

Today's News

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Former Florida Governor Sues to Prevent Legislature From Setting Tuition

By [LYNDSEY LEWIS](#)

Former Florida Gov. Bob Graham and several others sued the state's Legislature Friday over who has the right to set tuition at public universities.

The suit aims to strip legislators of the power to set the rates, and to hand the responsibility to the Board of Governors. The board, created by a constitutional amendment in 2002, was intended to oversee Florida's 11 public universities.

Mr. Graham, who led the charge to establish the board, maintains that the amendment gave the board authority to set tuition. He also maintains that, because the amendment was approved by voters, it is unconstitutional for the Legislature to establish tuition rates. He said the board's timidity had prevented it from exerting its full power.

"There has been a more recent perception that Florida is retreating in its support of higher education," said Mr. Graham, who is also a former Democratic U.S. senator. He was joined in the suit by -- among others -- a former Florida Congressman, Lou Frey, a Republican, and a former Florida State University president, Talbot (Sandy) D'Alemberte.

Mr. Graham said he had the support of Florida university presidents, although he declined to give names. University leaders in the state have complained for years that low tuition rates restrict the institutions' revenue, preventing them from keeping pace nationally.

The Legislature this year approved a 5-percent hike in statewide tuition, but the increase was eliminated by Gov. Charlie Crist, a Republican, who was not named in Mr. Graham's lawsuit. The defendants in the case are listed as Marco Rubio, speaker of the Florida House, and Ken Pruitt, president of the Florida Senate. Both chambers are controlled by Republicans.

Mr. Pruitt issued a statement challenging the lawsuit's merit. "This lawsuit is nothing more than an attempt to get unbridled tuition increases," he said. "God help our students if they win."

Bill Edmonds, the Board of Governors' director of communications, had no comment other than to say that the board would discuss the issue at its next meeting, on Tuesday.

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