Louisiana’s economic momentum takes center stage at 46th Tulane Business Forum

October 14, 2025



Susan Bourgeois, left, secretary of Louisiana Economic Development, highlighted some of the state's recent economic wins in a Tulane Business Forum conversation with Phillip May, president and CEO of Entergy Louisiana.

From billion-dollar industrial investments to the coffee business, the Port of New Orleans, AI and higher education, Louisiana’s expanding economic footprint was on full display at the 46th annual Tulane Business Forum.

The event, an annual presentation of the Tulane Association of Business Alumni (TABA), took place on Friday, Oct. 10, at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Titled “Rooted in Louisiana, Growing Beyond,” this year’s forum attracted more than 500 business leaders to learn how Louisiana companies and talent are making their mark on the world stage while driving transformation at home.

Delivering the luncheon keynote address was Paul Friedman (MBA/JD ’96), executive vice president of the Music Affairs Group with Sony Pictures Entertainment. A dual degree graduate of Tulane, Friedman discussed how business principles and legal frameworks support the use of music in film and television production.

The morning keynote session, “Louisiana Opportunity,” featured a conversation between Susan Bourgeois, secretary of Louisiana Economic Development, and Phillip May, president and CEO of Entergy Louisiana. Bourgeois discussed how public-private collaboration, targeted investments and forward-looking policy are transforming Louisiana’s economy and highlighted some of the state’s economic wins of the last 21 months, including the $10 billion Meta data center in Richland Parish and the nearly $6 billion Hyundai steel plant in Donaldsonville.

“We’ve been working hard to change the narrative,” Bourgeois said. “There’s been this feeling that we’re not good enough. We want to change that.”

The forum kicked off with a welcome from Tulane Association of Business Alumni President Taylor Gilbert (TC ’05, MBA ’12) and New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center President and CEO James Cook.

Next came a session on the New Orleans’ coffee business featuring Scott Ballard (UC ’95), co-founder of PJ’s Coffee parent company Ballard Brands; Janet Colley Morse, Director of Customer Relations, Dupuy Group; and Ryan McKinnon, COO of Westfeldt Bros. Inc. Amanda Coates, vice president of Cargo Development with the Port of New Orleans, served as moderator.

Tulane President Michael A. Fitts followed with an update on the university, highlighting its $5.2 billion economic impact on the state of Louisiana. Fitts discussed the university’s ambitious plans for its downtown campus, which he said is expected to grow to encompass 25 buildings accommodating 4,000 students and 5,000 employees.

Following a break, Christopher Ralston, partner with Phelps Dunbar, and Brian Stempel, head of customer advocacy with Lineal Services, discussed how AI is changing business in general and the legal profession in particular.

“There’s a lot of discussion around, ‘Is AI going to take all our jobs and are we going to live in some dystopian future?’” said Stempel. “My view is no, particularly when it comes to legal issues. But it is unavoidable. You have a new world that you have to engage with AI, and I think there’s lot of ways for us to start engaging with that that create benefit.”

Next, Shelbe Russ, president and CEO of AOS Interior Environments and board member of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, interviewed Paula Tkac, executive vice president and director of research with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, about the economy, including the Fed’s dual mandate to achieve maximum employment and price stability.

“If you think about these two parts of the dual mandate, oftentimes they kind of go together,” Tkac said. “But now we’re in a place where inflation is above target and the labor market looks slow, so what do you do? A lot of what we talk about [at the Fed] is which risk is more concerning right now, and, in fact, we ask our board of directors for input on that.”

Freeman School Dean Paulo Goes also delivered a brief update on the Freeman School before introducing Friedman for his luncheon keynote.

The Tulane Association of Business Alumni of the Freeman School of Business at Tulane University represents over 25,000 alumni worldwide, and the forum is its marquee event. Each year, the forum features speakers of national and international acclaim who address a variety of general business topics.