

# An open letter to faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends

May 20, 1997

Dear Colleague:

Less than 24 hours ago, the State Legislature approved its education budget for fiscal year 1998, a budget that provides only minimal additional money for The University of Alabama.

This comes despite the fact that there was \$133 MILLION in new funds in the education trust fund due to the expanding economy in Alabama, an economy strengthened by higher education--especially The University of Alabama. But even with this growth in available funds, UA will realize an increase of less than one half of one percent -- or \$429,979 -- after ear-marked funds and required pension contributions are subtracted. You'll hear the figure 1.54 percent, but when all is said and done, we're really talking about four-tenths of one percent. The inflation rate was 3 percent this year, so again we cannot even keep up with fixed costs of operating -- much less give our deserving faculty and staff a raise.

While we all have reason to be disappointed about the State Legislature's lack of commitment to the University, I can't help but feel heartened by the way the University community pulled together to fight for what we believe in. In the past year, countless faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends and others have come to the aid of the University. Whether it be a letter to a legislator, a phone call, attendance at a support rally, or merely standing up to give testimony at the local Rotary Club, people have stated loud and clear that what is happening to The University of Alabama is unacceptable.

I have heard it on good authority from such people as Sen. Charles Steele, Sen. Phil Poole, and Rep. Tim Parker that letters, phone calls, and personal visits, at critical times, were very important in preserving the funding that UA did receive. Indeed, if you had not taken time to help make the University's case, we could have been even more vulnerable in the legislature.

It would be hypocritical of me to ask you not to feel bad because the Legislature has chosen not to invest adequately in The University of Alabama. However, I do not for one minute believe that this funding situation reflects the view and will of the people of this state. Our research has shown us time and time again that when citing those aspects of the state of which they are most proud, Alabamians frequently point to The University of Alabama.

Our challenge, then, is to find the right combination that unlocks this pride and emotional support and turns it into legislative funding support. Over the next 12 months, I promise you that we will work even harder to achieve this goal. There will be many opportunities for you to stand up and be counted in support of the University. I hope and pray that you will continue to do so.

I want to underscore that all we are asking the Legislature to do is invest in the University's ability to do great things for our state. The University of Alabama delivers a \$1.7 BILLION return on a \$100 million annual investment of state funds. Smart business says that's a strategic investment that should be enhanced.

Indeed, in the year that I've been here, I've witnessed a University that has worked to raise its productivity in every measure -- teaching, research, and outreach. It hasn't always been easy, as we are doing more with fewer people. I am singularly proud of the wins that are taking place daily in our classrooms, our laboratories, and in the many fields of outreach activity.

The University of Alabama is making a difference and is worth fighting for. I earnestly ask for your continued support in making our case in Montgomery.

Sincerely yours,

Andrew A. Sorensen

President