

April 15, 2009

To: Washington State Senators and Members of the House of Representatives

From: Former Presidents of Washington's Four-year Public College and Universities

Dear Legislators:

As former leaders of our state's four-year public college and universities, we have been following the news from the Legislature regarding the higher education budget for the upcoming biennium with great interest and, particularly of late, with deep concern. While we recognize the historically dire nature of our state's economic situation, we are dismayed by the magnitude of the proposed reductions to higher education in the legislative budgets. In our combined years in higher education, we have never seen cuts this severe. Without moderation, they would deny tens of thousands of deserving students the opportunity to get a college education all the while sapping the economic future of our state.

The state of Washington has built a high-quality, widely accessible higher education system that is the envy of many states. It has taken decades to develop this system and achieve this level of distinction. Universities are not like factories that gear up and gear down to meet changing demand. Demand for higher education is on the rise. It takes time to develop educational and research programs and to nurture the talent and innovation that are the hallmarks of an exceptional higher education enterprise. Dismantling the progress that has been made—as the proposed budget cuts would surely do—would not just cause our universities to stall, it would cause inestimable damage from which it would take many years to recover.

We know that you face an immense challenge to balance the state's budget. Fortunately, Governor Gregoire has issued a responsible, thoughtful proposal to help Washington get through this difficult period without jeopardizing our higher education system or our state's future: give Washington's public four-year college and universities the authority to increase undergraduate resident tuition by 14% in each of the next two years. Because of increased financial aid and tax credits provided through the federal stimulus package, the burden of the increased costs would not be passed unduly on to students and their families. And our higher education institutions would have the means to remain viable and productive for future generations of Washingtonians.

Public universities have served Washington's citizens extremely well—educating our children, enabling our state to thrive in an economy dependent on knowledge and ideas, and improving the quality of all of our lives. We hope you will give them the opportunity to continue providing these services by supporting Governor Gregoire's tuition proposal.

Thank you for considering our views as you deliberate on these very important issues.

Sincerely,

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