

## Remarks of Rob Ingram to the House Ways and Means Education Committee on House Bill 204

My name is Rob Ingram. I am president of the Faculty Senate and a faculty member in the business school at the University of Alabama. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today against House Bill 204.

As you have heard repeatedly, this is bad legislation. It is financially irresponsible and has the potential to do indeterminable harm to K-12 and higher education. You have heard that from school boards, school associations, university presidents, and from numerous reports and editorials from newspapers across Alabama.

I am here today because I want to bring a message from employees in higher education from throughout the state. We are disturbed by this legislation. We are mad, we are frustrated, and we are tired of being treated like second-class citizens. I became a university professor because I want to teach students. I have always considered myself to be a teacher. Apparently, the only teachers in the State of Alabama, however, are those who pay dues to the Alabama Education Association. The leadership of the AEA has dedicated itself to absorbing as much of the Educational Trust Fund as it can without regard to the potential damage that is likely to be done to education at all levels throughout the state.

A lesson of this continuing effort is that the only way higher education and others concerned about education in Alabama are going to get attention in Montgomery is to become organized. We have been slow to learn that lesson, and we would prefer to not be involved in political matters of this type. We would prefer to spend our time educating your sons and daughters. But, it is obvious we cannot afford that luxury.

Faculty are not opposed to raises for K-12 teachers. I would love for our state to pay all educators at the national average. It would even be great if teachers in higher education were paid at the regional average. I would like to see raises for state employees, and I even support raises for legislators.

But the issue is not raises; it is financial responsibility. If this legislation included a provision that raised the salaries of teachers in higher education to the national average, it would be more palatable to faculty. It would not make this a good piece of legislation, however. It would still be financially irresponsible to earmark most of the growth in the Educational Trust Fund for salaries, not knowing how much that growth will be and not knowing what other pressing needs will arise.

A question that should be asked is why are salaries in Alabama not currently at the national level. Is it because legislators in the past have not wanted to pay teachers? Of course not. Is it because the legislature has been stingy with resources in the Education Trust Fund and has been unwilling to appropriate funds for salary increases? Again, the answer clearly is no. The problem is that the Education Trust Fund has not had the resources to meet all the needs of education in the state. We are all aware of the variability of revenues and the fact that, in some years, there is limited ability to provide additional resources to education. This legislation does nothing to solve that problem. Instead, it makes the problem much worse, by locking in a large portion of new resources to a single purpose, irrespective of other needs that are likely to arise.

Raising salaries to the national level is an easy decision. If resources are available, raise salaries. But make sure the resources are available and that the raises are justified in terms of other needs of K-12 and higher education.

Why is this legislation being proposed? Obviously, the governor and the leadership of AEA do not trust you to make that decision. They know that financial needs and resource constraints in the future will make it difficult to keep salaries at the national level, when resources lag far behind national averages. They know, as we all do, that this legislation is not financially sound. When Representative Rogers asked Dr. Mabry to help him understand how this legislation could be financially responsible, the answer he got was "This legislation is very important to the governor." Gee, what an astute answer! When asked what happens in the future when growth in the Educational Trust Fund is not sufficient to maintain salaries at the national level, Dr. Mabry's response was, "What the legislature gives, the legislature can take away." I am real pleased to know so much forethought goes into legislation that is so important to the governor.

So what is going to happen if this legislation is passed and, as surely as we are here today, a time will come when the Education Trust Fund cannot meet essential needs of education. That type of financial catastrophe will happen. It may not be next year or the year after that. But it will happen. It has happened before, and the future is extremely uncertain. What are you going to say to the parents, taxpayers, school children, and citizens of this state when they ask why there is no money to repair schools, provide for new schools, technology, and teacher training? When the number of teachers has to be reduced to meet the salary demands of remaining teachers? When college students have to pay much higher tuition, because that is the only way universities in this state can continue to operate, and it will be much harder then for many students to get an education?

Are you then going to be willing to take the blame for these problems? Is the governor going to stand up and say "I made a mistake," or is he going to come back to you and demand that you solve the problems and that you take the heat with the citizens and teachers of this state? Is the leadership of AEA going to say, "You don't have to stick to the promise you made to keep salaries at the national level if that is detrimental to education in Alabama?" We already know the answer to that question. Mr. Hubbard has already spoken about legislation that raises teachers' salaries, that any financial hardship posed by this legislation on local school districts is their own creation and it is up to them to find a solution.

I want to assure you that we will be there to inform the people of this state of why the financial problems exist. We are dedicated to making this legislation notorious. Every time there is a financial problem in a local district, every time a university has to raise tuition, every time we lose faculty because we can't match salaries in other states, we are going to point to this bill as a major cause.

The tough decision today is not whether House Bill 204 is good legislation. We all know the answer to that question. The tough issue is that you are being asked to stand up to an 800-pound gorilla and look it straight in the eyes and say, "No, you can't have what you want." That is a very tough decision. I know it's a tough decision, and I am very sympathetic. This gorilla wields a lot of power. It controls a lot of money, and that money can either help you get re-elected or it can help someone else get elected in your place. But, you know folks, the people who elected you did so because they believed you were capable of making tough decisions; that you knew the difference between public and private and personal interests; that you would put the public good first; that you would make sound financial decisions in managing public resources. The question today is "Are you up to that task?"

If you pass this legislation, you are feeding the 800-pound gorilla so it will become a 1,000-pound gorilla. Are you then going to be willing at some point in the future, with a financial crisis looming, to stand up to the gorilla, look him square in the eyes, and say "No, you can't have what you want."

Before I leave, I want to say that I have no grudge against the AEA. It has done many good things in this state and there are many good people who are part of that organization. It is simply unfortunate that the leadership of AEA is committed to using the power of that organization for personal gain even if that means jeopardizing the future of education in Alabama.

Thank you.