

Dear WCU Campus Community,

I write to provide an update after a very active week in the General Assembly around Senate Bill 873. A small team of campus leadership participated in numerous meetings with Senate leadership and UNC System officials about this proposed legislation last week, and I was glad to be able to attend a related meeting hosted by UNC President Margaret Spellings.

We acknowledge that the bill has created some concerns among alumni and friends of the University. I can share, however, that there is much common ground around the need to address the issues of access and affordability in higher education. Further, I applaud Senate leadership for drawing attention to these important issues and proposing legislation to address them. North Carolina families expect and deserve their elected officials and university leadership to do all they can to control costs of attaining a college education.

A few significant changes to SB 873 since our last campus update include an extension of the implementation date for fixed tuition and fee rates to 2017, the insertion of clear language that specifies an amount of \$70 million in recurring funds to offset the tuition losses to the 5 campuses that would be subject to the required tuition reduction (including WCU), and a decrease of the mandated fee reduction from 10-25% to 5%. All of these changes are positive. The status and substance of the bill continue to evolve so we caution those watching this closely to be aware that things are changing, sometimes rapidly. We anticipate that the bill will go through several additional iterations before and if it advances in the legislative process.

I want to reiterate that this bill is complex and assessing its potential impact is not a simple matter. I am excited about the potential opportunity some parts of the bill would present to Western Carolina University. For example, the reduced tuition proposal could, if packaged and marketed appropriately, benefit WCU in terms of enrollment growth and increased competitiveness in the out of state market. Other components of the bill would present significant challenges for Western, notably the mandated fee reduction.

My leadership team and I will continue to work with UNC System officials, leadership at our sister institutions, and our elected officials to refine solutions to improve and ensure access and affordability at WCU and across the UNC System. We will provide further updates as matters evolve.

Sincerely yours,
David O. Belcher
Chancellor