



# **PRESS RELEASE**

## *Utah System of Higher Education*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 18, 2004

Contact: David Buhler, 801-321-7162

### **Higher Education Mourns the Passing of Chalmers Gail Norris**

Chalmers Gail Norris, 73, Executive Director of the Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority (UHEAA) and Associate Commissioner for Student Financial Aid, passed away at his home in Sandy early Tuesday morning. Norris joined the Utah System of Higher Education in 1982 as Associate Commissioner for Budget and Finance, and became the Executive Director of UHEAA in 1986. In 1991, he became Associate Commissioner for Student Financial Aid.

Under Norris' leadership UHEAA has become one of the leading student financial aid agencies in the nation with programs for guaranteed student loans, direct financial assistance, and college savings accounts. Its Loan Purchasing Program's portfolio of student loans consists of 113,000 borrowers with an aggregate outstanding balance of \$1.1 billion. In fiscal year 2003 alone, it guaranteed over 85,000 new loans valued at \$394 million. By operating the programs locally on a non-profit basis, UHEAA passes along to student borrowers millions of dollars of savings a year (\$10.5 million in borrow benefits in fiscal 2003). It has maintained one of the lowest borrower default rates in the nation (currently ranked as the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest). The Utah Centennial Opportunity Program for Education (UCOPE) provides over 2,000 grant awards (totaling \$1.2 million) per year and nearly 500 work-study opportunities (totaling nearly \$900,000) per year for needy Utah students attending both public and private colleges and universities. The Utah Education Savings Plan (UESP) Trust encourages saving for college, and is consistently ranked as one of the top three tax deferred college savings plans in the nation. As of December 31, 2003 UESP had 40,489 participant agreements with total account balances of \$593 million. A subsidiary agency of the State Board of Regents, UHEAA's operational expenses are covered entirely through program earnings and without state tax fund appropriations.

"Gail was a leader in Higher Education, not only in Utah, but in student financial aid circles nationally," stated Commissioner of Higher Education Richard E. Kendell. "He leaves behind the best run program in the country, and through his work, literally hundreds of thousands of students have been helped in achieving their goals in higher education."

Former Commissioner Cecelia H. Foxley, who worked closely with Norris for over 18 years, stated, "Gail is a valued colleague and friend. I knew I could always count on Gail to 'go the extra mile.' His work was always thorough, and complete. His commitment to his work gave a new definition to the phrase 'work ethic.' During my professional career in Minnesota, Iowa and Utah, I never had a more dedicated, hard-working colleague. When a staff member encountered a hardship, Gail was the first to offer a humanitarian solution. Gail enjoyed a national reputation in financial aid and higher education circles and his many contributions at the state, regional and national levels are highly regarded. We will all miss him very much!"

(more)

The Utah System of Higher Education includes the University of Utah, Utah State University, Weber State University, Southern Utah University, Snow College, Dixie State College of Utah, College of Eastern Utah, Utah Valley State College, Salt Lake Community College, Utah College of Applied Technology.

Norris was active in national and regional organizations associated with student financial aid and access, and served as Chairman of the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs from 1995-1996. Prior to coming to Utah in 1982, Norris had served in a variety of positions in Higher Education in Washington and Pennsylvania, including as the Executive Coordinator for the Washington State Council on Postsecondary Education, and Director of Planning and Budget Officer of the University, Penn State University. He served five years in the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. He also is a veteran of the U.S. Army Reserve, and was activated during the second Berlin Crises in 1961-1962. He earned a B.S. in Education from Shippensburg State Teachers College, and Masters Degree in Government/Public Administration, from George Washington University. A native of Pennsylvania, he started his career in education as a Social Studies Teacher at Middleburg Area High School, Middleburg, Pennsylvania. He is survived by his wife, Rei, son, Jeff, and daughter-in-law, Kathleen, and three grandchildren, Jack, Mary and Casey.

Commissioner Kendell has appointed Dr. Mark Spencer as the Acting Executive Director of UHEAA, while continuing in his current role as Associate Commissioner for Finance and Facilities.

###