

Washington Student Lobby

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Students Testify On Financial Aid Crisis in Washington

OLYMPIA – Jan. 28, 2005 – Tomorrow, student representatives from Washington’s public baccalaureate institutions will testify before a State Senate committee expressing concern about the financial aid crisis facing many Washington families.

James Evans, student lobbyist for Washington State University, be testifying before the Senate Early Learning, K-12, and Higher Education Committee as part of a student panel that includes community college and private university students.

“Over the past decade, tuition has nearly doubled at our state universities,” said Evans. “However, financial aid is simply not keeping pace. Even our most financially needy students aren’t receiving sufficient assistance because financial aid in this state has been grossly under-funded.”

According to the Higher Education Coordinating Board, the State Need Grant – a program that helps Washington’s low-income students afford college – was distributed to approximately 54,000 students during the 2003-2004 academic year. However, in each of the last two years, more than 6,000 students have been eligible for the program but have not received any aid because of insufficient funding from the state.

Of particular concern to students this year is Governor Locke’s budget proposal for the upcoming biennium. Locke’s proposal, which includes a statewide 5% increase in tuition and financial aid during each of the next two years, grants authority to the individual institutions to raise tuition up to an additional 4% each year. However, the budget language requires the institutions, rather than the state, to supply the necessary financial aid to cover the discretionary increase.

“After the two years are up, our tuition will be 18% higher, but the universities aren’t required to continue providing that financial aid,” said Evans. “This permanent decoupling of financial aid from tuition represents disaster, especially for Washington’s lower-middle and middle-income families.”

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The Washington Student Lobby (WSL) is a state-wide organization under the direction of the student government leadership from Washington’s public four-year institutions, and represents the nearly 100,000 students attending state universities. During the legislative session, student lobbyists from each of the institutions coordinate their legislative activity with the other members of the WSL and work together on common goals. The WSL is currently headquartered in Olympia, Washington.