



Friday, March 27, 2009

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## CofC president says higher education funding is key to economic growth

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 Published March 27, 2009

[College of Charleston](#) president George Benson on Thursday called on state lawmakers to invest more money in South Carolina's higher education system before it declines into mediocrity.

Sending more money to state universities is the only direct means lawmakers have to move the state's economy forward, Benson said, speaking at the [Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce's 2009 Economic Outlook Conference](#).

Benson said funding K-12 education is important, but higher education drives the economy. He criticized the state's declining financial support of its colleges and universities.

"If we don't nurture and support these assets (state colleges sand universities), they will die, and other states will gladly step

in to fill the void," he said.

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State funding now accounts for only about 13% of the College of Charleston's revenues, he said, making it dependent primarily on tuition for operations.

"The college is nearly private," he said.



Benson said his call for increased higher education funding is separate from the drastic cuts all state agencies have faced in the past year as the economy shrank. Recent cuts are just the latest in a long line, he said.

He did not suggest where state lawmakers should find the money.

Without increased investments in Charleston's higher education institutions, Benson said the area will be left with a one-dimensional economy based on tourism. He said the area's rich history and quality of life assets are valuable and should be fostered, but they can only go so far in negating the state's economic and education deficiencies.

"We'll be left with a strong tourism and hospitality industry and little else," he said.

In addition to more money, Benson also called for fewer regulations for state universities. Constructing a new building at the College of Charleston requires eight separate approvals, which he said is inefficient and leads to higher costs.

Benson said the state has made progress by creating the nonprofit S.C. Research Authority, which fuels high-tech, biotech, research and defense-industry companies. Another positive step the legislature took was funding research positions at state universities through the Centers for Economic Excellence program.

But those efforts are not enough, he said. South Carolina continues to lose ground in economic development, especially to neighboring Georgia and North Carolina. Both states invest more in higher education, he said.

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