

January 26, 2010

Dear Martha,

Before I get to a quick summary of our Legislative Conference, I wanted to update you on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act ("SAFRA"), or [H.R. 3221](#). This is the bill that passed the House of Representatives in September and would reinvest \$87 billion in savings from student loan programs in increased Pell Grants and the American Graduation Initiative.

Yesterday, Contra Costa CCD Chancellor Helen Benjamin, Chancellor Jack Scott, AACC Vice President David Baime and I met with Congressman George Miller, chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor. Chairman Miller continues to be a passionate supporter of community colleges and the investments included in H.R. 3221, as does President Obama and the Administration. Chairman Miller and his staff have actively engaged with us to ensure the final bill works for California's community colleges. However, we must convince the Senate that this education bill is a priority that should be addressed.

Will you e-mail or call Senators Boxer and Feinstein today to urge their quick action on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act?

Ask our Senators to Support Quick Senate Action on the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act

- [E-mail Barbara Boxer](#) or call (202) 224-3553
- [E-mail Dianne Feinstein](#) or call (202) 224-3841

The bill:

- would increase Pell Grant award and numbers by \$40 billion over the next ten years.
- would fund the American Graduation Initiative, which could provide approximately \$150 million per year for California's community colleges to enable improvements in student success.
- would provide \$625 million for community college capital facilities in California.
- is fully paid for through savings created through the direct lending program.

Legislative Conference "Wrap"

The League's Annual Effective Trusteeship Workshop and Legislative Conferences ended yesterday, and both were great successes. As I was leaving the hotel last night, I saw advocacy teams returning from meetings in the Capitol, which they uniformly said were "effective" and "successful." Many teams are continuing legislative meetings today or took their legislators out to dinner last night. The Effective Trusteeship Workshop also had great attendance, with nearly all of the newly elected or appointed trustees in attendance, along with many continuing trustees.

Before getting into the meat of my take-aways from the conference, let me thank the [entire League staff](#) who made the conferences such a success.

Overall: The evaluations I looked at last night were overwhelmingly positive, with some attendees

saying "best ever." However, some attendees wish that we had a better ability to put some lipstick on the pig, and that there was too much doom and gloom. That's a well taken criticism, although I'm not sure anything short of the Rockettes could hide the difficult position higher education, our state and our nation are in. As for the brontosaurus-sized lamb shank served at Sunday night's dinner, all I can say is that I eat a lot of hotel meals, and you never know what you're going to get.

The Budget News: No speaker or panel managed to escape talking about the state's fiscal situation, and many acknowledged that the Governor's budget may be optimistic and the "high water mark" for many state programs. Community colleges are a bipartisan priority, as we heard from State Treasurer Bill Lockyer and Assembly Republican Jim Nielson. We are better positioned than many other programs. However, while community college funding may not be further cut or even receive the governor's proposed increase for growth, the funding for UC and CSU may be overstated in the budget, which could result in a shift of even more students to already overenrolled community colleges.

Bill Lockyer, careful to caution that this year's budget will get worse than it gets better, also noted that the fundamentals of California's demographics and economy remain strong--if we invest in education.

The Legislature: As with every session, the panels with legislators and legislative staff could not hide the very difficult budget situation, which will curtail ambitious legislative agendas. Nevertheless, community colleges were uniformly encouraged to be innovative and focused on student success, and the doors were opened to rethink how we conventionally do things.

The Political Scene: Voters are angry and unpredictable. While our attendees loved the luncheon spirited dialog between KQED Capitol Bureau Chief [John Myers](#) and [Capitol Weekly](#) Editor Anthony York, the conclusion was that the waters are muddied to the point that making predictions could constitute political malpractice. The odds are a face-off between Meg Whitman and Jerry Brown, although somebody could shake up the race, and the political outcome of a Whitman-Brown showdown is unpredictable. (Brown has even yet to declare for governor.) Many of our attendees particularly liked John and Anthony's trip down our political memory lane of budgets, the recall and the consideration of Governor Schwarzenegger's legacy.

For those that liked the conversation and would like more, Anthony and John have a weekly podcast posted on Fridays at <http://blogs.kqed.org/capitalnotes/> and available on iTunes as "KQED Capital Notes Podcast."

Student fees: In the hallway conversations, the most spirited discussion was about student fees. What I heard were significant concurrent concerns about a) suggesting student fees are a better revenue source than broad-base tax extensions, b) "sticker shock" and the perception of affordability must be considered particularly now given the economy, and c) cuts to the student service programs serving our most vulnerable and non fee-paying students might be worse than a fee increase.

While some have absolute positions that fees should not change (or go down) or should go up to the national average (to enable funding to approach national average), most community college leaders appear in the middle. Regardless of the conclusion on the student fee level if needed to backfill cuts, there is still strong support for the concept of limiting fees to the change in per capita personal income, providing advance notice to students and institutions of any fee increase, and ensuring that students (and not the general fund) benefit if fees are increased.

Federal update: Attendees heard the latest from the Beltway from ACCT Director of Public Policy Jee Hang Lee and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Federal Relations Valerie Purnell. In addition to the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, topics included appropriations and further stimulus, the Jobs for Main Street Act, veterans, Workforce Investment Act reauthorization, and the DREAM Act. Both Jee Hang's [presentation](#) and Valerie's [slides on H.R. 3221](#) are available online.

And, finally, community college leaders are split between Vikings fans and Saints fans, with the former looking forward to a rematch next year and the latter anticipating the February 7 showdown.

Thank you for your attendance at the information-packed conference and your legislative advocacy, yesterday, today and throughout the year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott".

Scott Lay
President and Chief Executive Officer
Orange Coast College '94

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