



Where's the Fight?

Governor Proposes Deep Reductions to Community Colleges

by Jonathan Lightman

Here's a simple test. Which one of these is not like the others?

Higher education leaders not fighting budget cuts – Capitol Alert headline, February 7

"I don't sense the panic." – Assemblymember Sandré Swanson (D – Oakland), Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, in response to testimony of invited system representatives of the University of California, California State University, California Community Colleges, February 7

"I need to convey a very different impression to this Subcommittee on behalf of the faculty – there's extreme outrage over these proposed budget cuts and student fee spikes." – FACCC testimony (public comment), Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, February 7

Before we get to the fight, let's review the proposal on the table for the March budget. Faced with a \$25 billion shortfall, Governor Brown proposed \$12 billion in reductions, \$12 billion in the extension of temporary taxes conditioned upon a vote of the public, and the creation of a \$1 billion reserve.

Community colleges have been asked to endure a \$400 million reduction with the potential for a \$110 restoration if the Legislature raises student fees by 38%. The Administration also proposes to defer \$129 million in payments to the community colleges from one fiscal year to the next, raising the total level of inter-year deferrals to nearly \$1 billion.

Within Proposition 98, the minimum funding guarantee for K-12 and community colleges, our system is being asked to shoulder the pain; K-12 is left unharmed. That means our funding shifts to keep K-12 afloat.

These proposed cuts are all premised upon qualification and passage of a ballot initiative to maintain the temporary tax increases for another five years. While no one knows the impact of a June failure, the prevailing wisdom sums it up in two words, *fiscal Armageddon*.

Clearly, this is an extremely bad scene, with the potential for community colleges to lose thousands of students and many jobs, particularly in the ranks of part-time faculty and classified staff.

So, let's return to the question: where's the fight?

FACCC, alongside the Chancellor's Office and other System partners, is pounding the halls of the Capitol on a daily basis, railing against the budget cuts, and warning against fast-tracking other harmful proposals – like a change in the student census policy as a means for cost cutting. Given FACCC's position as a voice solely for community college faculty, we can also confront head-on the disproportionate impact of these budget cuts on community colleges within Proposition 98. This is a major issue as we may see a partial restoration of our funding pending a successful June election outcome.

FACCC's grassroots efforts, through our Point & Click System, our regional structure, and our electronic alerts (updated daily via the website, www.faccc.org, Facebook and Twitter) provide significant opportunity for faculty and student involvement. But the press, the Legislature and the Governor have all picked up on something very real.

On the ground level – at our campuses and in our communities – there's a palatable sense of fatigue and with only a scant notion of outrage. We've been engaged in what seems to be a never-ending battle for funding and we're craving a return to normalcy. Faculty, students, staff, administrators and others are tired of fighting, and it shows.

Unfortunately, we'll not be returning to normalcy any time soon. We're in the midst of a major economic slump with chronic double-digit unemployment. There's no ability for the colleges to benefit from a natural expansion of the state budget; we're in a state of contraction. Instead, our funding rests upon our continuous advocacy in the State Capitol and a robust grassroots campaign around the state.

It's now time for all community college stakeholders to engage in the following:

- 1) Be educated on budget developments. FACCC's website, www.faccc.org, is the best source of daily information;
- 2) Call your legislators and tell them that you're opposed (strike that, make it, you're outraged) over community college budget cuts and student fee spikes;
- 3) Mobilize for a June election – the fight of our lives. This means campus organizing, fund raising and Get Out the Vote activities. FACCC will play a central role in this campaign; details forthcoming at www.faccc.org.

The press is asking, where's the fight? The Legislature is asking, where's the panic? The public is wondering, "are community colleges vested in their future?"

If we're truly outraged over the cuts, as conveyed in FACCC's testimony to the Assembly Budget Subcommittee, then copy this article and distribute it around with a personal note to your colleagues – "I'm taking a stand in support of our colleges. What about you?"

The current fight in Sacramento will soon be around the state. It's for the future of education and preservation of public services. FACCC is positioned front and center -- you need to be there too.

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