

Tulane celebrates excellence at the State Capitol

March 27th, 2024

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President Michael A. Fitts and Senate President Cameron Henry stand with Legislative Scholars at Tulane Day at the Capitol. From left: Philippe Soileau, President Fitts, Senate President Henry, Navya Murugesan, Payton Doyal, Roma Kolluru, Julia Miller, Lucy John and Zoe Walker. (Photo courtesy of Jason Cohen)

Tulane University officials gathered at the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge on March 20 for a day of festivities, meetings and proclamations, all designed to celebrate Tulane's contributions to the state and beyond.

It was Tulane Day at the Capitol, a chance for everyone from President Michael A. Fitts to the university's legislative scholars to meet with lawmakers and state officials, including Gov. Jeff Landry, Senate President Cameron Henry and House Speaker Phillip DeVillier, to discuss all the ways Tulane and the state can benefit from each other's support.

It was also a chance for the Louisiana House of Representatives and the Louisiana Senate to commend Fitts and, in a resolution, "wish him and the university continued success in bettering life for all Louisianans by educating the leaders and discovering the cures of tomorrow."

Fitts is marking his 10th year as Tulane's president, and the resolution lauded him for helping "Tulane achieve an unprecedented level of success on every measure of academic excellence." The resolution cited Tulane's significant expansion of its downtown campus, initiatives to keep the best and brightest Louisiana students at home, and a 70 percent increase in research funding in the last six years.

"Tulane would not be the kind of university it is absent its unique location, and Louisiana is stronger and more economically vibrant because of Tulane," Fitts said. "Today is an opportunity for us to underscore how closely our university and our home state are linked and the profound difference we have made and will continue to make in the lives of Louisiana residents through research, health care, education and economic growth."

Fitts and other university leaders spent much of the day making the rounds of governmental and legislative offices. As meetings were taking place upstairs, the grand marble Memorial Hall, often referred to as a rotunda, served as the ideal space for Tulane to showcase its various accomplishments and programs.

With a backdrop of green and blue balloon bouquets, representatives from Tulane admissions, medicine, nursing, biomedical engineering, facilities and a legislative scholars program distributed such swag as magnets, beads, water bottles, umbrellas and fans, all while giving passersby, both legislators and the general public, a glimpse into Tulane's plans and successes.

Among the representatives was Brenda Douglas, dean of the new nursing program at Tulane within the School of Medicine, which will begin classes this fall. "We're here to show how Tulane can partner with the state to advance this initiative," she said. "We need nurses in this state."

Shawn Abbott, vice president for enrollment management and dean of admission, emphasized the importance of Tulane having a presence in Baton Rouge, especially with [the launch of the nursing program](#), which is partnering with the Tulane School of Professional Advancement.

"It's not every year that we launch such a program that will have such a powerful impact on the citizens of Louisiana," Abbott said, "so it was great to get face time with so many leaders to explain how Tulane is going to positively impact health care in Louisiana."

Katherine Raymond, a professor of practice in biomedical engineering, and senior Alyssa Bockman were proud to share information about the department's [mobility trainer project](#). Partnering with the nonprofit MakeGood, students have designed and produced dozens of trainers to help toddlers build strength and independence, and in the process, prepare for real wheelchairs.

"I love telling the story of how we educate students in biomedical engineering," Raymond said. "It's very much about hands-on work, being involved in the community and designing to make a societal impact."

Those passing by the Tulane tabling area also had a chance to view architectural renderings of Tulane's downtown redevelopment, learn about the Tulane School of Medicine's Bariatric Surgery Program and find out more about the Tulane Legislative Scholars Program. Under this program, which dates back to 1884, Tulane is required to give each state legislator the opportunity to nominate an eligible Louisiana student from their districts to receive a one-year, full-tuition Tulane scholarship paid for by the university. Legislators can renominate the scholarship recipient in subsequent years as they work toward their degree.

Several scholarship recipients were among the Tulane contingent and were thrilled to discuss what the scholarship has meant to them.

"It's meant everything," said Philippe Soileau, a sophomore from Eunice who was nominated by Rep. Phillip DeVillier. "It opened the door to Tulane. The fact that I can get this kind of quality education without having to worry is amazing."

Payton Doyal, a senior from Shreveport, said it has been an honor to be a Legislative Scholar, and he is especially grateful to his nominating senator, former Sen. Louie Bernard, whom he keeps in touch with regularly. "It has been such a unique experience, and I would not trade it for any other."



President Michael A. Fitts stands with Louisiana State Senate members and university leaders on the Senate floor following the reading of the proclamation recognizing Fitts' 10 years as president. (Photo courtesy of Jason Cohen)