

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

Our Opinion: Killing our economic engine

Layoffs won't help FSU or state achieve goals

| • PUBLISHED: JULY 24, 2010 2:00AM

Do we as citizens of Florida mean it when we say our universities will help drive our economic recovery and are a key to our future?

The layoffs of Florida State University professors made the news again this week.

An arbitrator heard FSU's side of the story as he considers a protest from the United Faculty of Florida, the union representing faculty, over the layoff of 21 tenured professors. A decision isn't expected until September.

But a union grievance is just a sideshow to the main issue: Do we as citizens of Florida mean it when we say our universities will help drive our economic recovery and are a key to our future?

Editorial Board interviews with candidates this election season demonstrate how much we rely on our universities. Consider what the candidates have said:

A candidate for mayor called FSU, Florida A&M and Tallahassee Community college our biggest economic assets. A City Commission candidate stressed alliances with our universities. County Commission candidates talked of economic incubators and cooperation with FSU and FAMU. One School Board candidate wants university students to help mentor needy local pupils, while another spoke of how hard it is to find math and science teachers to help meet new state graduation requirements.

A candidate for the state House spoke of retraining workers for our new renewable-energy economy. Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, a candidate for attorney general, spoke of working with the chancellor of the State University System as Florida seeks to develop biotech, aerospace and alternative-energy industries. Even Republican candidates for Congress stressed the need for a strong education system.

And FSU administrators go to arbitration to defend the layoffs of 21 tenured faculty, which were just part of cuts the university made to make up for an \$82 million reduction in state funding.

Florida State, like the candidates, dreams big. Since 2005, it has been seeking to join the big boys in the world of research universities as a member of the Association of American Universities. That would make FSU more competitive in attracting dollars for high-tech research. In addition, one of new FSU President Eric Barron charges has been to raise \$1 billion.

But this past January, *Science* magazine wrote about the effect the layoffs had on science programs at FSU. The article said FSU was laying off more tenured faculty than the other 10 schools in the State University System combined.

Jordan Kurland, associate general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, said in early June that no other university in the nation could match FSU's layoffs of tenured faculty. "I don't think you'll find a case of a major research university having to cut anywhere near this kind of magnitude," Mr. Kurland said.

Times are hard. There's no denying that.

But if we want our universities to prosper, if we expect them to be the economic engines of a new economy, if we rely on them to train the scientists — and plain old good citizens — of tomorrow, we must give them the financial support they need today. And they in turn must do all they can to preserve their most valuable resource — their faculty — through the bad times.

Drastic cuts approved in a three-year budget last year — not just of the 21 tenured faculty, but of whole departments and many other programs as well as nearly 200 positions — are devastating to FSU and to the local and state economy.

As former School of Theatre dean Richard Fallon wrote earlier this year, the economy will come back — but FSU's reputation might not.
