

Dr. Steve Hicks

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing Testimony

April 19, 2011

Good afternoon, Representative Sturla and members of the Democratic Policy Committee. My name is Steve Hicks, and I am the president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties. APSCUF represents the over 6,000 faculty members and coaches at the fourteen state-owned universities that make the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about public higher education issues in the state and, particularly, how Governor Corbett's proposed budget impacts our students.

We were all surprised by Governor Corbett's dramatic cuts to higher education, including a 54 percent, or \$270 million, reduction in the state appropriation to PASSHE.

Let me start by trying to give you a feel for the size of this proposed cut: it would be approximately 15% of the campuses' operating budgets (known as "E&G" -- Education & General); this varies a bit from campus-to-campus -- to a small campus like Cheyney it is almost 24 percent. To fill it all with tuition, it would take a 33% increase, from \$5,800 to over \$7,600; to fill it all through staff cuts, it would take at least 2,600 jobs, or a sixth of the faculty and staff in the university system.

These are huge numbers. They come after years of the state starving the system for resources -- our appropriation is the same as we received in 2005-06. We all know that inflation has increased in the five years plus -- as much as 8%, which means we are that far behind in real money. The governor's appropriation number, \$233 million, takes us back to the same paper dollars as in 1983, the first year of the state system, and we all know how much inflation has grown since then.

The big question here is what effect this will have on our educational mission. Everybody affiliated with the state system has anecdotes to show the color and power of our mission. Just the other day, I spoke to a Millersville graduate who told of how his carpenter father worked a second job to pay his tuition. In the aftermath of the governor's budget address, I have talked to numerous students who have said "any significant tuition increases means I can't come back to school." As one student bluntly asked East Stroudsburg University's president, "Should I plan to come back or should I fill out my application at McDonalds?"

This is the sad state of public higher education today. According to Chancellor Cavanaugh's testimony in the Senate last month, the average student borrows \$23,000 to graduate. It is becoming increasingly more difficult for children of working class families to afford a baccalaureate degree.

Governor Rendell was up front about his priority to keep tuition low: PASSHE has been commended by the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board for having the smallest increases in tuition at public universities over the last six years. We have done what we can to keep post-secondary education affordable.

Governor Corbett's budget proposal really threatens this affordability. Beyond the 54 percent cut, there are numerous smaller line items that have chilling effects. The elimination of \$1.6 million for the Cheyney Keystone Honors Program will make it far more difficult for qualifying students to earn a four-year degree. Some of these students have become lawyers, doctors, and Fulbright scholars. This budget threatens to take a lot of opportunity away from these students. So does the \$7 million cut to Lincoln University, a state-related and one of the oldest historically black schools in the country, that might have trouble keeping its doors open.

Opportunity means giving working class students a chance to live a different life. In short, it means providing the education that we all received.

Last week, the Chancellor's office notified me that every university in the system may layoff faculty next year; this is a clear effect of the Governor's proposal. Fewer faculty mean a lot of devastating results to our students.

Last summer, the PASSHE board of governors essentially killed 66 programs across the state system. Included in those were foreign languages, economics and physics programs. These cuts will only weaken the quality of education. Last fall's retrenchment at Kutztown and Mansfield saw the theatre program at both be cut; imagine the 14 mostly rural communities our universities reside in no longer hosting local theatrical productions -- it is a painful symbol of the cultural life lost in an underfunded public education system in Pennsylvania.

The loss of culture is not the only loss to the Commonwealth: PASSHE is the 13th-largest employer in the state. A recent study on the system's economic impact out of Shippensburg University indicates that the governor's cuts would have a multiplier effect of \$1.9 billion on the state's economy in a time when we have not yet come out of the effect of the 2008 recession. Even if it's not 2,600 jobs (no one expects the universities to rely on either job cuts or tuition but a mix to fill the gap created by the Governor's proposed cuts), how many is too many? I'm not the first to point out how strapped the state is to pay for the benefits for those who are unemployed; and to lay off many workers in small communities like Lock Haven, Clarion, Bloomsburg, or California is to negatively impact the local economy. Three of our universities are the largest employer in their home county, and our universities are in the top ten in 11 counties.

Another aspect of this effect is the potential loss of graduates: in a time when a whole series of experts, including the Obama Administration, are saying we need more college graduates, we are pushing college education out of the financial range of the working class. PASSHE schools graduate 40 percent of the state's teachers; how do communities survive without that stream of

teachers? PASSHE's second largest major is the health sciences; how do communities thrive without the nurses, therapists, and health professionals we need?

Ninety percent of PASSHE students are Pennsylvanians; 73% of them stay in the state. There is no brain-drain, unless our system begins to price itself so that education is more affordable in Ohio, West Virginia, or even New Jersey. We have the brains, we are educating them, and they have been staying in PA.

Higher education is vital to the Commonwealth, a word we need to remember in these discussions. When our forefathers founded "the commonwealth," they really did take the notion literally. They were in it for the wealth of all the people. It may be popular for some people to villainize the notion of a common good, but this is central to our welfare as a citizenry. We need educated people.

I never tire of quoting Thomas Jefferson, one of the most articulate and symbolic of our founders, who said "An educated citizenry is a vital requisite for our survival as a free people." Today we emphasize the importance of degrees -- No Child Left Behind was predicated on the importance of pushing every child through to a degree. But even if our students never earn a degree -- and we need to increase our four-year graduate rates significantly -- just attending and getting some college education has massive benefits to our students.

College education is a transformative event. Any student from any region of the Commonwealth given time in a classroom at Cheyney, or Clarion, or here at Temple, will benefit from that experience. Being exposed to the ideas in a philosophy course, a physics course, a women's studies course, or even an accounting course can be life changing. That person returning home with education in hand is more likely to become involved in civic life -- whether it be a political party, the local Chamber of Commerce, or a church group.

These days the state invests less than \$4,000 a year in each PASSHE student; this is unfortunate given that we invest \$32,000 in each prison inmate. Given the benefits of a college education, isn't it important to make sure we at least maintain funding?

Let me finish by returning again to my theme: the damage caused by the governor's proposed cuts. I don't think we are wrong in thinking that our notion of the American dream - the hope that our children will do better than we did - will be decimated. A 15 percent cut to the state-owned universities' operating budgets would mean a major change in the way we do business: students will not be able to afford to come (since PHEAA, which has a disproportionately small impact on PASSHE due to its rules, was cut, too); programs will disappear; and certainly the long trend toward larger class sizes will continue. That's not the same education YOU received, and it's not the best education we can provide our young people, and it's not in the economic best interest of the Commonwealth.

So I implore you to restore funding for higher education in this budget proposal: let's start investing in higher education, and our future, not adding to the indebtedness of our students and their working class families.