

STATEMENT

Western Washington University President Bruce Shepard issued the following statement on the recently released operating budget plans by the state Senate and House:

Our state's wealth is best measured by the developed talent of its people. The leaders of the state of Washington can proudly state that for the last 15 years they have truly invested in the development of human potential through higher education. Public higher education delivers on this investment every day, educating our state's work force and developing the ideas and critical innovations of the future. The diverse array of highly successful businesses and industries in our state are a living testimonial to the end result of that investment.

The recent announcement of the budgets being proposed by the state Senate and House for the 2009-2011 biennium can only be viewed as shocking and distressing for the short- and long-term future of our state. Public education in Washington has never seen reductions of the scale proposed in the budgets just released, and I am very concerned what this will do to the quality of both Western and higher education in the state.

Fifteen years ago, Western was a respectable regional university. Today it's one of the best in the West. That progress is not a faucet that can be turned on and off. Budget cuts of this magnitude can unwind those 15 years of progress in a short time. It is especially critical in these very tight budget times to sustain the excellence of Western and higher education for future years. The success of higher education is integrally linked to our state's high standard of living.

While times are tough across the country, I am aware of no other state that is preparing to so decimate its capacity to move ahead as times turn around. Certainly not the globally competitive states that we have, apparently until now, seen as our peer competitors. Please see the chart at [Global Challenge States](#). Is our state now waving the white flag in that knowledge-based competition? As the economy turns around, who will be positioned to compete nationally and globally? And, who will not?

Our state's public higher education institutions could take years to recover from these proposed budget reductions, with long-lasting effects on student access and academic quality. To help offset the potential damage from these budget reductions, it is very important for the Legislature to provide Washington's public four-year colleges and universities with increased and adequate flexibility on tuition. While no one likes increased tuition, it is clear that access to higher education -- to a high quality of higher education will diminish significantly without that additional revenue.

There is no question that the state of Washington is facing enormous budget challenges and Western Washington University has and will continue to make hard choices to help meet needed budget reductions. In these difficult times, I appreciate the dedicated efforts of our leaders in Olympia, who are struggling to deal with an unprecedented budget deficit because of the economic downturn.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Governor and the Legislature to protect the integrity of public higher education in Washington, the best possible investment for our citizens.

Sincerely,

Bruce Shepard