

2013 End of Session Report

The 2013 legislative session turned out to be full of drama, intrigue, and some pretty significant victories for students and higher education as a whole. Three major events had a profound impact on this legislative session and provided unique challenges and opportunities for students and our lobbying efforts. First, was the McCleary Decision, in which the State Supreme Court found that the State of Washington was not meeting their constitutional obligation to fully fund basic education. Second, the election of new a new Governor, Jay Inslee. Third, Just before the legislative session began, two senators defected from the Democratic Party and formed a Majority Coalition with Senate Republicans, effectively shifting the balance of power in the legislature. It was also an odd year, which means that there was a significant focus on creating a budget for the upcoming biennium. Acknowledging these factors is important in understanding the context of this particular session and what was accomplished.

Priority Items

Expanding Financial Aid

Expanding financial aid is a critical issue in higher education for reasons for the reasons of increasing accessibility and affordability. This year, students set ambitious goals in seeking to increase funding for the State Need Grant and State Work Study programs, and well as seeking to restore financial aid and loan repayment programs, such as the Heath Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship program. Because of the McCleary Decision, very little funds were available to direct toward financial aid programs, and as a result very little progress was made on this front. It is important to note that that there is a very strong desire to fully fund the State Need Grant among most legislators and there will continue to be efforts made toward getting there.

Bills of note: None

Legislators of Note: Rep. Pollet and Rep. Seaquist

New and Dedicated Revenue

There is a recognition among students that if we are going to see increased investment in higher education that we are going to have to work on finding new revenue sources and secure additional funding by making sure it is dedicated toward higher education. One of the first things that happened as a result of the shift in power in the Senate, was that new revenue was effectively taken off of the table for budget negotiations. Furthermore, the McCleary Decision meant that dedicated revenue was hard to secure due to the amount of money that needs to be funneled into basic education. Early conversations surrounding securing new funds from marijuana legalization were promising, but there was too much uncertainty and too many logistical problems around implementation to make much progress. As a final point, our work with the Revenue Coalition continues to be beneficial in that it creates a strong united front among a broad range of advocates in pushing for new forms of revenue.

Bills of note: HB 1494

Legislators of Note: Rep. Seaquist

The Washington State Dream Act

The Washington State Dream Act would allow undocumented students who have gone to high school in Washington State the ability to access the State Need Grant. While we were not able to get this bill passed through the State Legislature, fantastic progress was made on it and it is poised to make it through in the very near future. This bill passed out of the house with very strong bipartisan support (77-

21), and had the votes to pass out of the Senate, but unfortunately was not brought up for a vote in the Senate Higher Education Committee. Student turnout, organization, and enthusiasm around this issue was excellent. One America turned out to be a perfect partner to work with on this issue, and they dedicated a lot of time and resources to turning students out for hearings. Continued education needs to be done with legislators around this issue, but with continued support this could pass through the legislature in the next year or two.

Bills of note: HB 1817 and SB 5655

Legislators of Note: Opposition: Sen. Bailey and Sen. Schoesler.

Support: Sen. Frockt, Sen. Kohl-Wells, Sen. Murray, Sen. Hewett, Rep. Zeiger, Rep. Smith, Rep. Fagan.

Voter Access

In the fall of 2012, the WSA ran its first statewide voter registration campaign, and during this process students were able to identify a broad range of issues around voter registration, specifically in regards to access for students. These issues included, but were not necessarily limited to, getting ballot boxes on campuses, allowing pre-registration with drivers licensees, and granting student governments access to residential halls for the purpose of voter registration. A lot of voter access bills were heard during the session but the one that had the most movement was in regards to getting ballot drop boxes on campuses. Though none of the bills we supported regarding voter access passed through the legislature, significant progress was made in that we were able to build strong relationships with the Secretary of State's Office and a number of local Auditors. Our best prospects for making headway in regard to many of the stronger voter access concerns that students had during the 2012 elections may be to work with the Office of the Secretary of State and local Auditors, rather than going through the legislature.

Bills of note: HB 1267, HB1279, HB1290, and HB1413

Legislators of Note: Rep. Hunt

Action Items

STEM Degrees

This item was specifically aimed at removing a B&O tax exemption for R&D firms and directing the saving into a fund create more slots for STEM degrees. No individual bill was introduced regarding this particular issue as the goal was to work it into the larger budget bill. No progress was made on this specific issue, and because this tax exemption is set to expire in 2015, there is little chance of building enough ground for the 2014 session. A couple of additional notes on STEM degrees did come out of this session, first, there was additional funding in the budget that targeted STEM degrees, and there has been some early discussion around incentive based funding.

Bills of Note: None

Legislators of note: Rep. Magendanz

Western Governor's University (WGU)

Efforts were made to ensure that Western Governor's University would be subject to certain accountability and transparency requirements by removing their exemption from the Degree Granting Institutions Act. Unfortunately, it was unclear where the hurdles for this particular problem were and as a result, the WSA was unprepared to talk about this issue. During the course of the legislative session WGU pushed for and was awarded access to State Need Grant dollars. Institutions accessing State Need Grant dollars have historically been required to provide a variety of performance and access measures to

the Higher Education Coordinating Board, but because the board was disbanded in 2012, it is unclear if that requirement still exists and how is responsible for tracking that information.

Bills of Note: None

Legislators of note: Sen. Frock and Rep. Pollet

Differential Tuition

Removing differential tuition setting authority from universities is important for maintaining consistent and predictable tuition costs. There was a lot of talk around this issue, especially in regard to how it affects the Guaranteed Education Tuition program. While we were unsuccessful in removing differential tuition, it was suspended as part of the tuition freeze for the 2013-14 school year.

Bills of Note: HB 1043

Legislators of note: Rep. Reykdal and Rep. Taylor

Student Advisory Committees

This bill was specifically aimed at providing students the option of creating an advisory board on their campus for the purpose of voicing concerns and support, and registering dissent on university policy. This bill was very well received from the outset, experienced a minor hiccup along the way, but was ultimately passed out of the house and Senate and signed by the Governor.

Bills of note: 1331

Legislators of note: Rep. Riccelli and rep. Zeiger

Student Veterans

This session students were specifically focused on removing the 1 year waiting requirement for veteran access to in state tuition. Good ground was made on this issue, in fact, a version of this bill made it through both the House and the Senate, but we were unable to get one version through both chambers. Other issues regarding student veterans that we were successful in pushing through both chambers were securing early registration for veterans and establishing protections for students who miss class and assignments due to service requirements.

Bills of note: HB 1011, SB 5179, SB 5061, HB 1119, SB 5343

Legislators of note: Rep. Riccelli and Zeiger

Pay It Forward

Efforts were made to support a budget proviso studying the impacts of the Pay it Forward model as a way of combatting student debt. Most of the work that was done regarding this proposal was aimed at educating legislators about it. We were not successful in securing a budget proviso this session, but because the Oregon State Legislature was successful in funding a study, there has been more interest around the model. Discussions are set to continue in the next legislative session and there may be a good opportunity to create a bill and work it through the legislature.

Bills of note: None

Legislators of note: Rep. Seaquist

Expanding Childcare Assistance

One of the biggest barriers for access to college for parents, especially single parents, is childcare. This session students worked to expand funding for the Childcare Matching Grant program. Not much

progress was made on this issue and the bill that we did get put together didn't go very far in the house. When the bill failed to move very far we did go to work on a proviso, but that was ultimately unsuccessful too. With so much money being tied up in basic education it was hard to sell this plan.

Bills of note: HB 1873

Legislators of note: Rep. Riccelli

Viticulture

Washington State has become one of the premier wine producing regions in the world, as a result, a number of our universities have developed viticulture programs to fill a growing need in this budding market here in our state. The bill that was originally introduced would allow university and college students under the age of 21, to taste but not imbibe wine. The administration at CWU and WSU resisted due to concerns, ultimately an amended bill passed through both chambers, but it only applied to community colleges.

Bills of note: HB 1459

Legislators of note: Sen. Frockt, Sen. Holmquist-Newbury, and Rep. Haler

Additional Items

Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET)

This was not an item that was really on our radar going into the legislative session, but it turned out to be a very hot topic for the first month of the session. Specifically, there were concerns about the viability of GET and whether or not the State should scrap the program entirely. As it turns out, GET is a pretty popular program, and the response to the proposal to scrap it was fast and overwhelming. Students in particular did a great job of mobilizing around this issue, and as a result of these extensive efforts to defend the program, GET had all but dropped off the radar by the time February rolled around.

Bills of note: None

Legislators of note: Sen. Tom

The Budget

In addition to the items outline in our agenda, the WSA constantly strives to push for more affordable, accessible, and quality higher education in general. It is the belief of students that one of the most effective ways we can ensure higher education remains affordable and accessible is to keep tuition costs low. From the outset of this legislative session, students made it clear that the best way the legislator could help out students was by keeping tuition costs stable. In the end, students were able to secure a tuition freeze for the 2013-2014 school year, and potentially extend that into the 2014-2015 year.

Overall there was about \$338 million extra dollars that were plugged into higher education. \$17 million of that went into the State Need Grant to maintain previous levels of funding. There was also some funds directed towards specific universities to expand STEM programs as well. Overall, it was a good budget in a year that could have been much tougher for students.