

November 10 Faculty Senate Report

The FAC met at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines. We had three guests, Senator Ed Maloney, Chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, Representative Robert Pritchard, Republican Spokesperson for the House Higher Education Committee and Andy Davis, Executive Director of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

The two legislators expressed their support for higher ed, but noted it was a tough sell politically since we seem to be quiet compared to the K-12 schools and the social service people. Whenever a cut is floated for the other two groups, they hear from their constituents—loudly, but hardly a peep from constituents concerning funding for higher ed. We need more everyday advocacy.

Both legislators stressed that a shift to performance based funding could lead to funding increases for higher ed., it is just that more money may be put in to accomplish certain goals, like increasing degrees awarded or student retention. The funding increases can be sold as a job creation program. Both stressed that any new funding mechanism has to compensate for differences in student bodies.

The MAP program might also be altered to have some performance incentives built into it. They pointed out the Indiana program that begins to interact with students at the junior high level. If those students successfully complete a set of core courses, they become eligible for grants. This might eliminate some of the MAP money that goes to students who fail miserably in school, and keep another student who might be a bit better off financially, but still needy from getting a grant.

In response to a question about the creation of a two tiered pension system last spring, Maloney said it could be difficult politically in the coming year to not do something about benefits for current employees. The day after last year's change, the Chicago Tribune chided the legislature for not going far enough. Both of them understand that the unfunded liability is not the fault of the covered employees—we make our contributions each month, but the general public does not understand this. Their understanding is that the state does not have enough money to pay the pension contribution—So let's just eliminate the problem-cut benefits and programs they care about can be funded and their taxes won't go up.

Andy Davis was pitching his plan to sell \$550 million of revenue bonds over the next five years to provide funding for an additional 50,000 eligible community college students over the next five years. The rationale for the program—of those 50,000 eligible students each year not getting funding—only 28% of them attend—they just cannot afford. The additional tax revenues generated by the funded students would more than cover the payback. If implemented, ISAC should have about \$50 million more in funding for four year students as well. On a related note, Davis said ISAC is looking at legislation that would require veterans to use federal funding before using the Illinois Veterans Grant, which would generate quite a bit of cash for us. The feds actually pay us for veterans using their benefits.