincerely,

Aubrey Patterson
President