

Spellings speaks on global competition and innovation

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Furthering the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's recommendations to make colleges and universities more affordable, accessible, and accountable, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, along with Congresswoman Heather Wilson, discussed issues relating to higher education and global competition with students, education officials, and business leaders at a University of New Mexico roundtable meeting. Emphasizing the importance of math, science, and higher education in preparing students to succeed in the 21st century, Spellings also raised awareness about the availability of the Academic Competitiveness and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) grants. The SMART grants provide \$790 million in funding for the 2006-2007 academic year and \$4.5 billion over the next five years, with the aim of improving the quality of math and science education and encouraging students to accept the challenges of meticulous coursework. Spellings also discussed the extension of No Child Left Behind accountability standards to high schools, the need for an increase in and reformation of programs providing aid to the needy, and the creation of a privacy-protected information system for higher education.

Proposal to change eligibility requirements for need-based state grants

Need-based MASSGrants, long since offered to Massachusetts families within the lowest income brackets, will now be extended to middle-class families, as well. Massachusetts higher education officials said that due to the escalating costs of higher education, families with incomes of \$70,000 or less will become eligible to benefit from the expansion proposal depending on family size and number of college students within the family. Eligible students will receive free tuition and fees for two years of community college if they have taken college preparatory courses in high school and qualify for non-remedial college coursework. The proposal, which is pending approval by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and the state legislature, will funnel \$175 million into the state's college financial aid system and will specify that funds may be used for public or private colleges in the state or in the other five New England states, Pennsylvania, or Washington, DC, with which Massachusetts maintains reciprocal agreements allowing out-of-state students to utilize aid from their home states. An estimated 20,000 students from families with incomes between \$36,000 and \$70,000 will benefit from the proposed changes.

Schwarzenegger vetoes aid bill for illegal immigrants

Stating that California has limited funds and that undocumented students in California are already receiving reduced tuition rates, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger prevented a bill-SB 160-aimed at allowing illegal immigrants to apply for financial aid from passing in the state. Illegal immigrants already benefit from tuition exemptions at certain community colleges and universities through Bill AB 540. Criticizing Senator Gil Cedillo, who proposed the SB 160 bill, Schwarzenegger stated that the senator's attempts to push the bill would "only further encourage illegal immigrants to flood into the country." Schwarzenegger continued, "If bills like this were made into laws and such, it would be a horrific situation for the nation."



1% tuition hike in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education's board of governors, which is meeting in Harrisburg, is considering making a 2007-2008 operating request for \$495.7 million, an increase of \$28.1 million. The move reflects the demand to support an operating budget of \$1.3 billion for the 14 Pennsylvania universities, including California, Clarion, Edinboro, Indiana, and Slippery Rock in Western Pennsylvania. University officials are considering an appropriation request that would keep any tuition increase next year to 1% if the state boosts aid by 6%, stated a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* report. A 1% tuition hike would increase tuition by \$50 from its current level of \$5,038 annually.

UNC adopts Bowles' cap on tuition raises

A proposal made by University of North Carolina President Erskine Bowles to keep tuition affordable while ensuring adequate financing and providing high-quality education met with approval from the board's taskforce. A cap approved by the university system's board of governors will allow tuition at UNC's 16 campuses to increase by no more than 6.5% annually for the next four years. The cap, which university officials will review and consider amending after four years, reflects the annual average tuition increase in the UNC system over the past 34 years, according to a report in the *Winston-Salem Journal*. The cap applies only to in-state undergraduate tuition, which ranges from \$1,490 a year at Elizabeth City State University to \$3,530 at North Carolina State University. The University of North Carolina system, which skirted a lawsuit with the passage of the new plan, has seen a 71% hike in in-state tuition over the past seven years.