

**PRESS RELEASE: FEB. 19, 2010**



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### **HOUSE LEADER PLEDGES HELP FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE FUNDING**

JACKSON – The chairman of the House Universities and Colleges Committee pledged to supporters of the 15 community and junior colleges Feb. 18 that state representatives will do what they can to make progress toward mid-level funding – in the face of three FY 2010 state budget cuts on top of system-wide record enrollment increases this year.

Rep. Kelvin Buck, D-Holly Springs, told the crowd of about 200 community college students and faculty gathered in the Capitol rotunda that House members understand the two-year colleges need funding to provide services when they have double-digit enrollment increases in the fall and spring.

“Anybody who knows anything about government now knows that if there are priorities on the table we can find the funds to do what we need to do. ... We’re committed in the House of Representatives to the importance of mid-level funding,” Buck said.

In 2007, lawmakers and Gov. Haley Barbour committed to mid-level funding through Senate Bill 2364, a historic measure endorsing per-student funding for community colleges that is midway between per-student funding for K-12 students and regional public university students. The colleges are asking for \$64.7 million for mid-level funding in FY 2011.

“All of our colleges are experiencing record enrollment. The demand is there. We see more than just numbers when it comes to talking about a budget, when it comes to talking about education,” Buck said. “We see people. We see families. We see families that are having to pay more for tuition, families that are having to dig deeper in their pockets.”

Neither Barbour nor Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant was optimistic about the possibility of increased funding this year.

The state officials were speaking Thursday at a news conference called by the 3,000-member Mississippi Faculty Association for Community and Junior Colleges to spotlight the record-breaking enrollment in the face of three budget cuts this year.

Enrollment at the state’s 15 community colleges soared in the fall. Preliminary figures for fall 2009 show enrollment was up nearly 10,000 students system-wide from fall 2008, an increase of 13 percent. Eleven of the 15 colleges had increases of more than 10 percent. East Mississippi Community College posted the largest increase, nearly 20 percent.

“At East Mississippi Community College, we’re all about knocking down the barriers that stand between people and opportunity,” said EMCC President Dr. Rick Young.

“But, to continue to serve the people in our district, we need adequate resources. During these unsure economic times, we need to support people’s efforts to improve their lives, and secure their families’ futures – not struggle to do more with less.”

The boost in enrollment continued this spring with credit enrollment up 16 percent, said Dr. Eric Clark, executive director of the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges.

“Community colleges are the institutions primarily responsible for getting folks off welfare, and out of minimum wage jobs and letting them make a good living for their families and pay more taxes to their state and local governments,” Clark said. “If you look at the numbers over the past decade, community colleges have been underfunded compared to other parts of our government and other parts of our educational system.”

Mississippi’s community and junior colleges served more than 250,000 people in FY 2009. This includes almost 100,000 in academic or career-technical programs, more than 150,000 who took Workforce classes and almost 30,000 in continuing education, adult basic education, literacy or GED classes.