

## Joseph A. Palermo: In CSU system, students pay more for less

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There's an ancient saying that we do not inherit our society from our ancestors, but borrow it from our children. On July 21, the California State University Board of Trustees approved a fee increase requiring undergraduate students this fall to pay \$4,026 a year, an increase of about \$1,000 over the previous year (and this fee hike came after years of previous increases).

The fee hikes, the denial of enrollment to 40,000 students, the layoffs of faculty and staff, the budget cuts and furloughs, the stuffing of more students into fewer classes, etc., are all sacrificing California's future for a short-term "fix" that in reality is not a fix at all.

The 2010-11 year will likely bring more bleak budgetary news. By blocking any new revenue streams to fund higher education, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Senate Republican minority are not only taxing California's young people and their families, they are crippling the state's future.

The degrees from CSU awarded during these furlough years might lead future employers to look upon them as suspect, perhaps even as inferior. The teachers, nurses, technicians, journalists, criminal justice professionals and others we teach could have the quality of their training questioned.

It's not fair to the students and their families to be forced into buying an inferior product for grossly inflated prices. Students are paying more than ever for a CSU education even though they'll be spending less time with professors, have fewer course offerings and be crammed into overcrowded classrooms.

These budget cuts and student fee increases have gone on for years, but 2009-10 will be the cruelest year of all. In past budget cycles, CSU Chancellor Charles Reed and the board of trustees have responded with a shrug, saying simply: "We'll manage." Reed recently told the media that CSU is still a "bargain" compared to other institutions. Really? A "bargain?" Or is it a bargain basement sell-off?

There has been a profound lack of leadership among our elected officials in the state Capitol and in Long Beach, where the chancellor and trustees preside. Now the CSU administration has been finally forced to acknowledge that the latest round of devastating cuts will adversely affect the

quality of education: "Cuts of this magnitude will naturally have consequences for the quality of the education we can provide," a side letter to the furlough agreement states.

The California Faculty Association has stood and will continue to stand with students and their families. The record is clear. CFA has opposed every single increase in student fees whenever the issue has been raised in the Legislature. As a faculty organization we have consistently lobbied state legislators and the governor's office to invest in California's higher education.

To that end we have voiced our strong support of Assembly Bill 656, sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Alberto Torrico, D-Newark, because it is a sensible and fair effort to secure funding for the CSU system. The Republican minority in the state Senate and our Republican governor squashed it, and by doing so they denied the necessary funding for the CSU system that would have helped us avoid what we are seeing today – cuts, furloughs and fee hikes. It is a tax on CSU students and their families.

In order not to tax ExxonMobil, Shell Oil and other oil conglomerates that have made record profits in the tens of billions of dollars off California consumers in recent years, the Republicans blocked Torrico's oil severance tax proposal that would have provided a billion dollars for higher education. They also blocked a tax on cigarettes that would have averted cuts as well. And they did so for blind ideological reasons with a total disregard for what is in the best interest of the state of California.

Somebody should ask Schwarzenegger and the Republicans in the Legislature why they insist on taxing students instead of oil and tobacco corporations. That's why students were chanting outside the chancellor's office when he approved the fee hike: "Tax oil, not students!" CSU professors can absorb these pay cuts and we will absorb them. We'll manage. We'll get by. We can take the hit as our faculty union voted in favor of doing so in the name of protecting higher education in California.

CFA approved a 9.23 percent cut in our remuneration that will be reflected in a 9.23 percent reduction in our teaching activities. We've done our part. The professors will endure. But the students and their families are the true victims here. They're getting ripped off.

Students are taking on extra jobs and piling on extra units to get through faster just to make ends meet. The quality of their education is suffering even while they go into debt, work long hours and stretch themselves thin with heavy unit loads to obtain a degree.

If it is true that we do not inherit our society from our ancestors but borrow it from our children, then the current downsizing of the CSU system represents a wholesale larceny against our children and our future.