

March Faculty Senate Report

I was unable to attend the last FAC meeting in Springfield, but Terry Clark was able to attend for me. The principle action taken was a vote to join the Responsible Budget Coalition, a group of social service and education groups advocating for the passage of HB174, which would increase the income tax to 4.5%, extend the sales tax to services and allocate 1/6 of new dollars (about \$600 million) to higher education.

Three weeks ago, I represented the FAC at a meeting of the Higher Education Legislative Coalition in Springfield. The HELC is a group of Higher Ed lobbyist and union lobbyist. The purpose of this loosely organized group is to attempt to put out a unified message to legislators, but because of competing interest, that is not always easy to do. Surprisingly to me, the HELC voted nearly unanimously to join the Responsible Budget coalition as well.

The governor's budget document released last week is not pretty. We get hit pretty hard as a result of losing the federal bailout money. It also zeroed out several specific purpose items like O & M for the cancer center at the med school and the legislative internship program. As you are all probably aware, after the release of the budget document, during his budget address, the governor proposed a 1% tax increase that would all go to education. I am not sure how much of that money would go to higher ed.

I am also not sure what the Quinn tax increase does to does to the participation of education in the responsible budget coalition, since none of those new dollars would go to social service agencies. I imagine the RBC will continue to advocate for HB 174, which would help all agencies—but education could split off and advocate for the more modest Quinn proposal.

What do I think will happen? Nothing. They will kick the can down the road. Pass another half year budget then wait until after the election to try to find new revenues.

In the meantime, what can we do? Contact your state representative and senator and tell him or her that you are in favor of additional revenues. Speaker Madigan will not call a tax increase bill unless there are 8-12 republican votes. If your legislator is republican, it is essential they know we are watching. Something I hear time after time is that those in favor of additional resources for higher education do not make themselves heard. But they do hear from voters who think we are fat and overpaid. So make an effort to make a phone call or write a letter (no email). It could be essential to preserving the type of university we have here.

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