



February 14, 2008; Volume 18 / Number 4

From the President's Desk

Which Way California?

The governor's proposed state budget for 2008-09 has very distressing news for the CSU and, indeed, all of public higher education. But, most of all, it is not good for California.

First of all, it is a difficult document to decipher. On one hand, it identifies a General Fund increase for the CSU above the present year's allocation, allowing the governor to claim that the compact with the CSU is being honored. Yet, on the other hand, the budget request of the CSU Board of Trustees for next year to enable enrollment growth, fund mandatory employee health benefits, and meet compensation agreements for CSU faculty and staff is substantially reduced. Combined with a loss of student fee revenues and a 10 percent reduction in the CSU's General Fund allocation, after the augmentation, the CSU faces a shortfall of \$386 million next year. Similarly, the document calls for enrollment growth, but does not fund it. Further, the document offers no fee relief for students through a fee buyout, as the trustees have requested.

Second, though, and more importantly, the proposed budget does not just test our fiscal management skills. It challenges our spirit. For this is a budget—that is, a resource instrument to accomplish goals and fulfill purposes—that raises serious questions about the values that guide it and the future that awaits it. The real issue, then, is not so much the disappointing and confusing numbers within this budget as the disheartening vision behind it.

There are serious public policy issues at stake, all focused on the question of the direction in which our state is headed. Will California's future be defined by a cleaner environment, a healthier population, greater economic growth, assured educational opportunity, stronger communities, and hope for all who live and come here—or not? Can we say with any certainty that the state's best years lie ahead and that today's parents can expect a better life for their children? Can we build a promising future for all Californians, not just those of privilege and means?

It requires more than rhetoric to answer these questions affirmatively. It requires vision and will and an understanding of the kinds of investments that are critical to enable the state to deliver on its promises, not just talk about them, or lament tough times. There is no area more important to this translation than higher education.

Thousands of prospective students are clamoring for admission to our institutions, more than we anticipated. With a downturn in the state's and nation's economic fortunes, those numbers will likely swell even more as many others do not find employment or seek to retool for the jobs ahead.

An ever-growing percentage of these college-seekers are from traditionally underrepresented populations, most notably, Hispanic, Native American, and African American. At Chico State, as throughout the CSU, they have been buoyed by substantial increases in their college-going rates. With students of color representing two-thirds of the K-12 enrollments in this state, this is not the time to close the doors to higher education and ignore the reality of the changing face of the California workforce. For to do so would effect a tidal wave of personal tragedies that would have dire economic and social consequences for our state.

The role of the CSU regarding the preparation of the state's workforce is extraordinary. Almost 90 percent of the state's K-12 teachers are graduates of the CSU. Two-thirds of the state's nurses come from the CSU. More than 50 percent of the agriculture research and management workforce is prepared here and at the other campuses in our system. In some professional areas, the numbers are staggering, as, for example, public administration and criminal justice, which draws 82 percent and 89 percent, respectively, of its workforce from the CSU. It is not an exaggeration to emphasize the CSU as the engine for the California economy and the shape of its future. Moreover, the number of jobs in this state that require a bachelor's degree as the minimum credential continues to grow sharply.

This is a time that will test our state's governmental leaders and other public policy makers. We—the students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and friends and supporters of Chico State and the CSU—must make sure that they know what is at stake—and what we expect from them. There will be many opportunities for all of us to join this advocacy. I urge you to become informed and get engaged in this vital campaign. For standing as One University will not only strengthen our own sense of connection and purpose, but affirm our message of how we serve our state and define its future.

—Paul J. Zingg, *President*