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November 16, 2009

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**BLUEPRINT ADDRESSES TUCKER COMMISSION
*HIGHLIGHTS HIGHER ED CHALLENGES, OFFERS RECOMMENDATIONS***

BATON ROUGE, La. — Blueprint Louisiana today appeared before the Louisiana Postsecondary Education Review Commission to present recommendations for sustainable improvement of the state's higher education enterprise.

"Our ideas are from the viewpoint of the "customers" of higher education — students who want to better themselves, parents who often foot a large portion of the financial bill, and businesses that need educated and qualified employees," said Blueprint Louisiana Chairman Bill Fenstermaker, President and Chief Executive Officer of C.H. Fenstermaker & Associates of Lafayette. "Meeting the needs of those key customers should go a long way toward serving the overall best interests of the state and helping to create the Louisiana we deserve."

From Blueprint's perspective, there are two central issues that must be addressed in the state's higher education system:

1. An unacceptably low graduation rate in the state's four-year universities. The national average graduation rate is 56.1 percent, and the top dozen states graduate over 60 percent of their students in a six-year time period. By contrast, Louisiana's average six-year graduation rate is 42.2 percent.
2. An underdeveloped community and technical college system. Compared to the other states included in the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), Louisiana has the second-lowest percentage of (full-time equivalent) higher education students enrolled in two-year colleges/technical colleges.

Blueprint offers five recommendations to address the two fundamental problems of low graduation rates and an underdeveloped community and technical college system. These recommendations provide a new framework of accountability that will improve the performance and financial efficiency of postsecondary education in Louisiana.

1. Fully implementing the performance-based funding formula for higher education;
2. Raising university admission standards;
3. Establishing "Centers of Excellence" within the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS);
4. Providing our higher education systems greater freedom to raise the revenue they need to maintain and improve educational quality; and
5. Removing all chronically-failing postsecondary schools from the control of their respective governance systems.

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“Today’s fiscal reality should be enough to force action,” Fenstermaker said. “With declining financial resources, if all we do is cut across-the-board, we condemn ourselves to a mediocre system across-the-board. With thoughtful improvements and a commitment to excellence, we believe in the potential of our higher education system to deliver an array of positive economic and community impacts for our citizens.”

Established in 2006, Blueprint Louisiana is a citizen-driven effort to identify and implement essential changes to fundamentally improve Louisiana. The group’s original vision for a better Louisiana focused on major governmental reforms in the areas of ethics, education, workforce development, health care, transportation and coastal restoration and hurricane protection. Earlier this year, it added a “new economy” component to its reform agenda. The nonpartisan effort is led and supported by community and business leaders from across the state.

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