

Report to the Faculty Senate-April 2007

Since my last report the FAC has met in Peoria with members of the Higher Education Legislative Coalition, specifically Merideth Byers of IEA/NEA and Sue Kaufman of UPI. The object of the coalition is to present one story to the legislature and to the public instead of having each constituency group out there asking for their own deal. They are also asking for support at the higher Ed Lobby Day in Springfield on April 25. They talked about the two tax initiatives on the table, HB 750 (which has passed out of the house committee) which is the tax swap proposal that has been around for a number of years. The other is the GRT as proposed by the governor. These two union reps seem to believe we could end up with \$400,000,000 out of the new money.

The BHE budget came out with basically a 1.5% increase for state universities with another chunk of money that is to be awarded on a competitive basis in areas the board wants to emphasize. Shortly thereafter the governor released his budget calling for a new GRT tax that is supposed to raise 6 billion in new funds. Out of that 6 billion in new funds, the governor allocated less than one half of one percent in new funds over the BHE budget recommendation.

In late March, we attending the IBHE meeting in Springfield. It was the first meeting for new BHE chair Carrie Hightman. The board invited legislators in to share their thoughts about higher education. In attendance were Representative David Miller, Representative Richard Myers, Senator Edward Maloney, Senator Bradley Burzynski, Senator Mattie Hunter, Senator Pamela Althoff, and Senator Lucktefeld. The legislators were very frank with the Board. First, they told the board they cannot sit on the fence-they need to get behind the GRT, or HB 750, or be against them. They also said the board has the expertise about higher education and the legislators have to rely on the board to make recommendations for funding that are realistic. If the board asks for 1.5%, the legislature assumes higher ed only needs 1.5%.

After the formal meeting, the FAC met with the Board and the Board staff. The idea of being an advocate for higher education and making realistic budget requests was discussed at length. The FAC has been for some time urging the Board to ask for more in the annual budget requests. If you ask for less than we need, we will never see adequate funding. Several of the board members seemed to be in agreement, but Judy Erwin, the Executive Director, stated that the Board is appointed by the governor and that the Board would not make a budget request that was not in line with what the governor wanted.

This is a departure from how the IBHE traditionally operated. Board budget requests commonly were in the 8-10% range. That amount would be whittled down by the legislature to end up with a 4-5% increase. The course being pursued by the executive director and the board is moving close to being an irrelevant politically co-opted arm of the governor's office. Whereas Universities have worked through the board, we are going to be forced to work around the board.