



Governor's "State of the State" message addresses community colleges

Governor Charlie Crist's first "State of the State" message mentioned community colleges but gave no real indication what level of funding the year may bring for our colleges. A major focus of his speech was making housing more affordable and helping homeowners find some form of property tax relief. While every Floridian would applaud that effort, reducing taxes may mean less state revenue and, consequently, less funding for some programs. Governor Crist said, "I have set forth a plan to reduce property taxes by doubling your homestead exemption, making the Save Our Homes protection portable and extending that protection to business and rental properties as well."

Later, he concentrated his remarks on education and spoke about the important work being done by educators at all levels. He announced that he also is proposing "an increase in funding for our state universities and community colleges; without raising tuition." However, some who have reviewed his speech as well as his proposed budget believe that tuition will have to be raised in order to make ends meet. Estimates as high as \$800 million less revenue have been projected for the state's coffers should the Governor's tax reduction plan become law.

Legislative session begins

The opening week of session is always exciting. While committee meetings have been going on for several months, the first days of session give the best indication as to what kind of session we have in store. The Governor set the stage this year with promises of change, House Speaker Rubio added his intent to do the same with his "100 Ideas for Improving Florida," and Senate President Pruitt endorsed improvements while promising to take the cautious and thoughtful road. All three expressed major concerns about the State revenues, and a sense of gloom related to budgets pervaded the halls. To the extent it could be considered good news, there were many reports that leadership wants to protect all levels of education funding. The bad news is that they want to protect us from cuts. Time will tell whether gloomy forecasts actually happen.

In addition to hearing from the Governor and legislative leaders, the FACC legislative team continues to review released bills to determine how they impact the colleges. The bill drafting process is such that many bills are released the first week of session, and the college lobbyists scramble to see what the legislators have in mind. The list of bills being followed by the lobbying team is well over 400 already, and nearly 50 are on the list of "major concern" to the system. It appears that education is a top issue for legislators this year, and lobbyists anticipate an incredibly busy year.

Budget Request

The community colleges have requested and the State Board of Education has approved an increase of \$100,841,051 in state funding in this year's Legislative Budget Request. The State Board has forwarded the Legislative Budget Request to the Governor and highlights of the increases in the request are:

- \$52.25 million to fund Capacity Building;
- \$10 million to improve equalize funding among the colleges (as measured by FTE);
- \$19.6 million to meet rising insurance and utilities costs;
- \$10 million for performance based funding;
- \$4 million to operate new facilities.
- \$5 million for enrollment growth

Bills to Watch

The College System has sponsored or supportive several bills that are considered top priority to pass. Bills that have been on the table for the past couple of years, but not passed, and which are being reintroduced this Session include:

Cosmetology

[HB 117](#) (Carroll) and [SB 920](#) (Wise) amends the licensure requirements related to cosmetology, so that licensure is available for specialties, including hair technician, esthetician and nail technician. Colleges with cosmetology programs have supported this legislation which will allow students to be trained in specific, shorter programs and enter the workforce quickly.

Baccalaureate Degrees

[SB 244](#) and [SB 1570](#) have both been filed by Senator Lynn to address the process for community colleges to obtain approval to offer baccalaureate degrees. A House bill was filed, although subsequently withdrawn. It is expected that a House bill connected to the “100 Ideas” to include similar language to Lynn’s will be filed. As a College System, we want to ensure that the colleges continue to report to the State Board of Education, even regarding baccalaureate degrees, and that the approval process for new programs is simple, yet accountable.

Textbook Sales Tax Exemption

Several bills have been filed to address the rising costs of textbooks. One idea is to create sales tax exemption on college textbooks. [SB 254](#) (Wise) and [SB 2492](#)(Haridopolos), as well as [HB 289](#) (Flores) all would result in such an exemption. Senator Haridopolos’ bill adds private colleges to the exemption, and also restricts educators from receiving inducements to select books. All the textbook bills are subject to an evaluation by the “Revenue Impact Committee” to determine how much revenue the State will lose if the bill passes. Initial reports were close to \$30 million, just for purchases at public college bookstores. Expanding the exemption to private colleges could take the loss of revenue to a level that passage will be extremely difficult.

Financial Aid

Need based financial aid has become a major issue for the community colleges. The Council of Presidents endorsed two pieces of legislation to help our students. [HB 343](#) (Bean) and [SB 918](#) (Wise) amend the College Work Experience Program to allow Adult Vocational (PSAV) students and Educator Preparation Institute (EPI) participants to be included in the program. The bill also allows PSAV students to participate in the Florida Student Access Grants (FSAG). A second bill also addresses FSAG, addressing the issue of the expected family contribution for community college students, and also creates a new “working student” financial aid program, to address those students who can only qualify for student loans. [HB 1443](#) (Thompson) and [SB 2698](#) (Lawson).

Excess Hours

FACC members are sure to be disappointed that Excess Hours bill has resurfaced, even though it was anticipated. Senator Constantine’s bill, [SB 2862](#), was filed by Representative Altman as [HB 1507](#). This bill passed two years ago, but was vetoed by Governor Bush. The bill would require students to pay at 75% tuition tax for taking more than minimally needed hours. The colleges strongly oppose this legislation.

Other Issues of interest to FACC include

As mentioned previously, the FACC legislative team in tracking close to 400 bills and will provide more information on other bills in subsequent editions of *Perception*. Look for updates on:

Retirement

Many bills have been filed that deal with retirement issues. FACC and college lobbyists are watching these closely, and will offer amendments that address college staff interests whenever the opportunity arises.

Articulation

Articulation between sectors, from high school to college, and among postsecondary sectors, appears to be of interest and several bills offer suggestions to enhance the process.

Residency for Tuition Purposes

Residency determination continues to be an issue, with interest generated by FACC members to find solutions that are fair to Florida residents, while insuring that those who come to Florida for the sole purpose of attending college are required to pay out of state tuition. Lobbyists are working closely with DOE and legislators to develop acceptable language.

Public Funding of For-Profit Private Institutions

For-profit institutions continue to offer legislation that is of concern, especially increasing financial aid for their students. This year, issues related to articulation and state control are expected as well.

Full-time Faculty Requirements

At least two legislators are interested in requiring that 75% of public postsecondary institution's faculty be full time tenured or on continuing contract (on track to be so) by 2013.

Stay tuned. There are seven more weeks to go.