

House Subcommittee Funds Spokane Medical Students

The partnership with the University of Washington and Eastern Washington University to create more education programs that produce additional doctors and dentists has been recommended for funding by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education. Programs to start electrical engineering in Vancouver and expand the nursing programs in Spokane have won the approval of the subcommittee.

That preliminary House budget, the first of its kind in more than 15-20 years, was the highlight of a week in which the 2007 Legislature inched toward the halfway point of the scheduled 105-day session. As that milestone approached, session activities seemed to be getting more serious. Many of the initial hearings and bill preparations have concluded and now decisions are starting to get made. There was discomfort and stern debate among many legislators. Today's first deadline for legislation ground up hundreds of bills that were still stranded in policy committees. Legislators are gearing up to work this weekend to consider legislation with fiscal impact. Those bills have until March 5th to pass fiscal committees in the original house.

WSU has been tracking more than 130 bills that could impact education and research but it appears the list will be pared down considerably with the passing of the deadlines. You can see that list at: <http://www.olympia.wsu.edu/Status/Status2007.stm>.

Governor's Higher Education Budget Gaining Legislative Support. WSU continues its crusade for the Governor's higher education budget (HB 1089, SB 5139.) It appears to be the basis for most of the decisions made in the House subcommittee which is chaired by Rep. Kathy Haigh, D-Shelton. House Higher Education Chair Deb Wallace, D-Vancouver, led efforts to write the higher education section of the budget, which also dealt with early learning and K-12. One of the Governor's most controversial "Washington Learns" proposals for higher education this session has been her proposal to benchmark funding for higher education against the "Global Challenge States," but that has withstood challenges so far to bills in both houses (HB 1883, SSB 5806.) **It is also incorporated in the Subcommittee budget proposal, which now goes to the full Appropriations Committee for consideration for the next couple weeks. It includes at least partial funding for every WSU budget request:**

- A lower tuition hike for WSU students (5 percent per year) than the 7 percent proposed by Gov. Gregoire. WSU praised the lower tuition rate as the Legislature followed the Governor's guidelines for linking tuition rates to state funding. The House subcommittee maintained the Governor's funding level for WSU, while adding an additional \$4 million to make up much of the difference in funding per student created by the lower tuition rate.
- 815 new total enrollments for the WSU system, 87% of the WSU request.
- \$9.5 million to WSU for more doctors, dentists and nurses in the Spokane area.
- \$500,000 support for low-income, first-generation, students at WSU.
- Adds 200 freshman in Vancouver for fall 2007, while the Gregoire budget funds 150.
- The Governor's proposals for adding high demand enrollments, 255 non-medical slots plus 55 health sciences students.
- The Governor's proposals for Bioproducts (\$4 million) and the Unified Agriculture Initiative (\$3 million).
- \$500,000 for commercialization of research.
- Provides \$2.8 million to establish a new electrical engineering program at WSU Vancouver and enroll 25 students in fall 2008.
- A new PhD program in nursing plus enrollments at the master's and bachelor's degree level.
- Funding for Small Business Development Centers and the William D. Ruckelshaus Policy Consensus Center.

Problems with Mount Vernon Funding, Graduate Health Benefits. The House subcommittee budget did raise some concerns for WSU that it did not have in the Governor's budget. More than \$1 million in funding that was provided by the Governor for maintaining full health benefits for WSU research assistants and teaching assistants was not included in the House budget. The Governor's budget provided \$557,000 of the \$734,000 requested by WSU for maintenance and operation of new facilities at the Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Station (WSU Mount Vernon.) WSU has asked the House Appropriations Committee to consider these concerns.

In other developments:

- **Senate Bill 5586**, amended to include \$6.7 million for WSU Bioproducts Research, passed the Senate Water, Energy, and Telecommunications Committee today. A comprehensive environmentally-backed Cleaner Energy Bill, the proposal now goes to the Senate Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

- **Tri-Cities interests** continue to work to secure additional enrollment funding for 110 new freshman enrollment slots, 25 new nursing positions and 10 new electrical engineering position. The Governor and subcommittee budgets provided 75 freshman enrollments, five nursing slots, and no electrical engineering.
- **A coalition of agricultural organizations** are attempting to secure more funding for the Unified Agriculture Initiative. Some House leaders have been advocating \$8 million to \$10 million for the proposal.
- **Funding for the “Stars” program** has been added to a Senate Bill (SSB 5090), a \$10 million proposal that could lead to a nationally-ranked bioproducts researcher for WSU. The bill, however, does not have the support of the Governor’s office, in part because it rewrites her proposal for “Innovation Partnership Zones.” It must pass the Senate Ways and Means Committee by March 5 to remain alive.
- **The Governor’s innovation zone proposal** (HB 1091) has passed the House Appropriations Committee and is awaiting assignment to the House floor for a vote. It is a \$5 million proposal. Innovation Partnership Zones are proposed to be formed around entities like universities or national laboratories. They would be eligible for financial benefits from the state to promote economic development.
- **The Governor’s office today joined higher education** institutions in opposition to Substitute House Bill 2289. It would transfer responsibility for information technology from WSU personnel to Olympia-based state administrators.
- **WSU’s proposed constitutional amendment** to allow improved returns on WSU trust funds continues to move through the Legislature. Substitute House Bill 1784 and Substitute House Joint Resolution 4215 have passed the House Capital Budget Committee and are now in the House Rules Committee. The House bill includes amendments advocated by State Treasurer Mike Murphy and supported by WSU and Joe Dear, of The State Investment Board. Senate Bill 5766 and Senate Joint Resolution 8220 are in the Senate Rules Committee after passing Ways & Means without amendments.

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