

To colleagues at the Seattle Community Colleges –

Last week, our Trustees, Presidents and I met with our legislators in Olympia to talk about the state budget. We also heard from representatives at the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges who are close to the budget situation as it unfolds in the state legislature.

Our legislators told us that this is a budget year unlike any other in memory and that they are under pressure to make some difficult decisions in the months ahead.

We were initially heartened when Governor Gregoire announced her proposed budget for the 2009-11 biennium. The Governor's budget kept cuts to the state's two-year colleges to 6%, and praised community and technical colleges for our work in preparing the state's workforce. On the other hand, budgets for the state's four-year colleges and universities and other state agencies were reduced up to 13.3%.

Since December, however, the economic climate has further deteriorated and recent news from Olympia suggests that cuts to the two-year college system will be deeper. We are all aware of daily news stories of declining revenue forecasts and collections, significant layoffs by our area's employers, and increased numbers of mortgage foreclosures. Financial benefits to our colleges from federal and state stimulus packages are still unknown.

Based on these early indicators and what we have heard from the State Board, we are now preparing for budget reductions of up to 10% for the coming biennium. This amount includes a 4.3% reduction already requested by the state for the current fiscal year, ending in June 2009. A tuition increase will probably be between 5% and 7% and will change the size of the budget cut. However, it is likely that we won't know the tuition rate or other specifics of the 2009-11 budget until June.

Committees at each college and the Siegal Center are preparing proposed reductions for this year and next year. In addition, a district-wide Budget Review Committee is being formed and will begin meeting this month to address how we may work together to increase efficiencies and reduce costs.

This is a difficult situation for everyone. We will continue to share information as we receive it.

Jill Wakefield
Chancellor