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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

May 5, 2017

Dear Southernites and Friends:

On Monday, I received a text message from Home Chapter President, Cortny Jarrell, regarding proposed amendments to House Bill No. 1 pending before the House Appropriations Committee. The amendments included a $1.75M proposed reduction to the Southern University System budget by the State Legislature. I then reached out to Rodney Braxton with Southern Strategy Group, to inquire about whether this amendment might pass. Southern Strategy Group has done a fantastic job lobbying on behalf of Southern. Similarly, this morning I was notified that the House Education Committee will hear House Bill No. 34 Wednesday morning at 9:00 a.m. The bill abolishes the Board of Regents and the System Management Boards, and replace them with a single governing board. These bills are reminders that the Southern University System continues to remain under attack by external forces, and that it is critical that the University must continue to find more self-generated dollars to guard against state budget reductions and harmful structural changes to higher education.

I had the opportunity to discuss the budget amendment with the Home Chapter at its regular meeting Wednesday night. These threats are a great example of why it is so important that the *Imagine 20,000* project succeeds. I am pleased to report that Southern Board of Supervisors Chairlady Ann Smith has appointed an *ad hoc* committee, called the Innovation and Development Committee, that will spearhead this project for the Southern University System. Al Harrell, CEO of the Foundation, will chair the Committee, and I will serve as co-chair. In addition, Chairlady Smith has appointed Board Vice-Chairman Rev. Donald Ray Henry, Attorney Tony Clayton, Attorney Domoine Rutledge, and Dr. Rani Whitfield to this Committee. Chairlady Smith will serve as an *ex officio* member of the Committee.

Starting Wednesday, this ad hoc Committee will begin meeting every other week to advance the development and implementation of this project. We are extraordinarily grateful to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation for the Planning Grant that will provide the seed capital to help with the development of this project. But the best part of this project is that it is a collaborative initiative among the three main arms of Southern University: the System, the Foundation, and the Federation. Moreover, I think this project can be one of the most powerful tools to help us increase self-generated funds and to build a strong defense against attempts to further reduce funding to higher education in general, and Southern University in particular.

In the meantime, it is critically important that you, our alumni and friends, continue to do what we have done so well -- raise scholarship dollars for our students, promote the Southern University brand, and look for concrete solutions to overcome the many challenges of our beloved alma mater.

I am extremely grateful to the chapters who are hosting scholarship events, including crawfish boils, around the country to bring alums together and raise scholarship money for our students. Scholarships are a major part of the Federation's recruitment and retention strategy for our campuses. The Houston Chapter had a successful crawfish boil last weekend. The Home Chapter and the Atlanta Chapter will host their big events tomorrow. I love the Southern University spirit that continues to spread throughout this country.

We continue to need your input in the planning process for *Imagine 20,000*. Stay tuned for more information. This is incredibly exciting, and I look forward to this journey.

Sincerely,

Preston

Preston J. Castille, Jr., Esq.
National President
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