**Students Call for No Fee Increases**

Why have students across the state been organizing demonstrations calling for no increase in fees and fair treatment for the community colleges? Their anger is an intelligent reaction to the 2003-04 Governor Davis proposal to increase community college fees from the current level of $11 per unit to $24 per unit. He proposes that the $149 million increased revenue resulting from the fee increase be offset by a loss of $215 million in funding to the community colleges as a result of the loss of students resulting from the fee increase. In total the governor has proposed a 10.4% decrease in funding for the community colleges in 2003-04 when compared with the approved budget for 2002-03. To community college students all of this translates to a 188% increase in fees accompanied by decreased class offerings – they pay more and receive less.

In the past when fee increases have been implemented, the loss of students has averaged a little over 1% for each $1 increase. Using this yardstick, community colleges would expect to lose in the neighborhood of 13% of its students due to the governor’s proposal. This equates to a loss in excess of 200,000 students – more students than are enrolled at all of the campuses of the University of California combined. If patterns follow past year experiences, the bulk of this drop in students will be concentrated among those who are low income, Latino, African-American, and older students (who have been hard-hit by the economic recession). These students, in addition, are the least likely to have access to information concerning financial aid and opportunities to have their fees waived.

The legislature needs to reject the governor’s budget proposal for a 10.5% cut in community college funding and demand that the community colleges not be cut disproportionally when compared with K-12, the University of California and the California State University Systems.

The legislature should resist efforts to increase fees for attendance at community colleges. Community college education today has the same standing as high school education did in the past – it is required in virtually all jobs that pay a living wage. A free and accessible community college education benefits all residents of California. A well-educated public increases the economic opportunity for all Californians by bringing industries into the state that require well educated work forces.

The legislature should consider whether it is good public policy to tax students for the benefit of the State General Fund and restrict access to public higher education based on race, age, and economic class. The legislature should also consider whether $149 million in new revenue (in a state budget of $100 billion) is worth the human potential lost resulting from the tax on students.

I look forward to a time when there are no fees and the ability to pay is not a determinant of who attends college. Let’s bring California back to the time when we led the nation in education and we had the wisdom not to levy a fee on community college students.

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