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For immediate release

Senate to offer community colleges insufficient funds

By a vote of 3-2, the Senate budget committee passed a budget bill for the community college support fund for $424 million – far less than the $440 million the colleges have identified as their minimum need to avoid additional large tuition hikes and program losses.

“I was really surprised,” said Oregon Community College Executive Director Andrea Henderson. “They talk about the importance of providing access to post secondary education and then fail to do the one thing that would ensure it.”

The Rogue Community College Board of Education, which adopted the college’s 2005-06 budget Tuesday night, did so without increasing tuition in hopes that the Legislature would approve the full $440 million for community colleges.

“We held the line on tuition believing our legislators would come through for community colleges,” said RCC President Peter Angstadt. “We thought that keeping tuition level would support the Legislature’s efforts – and help our students by keeping a college education affordable,” he added.

“Our budget for next year is basically a roll-over budget,” Angstadt continued. “At $28,276,629, it’s just 2.1 percent more than the current year’s budget. We don’t have much wiggle room. We’re opening a new campus in Jackson County this fall, for which we need operating funds.

“The Table Rock Campus will provide job-training programs and help stimulate the local economy,” Angstadt added. “We’re also trying to maintain academic and training programs at our campuses in Medford and Grants Pass, and we need sufficient operating funds from the state to do that as well,” he said.

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Earlier this session the House passed a community college budget of $434.3 million, which, although still short of what the colleges need, is closer to the mark identified as the minimum.

Since 2001, Oregon community colleges have been cut by $51.3 million. During that time, average tuition across the state has increased from $38.90 to $55.21 per credit hour.

“That price increase has already made college unaffordable for many Oregonians who are trying to learn skills that will provide them with a living wage job,” Henderson said. In 2001-02, Oregon community colleges served 406,931 students. By 2003-2004, enrollment had dropped to 330,595. Preliminary data from the 2004-2005 academic year show that the enrollment declines have continued at most of the colleges this year.

“The colleges understand that the state has many competing needs for resources that are too constrained to meet the public obligations, but this budget, on top of years of severe cuts and record tuition hikes, goes too far. This budget is $16 million under our most conservative need estimates. “Once again, community colleges will not be able to provide the services that Oregon’s economic recovery requires.”

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