

North Carolina House of Representatives budget writers rolled out late yesterday a draft proposal for the education section of the House budget for the 2011-2013 biennium. House committees – the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education and the full House Appropriations Committee – will be discussing the draft during the next several days. The House plan is to bring the proposal to the floor for vote and send the approved version to the Senate for that body’s consideration by the end of April.

This draft is extremely troubling in its implications for the university, our students, young men and women who aspire to an education at Western Carolina, and their parents.

Please remember, however, that this is one more step in the multi-step process of developing a state budget for the biennium. Following receipt of a House proposal, the Senate will develop its own budget proposal, and the House and Senate will conference their differences. The edition of the budget proposals finally agreed to by both chambers then will be sent to the Governor for her consideration and action. The Governor’s staff will be engaged with legislative budget writers throughout the process.

We will keep you informed of proposals as they progress and of details as they become apparent.

Following is a statement issued last night by UNC President Tom Ross commenting on the draft House budget for education:

“The deep cuts proposed today by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education present an enormous challenge for the University, and more importantly, for our students. Permanent net cuts totaling nearly \$483 million (17.4%) could not be absorbed without inflicting irreparable damage to our academic quality and reputation. To put this in context, a cut of this magnitude is equivalent to the entire state appropriations for UNC Asheville, UNC Greensboro, UNC Wilmington, Western Carolina University, and Winston-Salem State University combined. Because state dollars are the primary source of funding for basic academic programs, cuts at this level would require eliminating approximately 3,200 faculty and staff positions across the University and eliminating 240,000 class seats. As a result, students would find themselves in far larger classes and would find that courses they need for graduation are no longer offered or are only offered sporadically.

While we are grateful that the Subcommittee draft would fully fund enrollment growth in the first year and provide operating support for new buildings, state funding for need-based financial aid would shrink. That is a tremendous concern, given that 60% of our in-state undergraduates depend on need-based financial aid, and rapid tuition increases have put additional strain on students and their families. Other proposed cuts that would adversely impact the University include the loss of all state support for UNC Hospitals, the phased elimination of state support for UNC-TV, and the loss of funds critical for recruiting top graduate students to North Carolina. We are mindful that it is still early in the budget process and will continue to work with legislative leaders to preserve the quality of a UNC education.”

John