

Mississippi governor's plan to merge three HBCUs come under fire

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JACKSON, MS (NNPA) - Dozens of students, members of the NAACP, alumni and concerned constituents gathered for a rally at the Mississippi State Capitol last Friday to protest Gov. Haley Barbour's proposal to merge Mississippi's three historically Black universities.

Barbour has proposed merging Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State into Jackson State University. Outraged, students from each of the respective universities gathered on the steps of the State Capitol to let their voices be heard.

"Education is an economic equalizer," said Othor Cain, Jackson State University NAACP adviser. "If the governor is serious about fiscal responsibility, he should understand that students need a quality education in order to rise out of poverty."

A crowd of students attended the state College Board meeting last Thursday expecting a discussion about the proposal, but there was none. Barbour also has said he wants to consolidate Mississippi University for Women with Mississippi State. Under his plan, no campuses would close. The governor said the restructuring could save the state \$35 million off a nearly \$5.5 billion budget. The proposed change would leave Mississippi with five public universities rather than the current eight.

Barbour's consolidation proposal would have to be approved by lawmakers. It is part of his suggested budget for the fiscal year that begins next July 1.

Some Alcorn State University alumni called the governor's recommendation to merge the college with Jackson State University devastating.

Lawmakers would have to approve the governor's plan to merge the schools before it happens. The governor said the plan may not be popular, but it's necessary to help balance the 2011 budget as revenues continue to fall. "It would be like stripping us of part of our culture and our heritage and our camaraderie," said Alcorn graduate John Smith.

The governor's office said it's too early to say if the school's names will change, but they will all be run by Jackson State's president. Also the sports teams at Alcorn and Mississippi Valley would be disbanded with JSU's athletic program remaining.

Games such as this weekend's much anticipated Capital City Classic football game between Jackson State and Alcorn could end if the schools were to merge.

Opponents of the merger have created a website that has updates and an online petition. For more information visit www.savemshbcus.org