

Florida Council of 100

Position Statement on Senate Joint Resolution 2308 and House Joint Resolution 7025

Higher Education Governance

March 12, 2008

The Florida Council of 100, a group of business leaders dedicated to improving the economic growth and well-being of Florida, has been intimately involved with education in Florida since its founding in 1961. In more recent years, it completed studies and published reports on higher education governance and funding, including a 2002 report on the K-20 education governance system and a 2004 report entitled, *We Must Do Better*.

The Council of 100 has consistently and strongly advocated for education governance based on six principles:

- Establish the Governor as the state's primary education advocate;
- Provide seamless movement of students from one level to the next;
- Encourage collaboration, not competition;
- Provide clear lines of authority and corresponding accountability to governing entities;
- Discourage legislative micromanagement and interference in academic programs; and
- Coordinate the budget process to reflect appropriate priorities.

The Florida Council of 100 supported the 2001 K-20 education reform plan, championed by Governor Jeb Bush and enacted by the Legislature, as consistent with these principles. The constitutional amendment that created the Board of Governors in 2003 added complexity to the system (and was opposed by the Council of 100 at the time) but is generally consistent with the guiding principles noted above.

Senate Joint Resolution 2308 and House Joint Resolution 7025, however, are inconsistent with these principles in important respects. Most notably:

- They unnecessarily politicize Florida's education system by reinstating the governance structure changed by the voters in 1998 -- an elected education commissioner and the Governor-Cabinet serving as the State Board of Education.

- They counterproductively entangle the Legislature in the details of the university system by eliminating the current Board of Governors and replacing it with a smaller coordinating body that is effectively under the direct control of the Legislature. The same is true for individual university boards of trustees.
- They obscure the authority and accountability of the current Board of Education, Board of Governors, and the university boards of trustees.

Our concern is that a term-limited legislature will, by its nature, focus more on short-term programs and tactics as opposed to a long-term strategy for educational excellence. The ability to effectively run the university system will be subordinated to whatever budget crises are present year to year. The budget process will become more political and less coordinated. Important statewide strategic education priorities will give way to more in-fighting and competition among the universities for increasingly scarce state dollars allocated by the Legislature.

We sincerely believe that higher education in Florida could suffer. And if higher education in Florida suffers, then our entire economy is at risk. The state is focused on increasing the number and quality of businesses that create high-skill and high-wage jobs in target industries in order to ensure our continued economic growth and global competitiveness. Such businesses will not locate here, nor will we be able to grow them here, without a talent pool of highly educated and skilled people to make them successful.

Florida has reorganized its system of higher education governance several times in the last ten years. So much reorganization, with the prospect for more, is a source of great instability for our state. Another administrative upheaval is not the answer to whatever issues the Legislature may have with the Board of Governors. Currently, we have a system that identifies responsibility and accountability for all stakeholders. Let's execute within that system and not make higher education a political football in a difficult climate.

Clearly, the Council of 100 shares the desire of state policymakers to improve Florida's PreK-20 educational system. Florida must have a world-class educational system, accessible to all and second to none. As always, we stand ready to assist in any capacity, including facilitating working groups and partnerships to develop policy solutions and build consensus. It's a common goal we seek – the building of a better future for our children.

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