

Ideas to grow higher education in NWLA spark inside summit

Shreveport-Bossier Business Alliance connects colleges with the workforce

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Shreveport, La. - Local leaders discuss ways to fix the problems of higher education in Northwest Louisiana.

A summit took place inside the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce Tuesday afternoon called the Shreveport-Bossier Business Alliance. It brings together businesses, college system administrators and state politicians to find out what is needed and look for possible solutions to budget concerns and the region's role in the state.

"What has been important in Baton Rouge is that Northwest Louisiana is down there," said Phillip Rozeman, founder of the SBBA.

Some of the big issues discussed during the meeting include bringing back the constitutional amendment that recently failed on the 2016 ballot. It would have granted college boards the autonomous authority to set tuition and fees rather than waiting on

the state legislature. State Representative Thomas Carmody supports bringing it back to voters.

"It will take the public understanding the importance of them having the ability to establish and set their tuition that they need to charge in order to be economically viable," Carmody (R) District 6 said.

Along with increasing investment for LSU Shreveport where both funding and enrollment is down. State Representative Cedric Glover said the university has fallen behind in the state and that needs to change.

"What we are missing is that real, true commitment to a comprehensive research university that is needed to be able to serve the interests of a city the size of Shreveport and a region as large and dynamic as Northwest Louisiana. There's an old saying that great cities need great universities. If we want Shreveport to be that great city we all envision then we've got to have a greater, larger and more substantial commitment that what we have now," Glover (D) District 4 said.

Talks also involved looking for ways to get around statutory or constitutional dedications which basically prevent money from shifting from one service or entity in state government to another.

"What it ends up meaning is that you can be cash-rich in some area or function of state government and very poor in some others. You still having to come up with some other source of free and unencumbered source of revenue that go over and address the situation that's still lacking," Glover said.

Another issue brought up is how to provide incentives for non-traditional students who are 25 and older, which Carmody referred to as the "key to Louisiana's success."

Leaders hopes to translate the feedback to decision-makers in Baton Rouge.

Other legislators who participated in the panel include, State Senator Barrow Peacock (R), State Representative Sam Jenkins (D), State Representative Gene Reynolds (D) and State Representative Alan Seabaugh (R).

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