It’s Time to Know and Believe the TRUTH About SC State University

An Opinion Editorial by President Thomas J. Elzey

In recent years, news of the trials and turmoils of SC State University has dominated the headlines of every local and regional news entity. Splashed across the front pages above the folds and leading the news cycles on many television news casts, there have been numerous reports that tell a dismal and disappointing story about SC State, its financial troubles; its presidents and board members, and any associated topic that lends itself to eroding public perceptions about this state’s only publicly supported historically black institution of higher learning. Additionally, editorials and opinion pieces offer varied responses to the plight of SC State both with and without regard to what the TRUTH really is. Without a doubt, SC State is the hot plate upon which many have built their lunch and dinner table conversations, street side chatter, and even political rhetoric.

I understand and appreciate the value of the press and greatly respect the job it is charged to do as it relates to serving and informing the public. Our nation’s constitution allows for the freedom to inform and empower our citizens. As a university president committed to fostering positive and productive partnerships with the media, I always welcome the opportunity to provide accurate and timely information concerning the ongoing matters of this university.

Under the leadership of a new administration, “transparency” is not just a buzz word, it is a daily standard by which the university now operates and conducts business. It continues to become evident, however, that as SC State University begins the hard job of restoring public trust and reclaiming its brand as a top ranked and widely recognized institution, my role as president is to correct information inaccurately reported and dispel public misconceptions fueled by the constant barrage of media accounts, editorials, and “street committee” hearsay.

I am setting the record straight about South Carolina State University. It’s time the public knows the TRUTH without editorial influences and the sensational lures of headlines. And it’s time the public finally believes that this university is in recovery, not in despair.

ABOUT OUR FINANCES- HOW DID WE GET HERE?

TRUTH: In Jan., 2013, SC State reported a cash flow deficit of $13.4 million. An internal audit of university finances found that the shortfall was the result of the university’s failure to “right-size” following serious reductions in funding from state and federal sources. These continuous cuts in funding triggered a downward spiral of the university’s financial condition and no measures were adopted to replace revenue, curtail expenditures or streamline operations. Instead, band aid practices (i.e. utilization of 1890 funds), gave the illusion of balanced budgets and adequate cash reserves.
ABOUT OUR ACCREDITATIONS-

**TRUTH:** On June 10, 2013, the university received a letter from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges placing the university on warning. The letter cited non-compliance with standards concerning finances and board governance.

**TRUTH:** On June 19, 2014, the SACSCOC board placed SC State University on “probation”, citing finances. The standard concerning board governance was reintroduced. In its narrative, the SACSCOC board explained that the university’s board of trustees is ultimately responsible for the school’s financial condition. The university will remain on probation for one year. SC State University’s regional accreditation remains intact. The University’s nationally accredited programs maintain accreditation by their respective accrediting agencies and associations.

ABOUT THE $6 MILLION LOAN FROM THE STATE-

**TRUTH:** On April 30, 2013 The Governor and members of the budget and control board extended a $6 million loan to SC State University. From that loan, $500,000 was retained by the state for the appointment of a financial consultant to advise the university on finances. To date, a financial advisor has not been named by the state. The remaining $5.5 million has been disbursed to the university and used to pay outstanding bills.

**TRUTH:** State lawmakers have passed a proviso in support of the formation of a blue ribbon panel comprised of former and current university presidents, SC State University board members and legislators. The purpose of the special panel was to assess the university’s current status and make recommendations on how to aid the university in achieving long term viability.

ABOUT THE PROPOSED $12 MILLION LOAN

**TRUTH:** The blue ribbon panel has recommended that lawmakers extend an additional loan to the university for $12 million to be incrementally disbursed over a three-year period. Lawmakers have not yet acted on the panel’s recommendation.
ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SC STATE UNIVERSITY-

As lawmakers consider making good on their commitment to SC State, the institution continues to move forward, employing measures to stabilize the university. We are not sitting idly waiting to be “saved.” Instead, we devote our talents and energies to strengthening a university whose mission is to provide a quality education to its students, and doing it with a standard of EXCELLENCE.

TRUTH: On July 18, 2014 the SC State University board of trustees passed a balanced budget, its first in recent years.

TRUTH: In July, 2014, the SC State University Foundation pledged $1 million to help bolster enrollment.

TRUTH: By the end of fiscal year 2013, the university recorded a 56% increase in fundraising over the previous year.

TRUTH: In August, 2014, SC State welcomed its largest Freshman class in two years and continues to implement a multi-year enrollment management plan aimed at increasing enrollment.

TRUTH: Our academic programs remain strong and intact despite recent cost-cutting measures to balance our budget.

For nearly 120 years, South Carolina State University has been a major force in the Orangeburg community, the State of South Carolina and this nation; educating young men and women and training them to become productive global citizens. One need not defend the relevancy of a SC State University to critics. Our very presence and the results that we produce speak volumes about our value.

- More than $150 million economic impact on the Greater Orangeburg community
- 1890 Extension programs provide nutrition, early childhood education and advances Agribusiness in rural and urban communities throughout South Carolina
- 19 US Army General Officers leading troops at home and abroad
- 100% employability of Speech Pathology majors
- The state’s largest producer of certified teachers from our Teacher Education Program
- Leading provider of nuclear engineers to the Federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- The only university in South Carolina offering a BS in Nuclear Engineering

………..and the list goes on.
The **TRUTH IS**……South Carolina State University is here to stay. We are overcoming our current challenges and we have a bright and promising future, emerging even stronger than ever. I implore the public to know the TRUTH and believe that its support inspires and ensures our success.

Thomas J. Elzey  
President  
South Carolina State University