



OLYMPIA UPDATE

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Day 57 of a 60-day Session

Legislature may thaw I-960 fee freeze

It's spring break and there may be a thaw in the notion that user fees should be frozen. People don't like fee increases. But legislators are learning they may not like the ramifications of freezing user fees and spreading the costs to all taxpayers. The fees issue went public for the first time in Olympia during the final week of the legislative session. As we now move into the 57th day of a scheduled 60-day session, the thaw has yet to melt away the legislative logjam and WSU has \$1.5 million on ice.

Many routine fee increases in higher education and thousands throughout government cannot occur without approval from the Legislature. Even though last year's biennial state budget provided for 2009 fee increases, a majority vote in each house is required this year. Those are the terms of Initiative 960, a ballot measure approved by voters last November. WSU is urging legislators to authorize routine higher education fees increase in the final supplemental operating budget bill that is now being negotiated in conference committee.

Among WSU organizations that could be hard hit from legislative indecision is the Associated Students of Washington State University at all campuses. ASWSU, like most student governments, relies on student "Services and Activities Fees" for its funding. While S&A Fees committees have not set an increase for 2009, it is clear one will be needed, and the state budget had provided authority for a \$640,000 (7 percent) S&A fees increase for 2008 and 2009. The fees support administrative staff that ensure program delivery and under state budget law, must receive a minimum 2 percent pay increase this fall. Pullman Transit receives S&A fees funding and are undoubtedly is counting on a fee increase to pay for higher fuel prices. Child care programs face increased food costs. Examples of groups funded by S&A fees also include the Cougar Marching Band, the WSU Graduate and Professional Students Association, Student Publications including the Daily Evergreen, Health Advocates, Cable 8 , and ASWSU Programming, which provides concerts and other programs.

There's been some uncertainty among House legislative leaders over how many routine fee increases to authorize...and how to do it. Some House leaders favored an "omnibus fees bill" to accomplish that. Such an omnibus measure amended to include the fee increases sought by higher education passed the House Appropriations Committee Friday on a party-line vote. But now House leaders indicate they will make such changes in the final conference committee version of the Supplemental Operating Budget, an approach reportedly favored by the Senate and the governor. Both the Senate and the governor favor granting higher education the authority to make the routine fee increases that the current budget authorizes.

In addition to S&A-supported programs, there are other WSU programs that will be vulnerable without a legislative fees vote including: special courses, extension courses, workshops and summer session professional courses. The Initiative applies to new fees as well as fee increases. The new Spokane Executive MBA Program, already being advertised and accepting student applications, cannot be provided this fall without fee approval.

Most tuition rates at WSU are not vulnerable, as the WSU Board of Regents set the 2009 tuition rate well before passage of the initiative. But some institutions are much more impacted. The University of Washington, which has not yet set any of its 2009 tuition, has about \$45 million of its budget vulnerable. In addition to universities, agencies of government, like the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture, have a large portion of their budgets reliant on user fee increases next year. The two-year budgets passed by the Legislature last year assumed many of those increases and provided for tuition increases in higher education.

“Performance Agreements On Governor’s Desk”

The long-sought effort to create “performance contracts” or “compacts” or “agreements” between the state and public higher education institutions is headed for the governor’s desk. Engrossed House Bill 2641 will pilot-test a concept in which six-year agreements are developed between policymakers like the Legislature and governor and individual institutions of higher education. On a 92-1 vote Saturday, the state House of Representatives concurred with relatively minor changes by the Senate to send the measure to the governor’s desk.

WSU Student Collective Bargaining Legislation Passes

The agreement between Washington State University and the United Auto Workers Union for enabling legislation that might allow WSU graduate teaching and research assistants to collectively bargain has passed the Legislature. WSU had opposed the bill when House leaders and the UAW said the bill must literally duplicate the law on the books for the University of Washington. However, the union and WSU agreed to changes that were adjudicated by Senate Labor Chair Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle. The House voted 63-30 to accept the WSU-UAW compromise and send Substitute House Bill 2963 to Gov. Christine Gregoire for approval. If signed by the governor, it could set up a campus election to determine if WSU graduate student employees will pay union dues and collectively bargain with the university.

Just four days to go....

There is still no final budget outcome on authority to raise fees, funding for WSU’s core computer study or design funds for the Veterinary Medical Research Building. Engrossed Substitute House Bill 3329, which has passed the House 94-0, still remains in the Senate Rules Committee. The bill would require each institution to submit four or more lists of construction projects to be scored by the governor’s budget office. Normally, at this stage in the session, a bill must have passed each house in some form to be considered alive under legislative rules. However, SHB 3329, might fit the legislative loophole of being a “matter necessary to implement the budget.” A number of bills, including some that have already passed the Legislature, are still in doubt until the final budget is released. Among those:

Substitute House Bill 2582, Student Child Care, passed to the governor Saturday when the Senate concurred with House amendments. The bill is supported by ASWSU and WSU. It creates a new program for the four-year institutions administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board. Funding required to proportionally distribute funds for each institution based on the financial support for child care received by ASWSU and other student governments. But only the budget will determine whether the bill is an improvement for each institution. The state Senate provided \$500,000 for the four-year institutions while the house provided \$325,000.

Senate Bill 6187, the food animal veterinarians scholarship, passed to the governor Thursday when the state Senate concurred 46-0 with House amendments. It was supported by WSU and the Washington Cattleman's Association. It had earlier passed the House 94-0. However, the scholarship program is void if funding is not provided in the supplemental budget.

Substitute Senate Bill 6328, campus safety and security, passed today 41-0 when the Senate concurred with house amendments. The House had earlier approved the bill 96-0. While it now goes to the governor's desk, implementation of actual safety improvements will be up to the budget. It appears unlikely that the \$1.8 million to purchase equipment for warning systems and key card building access recommended for WSU by the governor will be in the final budget. The Legislature is considering a study of campus building "mapping" and an overall state patrol study.

Check Bill Status, Sign Up For Olympia Updates

As always, you can check the status of bills impacting WSU and get the current language from the WSU web site, www.olympia.wsu.edu/status.aspx. For your convenience, bills that are apparently dead are marked in red while live bills are marked in green.

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