

February Faculty Senate Report

The FAC met January 22 at Governors State University.

The first item of discussion was a startling memo to all community colleges as a result of an inquiry from the Governor's Office of Management and Budget. The memo asked if the colleges would have to close if they received only one more payment this year and whether they would have to close if they received no more money this year. They were also asked how much money they would need to stay open through June 30.

Don Sevener, Deputy Director for External Relations was our guest. He informed us that Carrie Hightman, Chair of the IBHE has written the Governor's office about the cash flow problems being experienced. She has been assured that all appropriated funds will be distributed, but the date is uncertain, and it could be after the end of the year. Personally, I hope that is true, but the numbers are huge (U of I is owed over \$400 million all by themselves).

Sevener also briefed us on legislative prospects. At this point, he thinks we are not likely to see a tax increase in the spring legislative session. The republican candidate for governor is saying that they can solve the budget problems without a tax increase. Among legislators, there is the perception that voting for a tax increase would not be a politically wise thing to do.

There are several statewide groups working to support a tax increase, however. The most advanced among these is the Responsible Budget Coalition (RBC). This group includes many diverse organizations, including social service agencies, unions, and educational groups. Another group is the Higher Education Legislative Coalition (HELC). One model is to replicate the strategy of the MAP campaign. There is a need to marshal the troops and work on targeting and planning the campaign. The RBC is currently focusing on HB 174, which has passed the Senate. This bill is similar to old SB 750, which would simultaneously cut property taxes and raise income taxes.

Sevener says we can't successfully appeal to politicians' moral obligation to fund higher education. Legislators want to know what we want and why we want it; they have to feel that their constituents want this. As with MAP, the campaign must be student focused, not institutionally or faculty based, and we need to turn up the heat. There has to be a political cover for legislators who would vote for a tax increase. In some districts, this is no problem. In others, such as targeted districts with political competition, support will be difficult.

Republicans in the House need to be lobbying targets; but they mostly oppose a tax increase. They view that the budget problem has been caused by Democrats so why should they bail them out. Strategies such as phone calls and rally days with visits to legislators are effective. One on one lobbying, especially in district offices, is the most effective (due to longer visits and more "quality" time). Letters to the editor and visits to editorial boards by administrators covering all areas of higher education are helpful. Parents, alumni, and business leaders need to be engaged.

For our part, we need to partner with our student organization like we did for MAP. High participation by students is needed. We as faculty can do something as well. Conventional wisdom is that Speaker Madigan will not call an income tax increase unless there are 8 to 10 republican votes to provide cover for his democratic members. There are quite a few house republicans representing university districts. We have one of those republican house members as our representative in Mike Bost. Schedule a meeting with him at his office and ask him to vote for a tax increase. He has no opposition in the election and the long term health of the university and of our region are at stake. We might also ask him to visit the senate for a discussion.

At its recent meeting, the IBHE met in Chicago and adopted a budget proposal. It is a four step proposal, ranging from a 6.2% reduction to a 4% increase. The reduction was a request from the governor's budget office and appears to be what the governor will propose.