



For Immediate Release

Tuesday, December 13, 2022

Media Contact

Jessie Greene, Coordinator of College Access Communications

Jessie.Greene@tn.gov

615-741-1318

**THEC Announces Departure of Executive Director and
Appointment of Interim**

NASHVILLE, TN – December 13, 2022 – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) voted yesterday to appoint Dr. Robert M. Smith as the agency's interim executive director after a special called meeting.

Smith will step into the role following the departure of Dr. Emily House later this month. House, who has served as executive director since 2021, is stepping down after nine years of government service.

"Dr. House has been an outstanding executive director and public servant to the people of Tennessee," said THEC Chairman Evan Cope. "I am grateful that Dr. Smith is willing to serve as interim executive director. He has a distinguished career in higher education, and I cannot imagine anyone more qualified to lead THEC during this transition."

The THEC executive director serves at the pleasure of the Commission, and also leads the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC).

"I am humbled by the opportunity to serve Tennessee students and colleges as interim executive director," Smith said. "I am particularly eager to meet with Commission staff and visit Tennessee's colleges to learn more about their needs and how we can better serve them for the mission of THEC."

Smith is special advisor to the University of Tennessee system for executive talent and leadership development. He has served in this role since 2017, following 18 months as interim chancellor for UT Martin. Smith previously served as dean of the

UT Martin School of Arts and Sciences, executive director of the WestStar Leadership Program, and director of the Tennessee Governor's School for the Humanities.

In 1999, he began serving as provost and later president of Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania before retiring in 2012 as president emeritus.

Smith has a doctorate from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He has received two national awards from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for teaching excellence and was selected a "First-Year Student Advocate" by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Smith and his wife, Ramona, live in Franklin, Tennessee.

The board also appointed an advisory search committee to begin the hiring process for a permanent leader for the agencies. That committee will direct and develop a process for full Commission consideration at their scheduled January 27, 2023 meeting.

###

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The Commission develops, implements, evaluates postsecondary education policies and programs in Tennessee while coordinating the state's systems of higher education, and is relentlessly focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential.