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## Boren taps former Okla. senator as VP of governmental relations to fight education budget cuts

By Adam Troxell Transcript Staff Writer 38 min ago



If the upcoming state budget battles over education are a chess board, the University of Oklahoma appears to be making the first move.

On Thursday, the OU Board of Regents approved the appointment of former Oklahoma State Sen. Jonathan Nichols as vice president of governmental relations. Nichols was in a list of appointments to be made in one item on the agenda for Thursday's regents meeting, and Boren took time to single it out as important.

"I'm recommending the approval of Jonathan Nichols, an advocate for education and a champion for safe communities in our state," Boren said.

Nichols, who served as a Republican state senator from 2000 to 2012, said he is eager to get to work and particularly to try and prevent any further budget cuts to higher education.

"I look forward to working with state officials to ensure that OU and higher education have the necessary funding for students to receive a quality 21st century education that will prepare them for an historically competitive job market," Nichols said. "This is truly a humbling honor and to serve the OU community under President Boren's leadership.

"The state is facing challenging times, but Oklahomans are at their best when they come together and meet their challenges with bold ideas and an uncompromising determination to do what is right."

While presenting Nichols to the Board of Regents, Boren pointed out his recorded past as a supporter of higher education. Nichols received the Most Courageous Legislator Award from the Higher Education Council of Oklahoma in 2001.

He also received recognition from the Council of Presidents and Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education in 2009 for his work to increase funding for Oklahoma universities and continued support.

"Jonathan Nichols has been an outstandingly committed advocate for the University of Oklahoma throughout his public service," Boren stated in a press release. "His proven effectiveness in getting things done and bringing people together at the State Capitol will be especially beneficial in this time of budgetary uncertainty."

Boren said the university is already preparing for a struggle if the next legislative session is like the last, with budget failures resulting in cuts to education funding.

"We're getting ready to go through a tough time financially," Boren said. "Unfortunately, last year, we received a 16.6 percent cut, and it was a disproportionate cut. It was as if higher education was singled out to bear the greatest financial sacrifice."

The hope is that Nichols' experience at the State Capitol can help avoid a similar situation in 2017. Boren said any further cuts could, among other things, jeopardize work done at the OU Health Sciences Center.

Scott Mason, who occupied the role with the university exclusively before Nichols' appointment, will continue similar work. His focus will shift solely to working with the federal government and federal programs.

Mason is a former special assistant to Gov. Mary Fallin.

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