



OLYMPIA UPDATE

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House Capital & Operating Supplemental Budgets

House slices “Stars” program

A state biennial budget that provides a \$35 million pay increase for K-12 teachers but holds university budgets nearly even is poised to pass the state House of Representatives Monday.

The budget also contained a surprise cut to the state research universities, slicing more than \$1.5 million from a program that is designed to recruit key “star researchers” for UW and WSU.

Except for the “Stars” cut, the WSU budget was virtually unchanged, increasing only four tenths of one percent in the House proposal (Substitute House Bill 2687.) Most of the \$12 million in additional moneys provided by the House for higher education goes to community college employees and aerospace apprenticeship programs. No major budget requests by Washington State University were funded.

Plans for a new Veterinary Medical Research Building in Pullman got a boost from the House capital construction budget (Substitute House Bill 2765) that passed out of committee today. The proposal contains \$2 million of the \$7.4 million requested to begin design of the building.

The House budgets were released less than a week after the state Revenue Forecast predicted a \$423 million drop in revenues to finance this biennial budget. Just days earlier, many had been expecting a forecast drop of half that amount. About \$231 million of the lost revenues is attributed to a drop in collections in the real estate excise tax.

Despite a lot of pre-budget dialogue in House committees prompted by the events at Northern Illinois University, there was no funding to improve safety at higher education campuses. Some one-time funding for equipment was recommended by Gov. Christine Gregoire but is not contained in any of the budget bills. The House did include funding for a single mental health counselor to be added at WSU. There was also no funding for Global Animal Health or Agriculture requests, and no funding for core computer programs. A number of key legislators raised concerns about Global Animal Health Funding in Appropriations Committee caucuses but no amendments were adopted Friday. The full House of Representatives is expected to pass the budget Monday. The future of such proposals will now rest with the state Senate.

WSU’s largest gain in the budget was \$1.6 million to fix a technical error that was made over the allocation of salary monies in the last biennial budget.

But nearly half of that gain was offset by the unexpected cut to the Stars Program, taking more than three-fourths of the funding for the program impacting UW and WSU. The \$1.5 million cut was funding that was unanimously approved for release to UW and WSU last January by the new state Economic Development Commission. The commission decided to invest in recruiting and starting an international expert in Nanophotonics at UW and a biofuels/bioproducts scientist at WSU.

WSU's new scientist, Birgitt Kiar Ahrin is a world class microbiologist from Denmark who was in Olympia last week to meet with Gov. Gregoire. She will lead WSU efforts from the new Bioproducts Science & Engineering Laboratory Building in Richland, where Pacific Northwest National Laboratory scientists will also be housed. The building is located on the campus of WSU Tri-Cities, across the street from PNNL. Among the areas where she is an expert, is in the conversion of cellulosic materials like wheat straw into fuel. The UW is now actively recruiting Michael Hochberg from the California Institute of Technology.

The cut is not noticeable in a quick scan of the university budgets as it was made as part of the budget for the state Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED.)

Other small items funded in the budget include \$225,000 for the Ruckelshaus Center for nurse staffing and land use issues.

The House operating budget proposal also contains \$160,000 for "student collective bargaining" at WSU. The \$160,000 funds House Bill 2963, which extends collective bargaining rights to WSU student employees. The bill was proposed by the United Auto Workers union, which currently represents graduate teaching assistants and research assistants at the University of Washington.

"By way of background, I have worked at several institutions where collective bargaining is authorized and I am supportive of the right to collectively bargain," said WSU President Elson Floyd in a letter to legislators about HB 2963.

"In a context such as ours, however, where this right will be extended for the first time to individuals whose employment duties are intertwined with their academic programs, I think it is very important to ensure that the enabling legislation is written as clearly as possible."

The UW legislation passed by the Legislature in 2002 followed 2 ½ years of discussion between the union, students and faculty, and administration. There were no discussions with WSU about the legislation prior to the bill's introduction last month. WSU is asking for two amendments to the bill, which is a copy of the UW statute: one that would clearly make matters of a fundamentally academic nature under the purview of faculty and administration, and not subject to bargaining. The second is that WSU requests that the bargaining units be limited to graduate students, not undergraduate students.

The amendments have been supported by the WSU Faculty Senate. Both the WSU Faculty Senate and the Associated Students of Washington State University have indicated they will oppose the bill unless changes are made. The UAW has opposed any change to the statute and the bill has passed the state House of Representatives without amendment.

Sen. Jeannie Kohl-Welles, who chairs the Senate Labor, Commerce, Research, and Development Committee, has indicated she will consider changes to the legislation. She was the original sponsor of the UW student legislation and said some changes are needed to adapt the bill to WSU. She has scheduled a hearing on the bill for Tuesday afternoon in her committee. The legislation has been identified as a high priority of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

Olympia Update is produced for persons interested in state government developments affecting Washington State University. For more information, go to www.olympia.wsu.edu. Contacts: Larry Ganders, Assistant to the President, 360-956-2165. From WSU campuses, dial 8-2165. If you wish to subscribe to Olympia Update directly by email, send a completely blank message from your e-mail account (no signatures or footers please) to: subscribe-olympia_update@listserv.energy.wsu.edu