



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday October 18, 2011

Jenifer Sarver
512-879-0992
Jenifer.Sarver@bm.com

TESTIMONY AT OVERSIGHT HEARING UNDERSCORES ONGOING POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE TEXAS COALITION FOR EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

AUSTIN—At a day-long hearing of the [Joint Oversight Committee on Higher Education Governance, Excellence and Transparency](#), the chairmen of the Boards of Regents of The University of Texas and Texas A&M Systems described as “moot” the destructive policy prescriptions that had been championed by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, underscoring the positive impact of the Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education.

“As people who care passionately about the future of Texas A&M University and The University of Texas at Austin, we are pleased that Chairman Box and Chairman Powell recognized the destructive impact of ideas such as separating research from teaching or seceding from the respected national university accreditation system,” said Gerry Griffin, recipient of the Distinguished Alumnus Award of Texas A&M University and a member of the operating committee of the Coalition.

“Our coalition was formed to support the constructive reforms such as those being pursued by Chancellor Cigarroa and President Powers at UT and, as Chairman Box testified, soon to be undertaken at Texas A&M University,” continued Griffin. “We recognize that the ‘status quo’ in Texas higher education is not an option. Keeping in mind that one size doesn’t fit all, the constructive, fully vetted and transparent reforms the UT System is undertaking are essential, and, if implemented appropriately, could become the model for the state and nation. We are extremely pleased that Chairman Powell and Chairman Box publicly testified that they agree.”

“When it comes to the UT System, we appreciate Chairman Powell’s acknowledgement of past mistakes with regard to the hiring of a special advisor,” said C. Patrick Oles, past chair of the UT System Chancellor’s Council and member of the operating committee of the Coalition. “We are hopeful that going forward, the boards of regents will support the innovations of the chancellors and the presidents of our universities, and we are glad to see Chairman Powell publicly endorse the leadership of both Chancellor Cigarroa and President Powers.”

The Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education had a strong presence at the standing-room only hearing, with members delivering both invited and public testimony, and numerous members in the audience.

John Mobley, former regent of the Texas A&M University System and member of the Coalition, was invited by the Committee to be on a panel with the Honorable Don Evans, former U.S. Secretary of Commerce and chair of the UT System Board of Regents. As one recommendation for improving governance, Mobley encouraged the committee to look at the nominations process in the Senate, and noted, “Just as we have corporate boards, you may look at requiring each institution to adopt a code of conduct and a conflict of interest policy ... Also you might silently ask yourself the question: ‘Do his or her experiences adequately prepare them for this job?’”

Following invited testimony, the floor was opened to public testimony, at which time several members of the Coalition delivered remarks.

-More-



Charles W. Matthews, former vice president and general counsel of Exxon Mobil Corporation and member of the operating committee of the Coalition, addressed the committee highlighting best governances borrowed from the corporate and nonprofit worlds. “For the past months, actions of certain board members have raised questions concerning best practices of corporate governance, advancement of interests of other special interest organizations, costly and disruptive requests for information by individual Regents without board concurrence, and a number of other well publicized events that have threatened the reputation of the institutions,” said Matthews. “At the very least this calls for an examination of board appointment procedures and current board policies and practices, and the work of this Committee should be applauded and supported by the legislature as well as the public.”

Gordon Appleman, also a member of the Coalition’s operating committee, provided insights based on his role as a consulting member for the American Law Institute on Governance for Nonprofit Organizations, an organization whose scholarly work is to clarify, modernize, and otherwise improve the law. Appleman said, “I urge you to investigate thoroughly all of the actions of the Board ... the future of The University and all higher education is at stake and must be protected from damage by irresponsible actions driven by conflicting motivations.”

Coalition executive committee member, Leslie Cedar, who is the executive director of the Texas Exes, highlighted concerns recent actions have raised with alumni of The University of Texas. In written testimony, she said, “The alumni are concerned that the ever continuing controversy ... will harm the students, the faculty, the value of our degrees, and will hinder UT Austin and its pursuit for excellence in order to change lives, and contribute financially to the state and nation.”

The next hearing of the Joint Oversight Committee is scheduled for November 18, 2011, and will continue to look at the issue of governance.

About the Coalition

The Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education was launched in the summer of 2011 by a group of concerned citizens who believe strongly in the power of higher education to transform lives, build our economy and shape Texas’ future. Formed in response to a growing concern over recommendations being floated that could have long-term damaging effects on our institutions of higher learning, the Coalition hopes to advance a thoughtful, constructive and transparent dialogue around higher education in Texas, seeking to improve the quality educational opportunities for all Texans.

***For more information on the Coalition and information on higher education in Texas, please visit:
www.TexasEducationExcellence.org***