



# PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

**Dr. Alvin I. Thomas**

President Emeritus

2646 So. Loop W., Suite 275  
Houston, Texas 77054-2675

February 18, 2012

Tel: 713-661-4949

Fax: 713-283-7947

Dr. Raymund A. Paredes  
Commissioner of Higher Education  
C/o Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
P.O. Box 12788  
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Dr. Paredes:

The attached letters, of January 9, 2012, from State Representative Sylvester Turner to you and the January 25, 2012 from you to Mr. Turner were distributed to the attendees and the public, during the February 2-4 meeting of the Research Association of Minority Professors, which took place at the Renaissance Houston Hotel Greenway Plaza, Houston, Texas.

These letters do not state clearly the specific action(s) (1) taken by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) at its October meeting and (2) if there were required legal mandates for these actions.

Please advise me: (1) what specific program(s) and at what degree levels were deleted from Texas Southern University; and (2) what specific program(s) and at what degree levels were deleted from Prairie View A&M University, and (3) what was the legal justification for these actions?

Apparently, these two institutions failed to meet THECB requirements.

As indicated in your letter to Mr. Turner, THECB recognizes the state and national need for qualified minority personnel in the areas of science and mathematics.

I am sure that you, as Commissioner, together with members of THECB are desirous of Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M University producing a large number of minority graduates. Responsibility must be placed on the Regents of Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M University for recruiting, admission, retention, and graduation of highly qualified student in each of the academic areas which the THECB eliminated.

Surely, these two institutions can and will respond to this type of accountability. The THECB cannot fail to hold these institutions accountable by eliminating programs.

Sincerely,

Alvin I. Thomas  
President Emeritus

c:

State Rep. Sylvester Turner  
Mr. John Sharp, TAMUS  
Dr. John Rudley, TSU  
Dr. George Wright, PVAMU

Governor Rick Perry  
Members, Board of Regents of Texas Southern University  
Members, Board of Regents of Texas A&M University System  
Members, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



# TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

P.O. Box 12788 Austin, Texas 78711

January 25, 2012

COPY

Fred W. Heldenfels IV  
CHAIR

Harold W. Hahn  
VICE CHAIR

Dennis D. Golden, O.D.  
SECRETARY OF THE BOARD

Amir H. Barzin  
STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Durga D. Agrawal, Ph.D.  
Robert W. Jenkins  
Munir Abdul Lalani  
James H. Lee  
Janelle Shepard  
David D. Teuscher, M.D.

Raymund A. Paredes  
COMMISSIONER  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

512/427-6101  
Fax 512/427-6127

Web site:  
<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us>

The Honorable Sylvester Turner  
Chair, Texas Legislative Black Caucus  
1108 Lavaca Street, STE 110-PMB 171  
Austin, Texas, 78701

Dear Chairman Turner:

I am writing in response to your January 9 letter related to low-producing programs at Texas Southern University (TSU) and Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU).

I have enclosed a summary of the process we used to evaluate low-producing programs. The key point is that all decisions to phase out or consolidate low-producing programs were rooted in a comprehensive process that spanned many months and allowed institutions multiple opportunities to affect final Board decisions. Most importantly, each institution was subject to the same level of intense scrutiny.

With respect to TSU and PVAMU, the decisions to phase out programs were not taken lightly. However, the evidence was clear that the programs had a history of missing recruitment and retention goals sufficient to graduate a relatively modest number of students expected of any university. Sustaining programs that have a long track record of inefficiency does a disservice to the state, the institutions, and most importantly, students.

The THECB looks forward to partnering with the TBLC to identify and scale more strategies to improve student outcomes at each institution. In fact, since 2009, the THECB has invested more than \$600,000 in TSU and more than \$150,000 in PVAMU from the agency's college readiness funds to support programs and initiatives designed to improve student success. This is in addition to direct State appropriations for each institution as part of the Office for Civil Rights Priority Plan, including \$25 million for the 2010-2011 biennium to support: 1) proven academic success programs; 2) existing graduate programs; 3) undergraduate programs; and 4) initiatives to target enrollment growth.

Ultimately, however, each institution must take responsibility for its programs. If a degree program does not have adequate demand, an institution must improve recruitment. If a degree program does not retain a sufficient number of students, it must improve academic support services. And if a degree program cannot graduate a relatively modest five students each year over a five year period, the institution should be compelled to rethink the program altogether. We cannot hope to close the gaps, control higher education costs (including tuition), and better serve our students, without institutions recognizing their

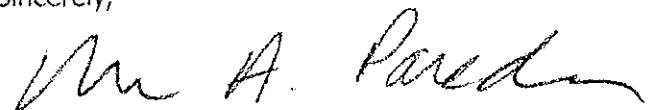
COPY

Letter to TLBC  
January 25, 2012  
Page 2

academic and fiduciary responsibilities to the state and their moral obligation to students to help them succeed.

I would be happy to meet with you and the members of the TBLC to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Raymund A. Paredes

Enclosure

c:     Members, Texas Legislative Black Caucus  
        Governor Rick Perry  
        Speaker Joe Straus  
        Lt. Governor David Dewhurst  
        Sen. Royce West  
        Sen. Rodney Ellis  
        Sen. Judith Zaffirini  
        Rep. Dan Branch  
        Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee  
        Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson  
        Congressman Al Green  
        Mr. Gary Bledsoe  
        Dr. John Rudley  
        Dr. George Wright  
        Members, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



# TLBC

Texas Legislative Black Caucus  
1108 Lavaca St, Suite 110-PMB 171, Austin, TX 78701-2172

COPY

Chairman  
Sylvester Turner  
District 139- Houston

January 9, 2012

1st Vice Chair  
Ruth McClendon  
District 120- San Antonio

Raymund A. Paredes PhD  
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
P.O. Box 12788  
Austin, TX 78711

2nd Vice Chair  
Marc Veasey  
District 95- Fort Worth

Secretary  
Helen Giddings  
District 109- Dallas

## RE: Closure of Certain Programs at Texas Southern University & Prairie View A&M

Treasurer  
Alma Allen  
District 131- Houston

Dear Commissioner Paredes and members of the THECB Board:

Parliamentarian  
Joe Deshotel  
District 22- Beaumont

General Counsel  
Harold Dutton, Jr.  
District 142- Houston

On behalf of concerned citizens and higher education stakeholders, the Texas Legislative Black Caucus and the Texas NAACP are troubled about recent actions the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has taken towards public institutions that offer what the THECB has determined to be low-performing degree programs.

At your October 27<sup>th</sup> quarterly meeting, the agency board voted to close down numerous programs in science and mathematics at several 4-year institutions under Agenda Item VIII-N(1)- Low Producing Degree Programs. Of immediate concern to us was the decision to close chemistry, math and physics programs at Prairie View A&M University, Texas Southern University and other high African American-serving colleges. The potential adverse and disproportionate impact of the decision to shut down programs in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (S.T.E.M.) fields on students seeking degrees from black-serving and other special-mission institutions of higher education is extremely unsettling.

As you are fully aware, both Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M University are of great importance to the State and to the African American community at large because they are the only two remaining public institutions in Texas with the federal distinction of being Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

I do not have to remind you of the troubled history that exists between the State and our two public HBCUs. For decades, both Prairie View and Texas Southern Universities have been subjected to discriminatory policies and practices that have left a legacy of deficiency that continues to impact the students each institution serves to this day. In fact, as you are well aware, in October 2000 the State of Texas entered into a consent decree with U.S. Dept of Justice- Office of Civil Rights detailed in the THECB's own *Priority Plan to Strengthen Education at Prairie View A & M University and Texas Southern University* that sought to enhance existing programs and to include among others the development of both an MS and a PhD in Electrical Engineering at Prairie View A & M University, as well as a BS in Computer Engineering Technology and an MS in Computer Science at Texas Southern University. These enhancements both require and rely on extensive offerings of math, science, and engineering courses, some of the very courses you would like to close.

### Members:

Barbara Mallory Caraway (District 110- Dallas), Stefani Carter (District 102- Dallas), Garnet Coleman (District 147- Houston), Yvonne Davis (District 111- Dallas), Dawnna Dukes (District 46- Austin), Eric Johnson (District 100- Dallas), Boris Miles (District 146- Houston), Ron Reynolds (District 27- Missouri City), Senfronia Thompson (District 141- Houston), James White (District 12- Hillister)

As just one example, the State of Texas produced a mere five African American graduates in Physics in academic year 2010. Of that number, two – a whopping 40 percent – of those graduates came from Texas Southern University. While the total number of African American Physics graduates produced in Texas is unacceptably low and should demand immediate action by the State to bolster those numbers, we respectfully submit the fact that TSU was able to produce nearly *half* of those graduates highlights that the University should not be penalized, but be *applauded* by you and the Coordinating Board.

While these numbers appear small on its face, we strongly believe that each African American student who is awarded a S.T.E.M. degree is significant to Texas and to the country simply because of the miniscule number of awards made in total by all institutions in the state. Further, since increasing the number of graduates in engineering-related degree fields is also a component part of the Closing the Gaps 2015 strategy for the State of Texas by the THECB, it is befuddling that the Board would take steps to stifle the ability for these fields to contribute additional graduates in Texas.

Further, data gleaned from your state accountability system suggest that Texas awarded 1,268 S.T.E.M.-related degrees (including 2-year degrees and certificate programs) to African Americans in 2010. Prairie View University produced 10 percent of all S.T.E.M. graduates with 129 degrees granted while Texas Southern University awarded 2.5 percent of the degrees with 37. Only the University of Houston has produced a similar number of S.T.E.M. degrees for African Americans in Texas with 36 in 2008 and 42 in both 2009 and 2010.

Also we must point out that over the same 2010 time period, the State's two flagship institutions, The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, produced only 36 and 24 black graduates respectively.

Regrettably, your agency has inadvertently exacerbated the challenges faced by African American serving institutions by applying the same broad brush to HBCUs as it does to predominantly white-serving institutions that have been spared the troubling legacy of discrimination that TSU and Prairie View have traditionally endured. Such a move by the THECB, with explicit ramifications that directly contradict with agreements made with the Dept of Justice's Office of Civil Rights is not the most prudent, nor fair course of action.

We ask that instead of valuable programs like chemistry and physics being eliminated based solely on the number of graduates produced over five years, the THECB should focus its

Members:

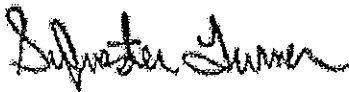
Barbara Mallory Caraway (District 110- Dallas), Stefani Carter (District 102- Dallas), Garnet Coleman (District 147- Houston), Yvonne Davis (District 111- Dallas), Dawnna Dukes (District 46- Austin), Eric Johnson (District 130- Dallas), Bonni Miles (District 146- Houston), Ron Reynolds (District 27- Missouri City), Senfronia Thompson (District 141- Houston), James White (District 12- Hillister)

attentions on those institutions that have long-standing program offerings that produce either:  
1. Low to no African American students or 2. No students at all (regardless of race) over a 2-3 year period. If you were to apply this metric based on race instead of total numbers, institutions like UT, Texas A&M, the University of North Texas and Texas Tech University, to name just a few, would be in jeopardy of failing to meet the guidelines established by the THECB over the same 5-year period.

We urge you to reconsider the closure of low-producing degree programs, particularly S.T.E.M. programs, at both TSU and Prairie View in light of the impact that these actions could have on both "Closing the Gaps" efforts as well as the vital accord reached under the *Priority Plan* in 2000. At this critical juncture of the State of Texas' history, with the need to further educate and prepare our students for both the degrees and workforce of a new economy; it is no time to pull out the rug from under the gains we've made. We look forward to the ensuing discussions that must occur to collectively address this important issue.

We anxiously await your written response.

Sincerely,



Sylvester Turner  
Chair, Texas Legislative Black Caucus

cc: Members of the Texas Legislative Black Caucus

Governor Rick Perry  
Speaker of the House Joe Straus  
Lt. Governor David Dewhurst  
Senator Royce West  
Senator Rodney Ellis  
Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee  
Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Congressman Al Green  
Gary Bledsoe, President of Texas N.A.A.C.P.  
President Rudley, Texas Southern University  
President Wright, Prairie View A & M University

Members:

Barbara Mallory Caraway (District 110- Dallas), Stefani Carter (District 102- Dallas), Gamet Coleman (District 147- Houston), Yvonne Davis (District 111- Dallas), Dawonna Dukes (District 46- Austin), Eric Johnson (District 100- Dallas), Boris Miles (District 146- Houston), Ron Reynolds (District 27- Missouri City), Senfronia Thompson (District 141- Houston), James White (District 12- Hillister)