FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement from Chancellor Mark Heinrich

May 13, 2015

As you know, the Alabama Legislature and the Governor have given final approval to legislation establishing an independent Board of Trustees for the Alabama Community College System. While there have been public discussions of this approach to the governance of the Alabama Community College System for a number of years, approval of this legislation represents a fundamental commitment by our leadership to focus greater emphasis on the two-year colleges’ core mission to provide a unified system of institutions delivering excellence in academic education, adult education and workforce development.

We have all referred to some critical turning point in our own lives and our corporate and public history as “WATERSHED MOMENTS.” Such moments are brought about by circumstances which stop us in our tracks. It’s a moment when everything changes. A point in time when nothing will ever be the same! Like a compass that provides direction, these are the moments that move us to new ways of thinking, relating, discerning, and accepting. More often than not, the future and vision of tomorrow are captured in these moments.

I fundamentally believe that every life, especially the lives of the students served by the State’s two-year college system, has the opportunity for Watershed Moments. As our State’s delivery system for jobs and skills training and the pursuit of academic achievement, the Alabama Community College System stands at this very instance realizing that a very important public debate has occurred regarding our System’s governance, and this change will define our successes as we move forward in this new era. Today the Alabama Community College System stands at the pinnacle of its Watershed Moment. Today, our System has come of age. With its own independent and distinct Board of Trustees to function as a guardian of our student training and education missions, we need not allow fear or concern of change to cause us to succumb to crippling or distracting emotions. Rather, we should embrace this governance change as that moment in our history when growth, opportunity and endless possibilities have been born. Our ancestors dreamed of a world without boundaries. We will only limit our potential under this new plan of leadership if, in the name of safety, protection, and reservation, we refuse to achieve.

There are some discoveries and truths we all must recognize in this Watershed Moment. For several years our System, including our students, faculty, and staff, have grown accustomed to being skeptical and at times fearful or untrusting of the environment in which we have worked. These attitudes and even some cynicism have been born and perpetuated out of monetary and budget concerns, change and approaches of political
leadership, and also, in part, some of our own System’s resistance to change. The world and public expectations that surround us and demand more and more from us each day can overwhelm us in such a way that we might even temporarily lose our way or dilute our mission. In some instances, we have allowed our fears to justify almost everything.

With the leadership of the Board of Trustees, we will aggressively operate the Alabama community colleges’ technical and workforce development programs to provide Alabama businesses the skilled workforce they need and deserve. The Alabama Community College System must equally provide the necessary course offerings and programs to allow our students to be prepared for eventual transfer to four-year institutions. I am committed to the task and the responsibility to lead the Alabama Community College System to provide instruction and workforce development initiatives that are responsive to industry needs—from highly-specialized instruction to programs that help prepare entry-level employees to meet growing, available job demands.

I want to thank the good people of this state who served on our governing State Board of Education in the past years. These men and women provided selfless and unwavering leadership to pilot our System to its rightful place as a leading educational system engaged in local and international education and training. While our governance is changing and we will shortly usher in a new era of committed leaders, we are resolved and steadfast in our System’s obligation to continue to meet its broad-based mission to provide quality educational opportunities to enhance the lives of the communities we serve.

To our newly confirmed Board of Trustees, on behalf of the entire Alabama Community College System, I want you to know that I welcome the opportunity to work with you to define a vision for the future of Alabama’s community colleges at a very critical juncture in the life of the System. Beyond today’s headlines, I fully intend to use this Watershed Moment to create and implement a new future for our System. The people of the great state of Alabama expect and deserve a community college system managed efficiently and effectively – and that’s exactly what we will provide. I’m personally committed to delivering sound management, and I urge our new Board to join us in our effort to re-energize, to focus and to lead the Alabama Community College System so that we best serve our students – the citizens of our great state!

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