



Proposed Tuition Freeze

By *Emily Zaborniak*



Escalating tuition is a major factor negatively affecting the enrollment of higher education. As a result, many politicians and education spokespersons are pushing the issue of college affordability to the forefront of their agendas. Recently, Governor Christine Gregoire proposed another way to financially assist prospective college students.

Gregoire proposed a tuition cap, effective for community and technical-college students in Washington state. The cap would limit the annual tuition to \$2,586, which is the current cost. Over the past year, tuition jumped a significant five percent, inciting concern. The proposal is a small part of a very large \$172.9-million-dollar plan to focus on the state's higher education.

In a recent *Seattle Times* article, staff reporter Andrew Garber relayed Gregoire's intention to encourage students. "It would send the right message," Gregoire said, "Go to a community or technical [college], and then we hope you'll transfer and get a four-year university degree."

Additionally, the governor's plan would cap the tuition at the University of Washington and Washington State, along with five percent of all other four-year public universities—a considerable portion for a beginning plan.

About \$20 million of the plan's budget will be allocated to keeping two-year colleges at their present costs. The governor's plan would also expand WSU medical-education offerings in Spokane to train dentists, nurses, and doctors. That expansion would run about \$15 million, in combination with a program offered by WSU, the UW, and Eastern Washington University.

The reaction to Gregoire's plan has mostly been positive, but is not devoid of criticism. Specifically, state Senate Republican Floor Leader Mark Schoesler commented that the governor's plan could have made a sharper attempt to cap tuition, "I'd like to see it capped at inflation," he said. "I'm very concerned about affordability of tuition to our universities by middle-class families.

Senator Schoesler isn't the only one to voice his concern for middle-class families. Recent press has focused around U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' speeches and Senator Ted Kennedy's Sunshine Loan Act.

Several Democratic leaders showed outward support for the proposal, as well as the president of UW, Mark Emmert, calling it terrific news for the entire state.

According to Garber's article, other highlights of the plan include: 1) \$106.6 million for training programs and to increase enrollment at the state's colleges and universities by 8,300—including more than 3,000 students in high-demand fields such as engineering. 2) \$750,000 to create small-business-development centers at Grays Harbor, Kelso, and Pullman. 3) \$19.3 million to increase university research and help turn research into new jobs.