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President of Agnes Scott and college trustee: Cutting aid to private college students will cost more than it saves

9:11 am March 20, 2013, by Maureen Downey

Here is a guest column on the planned cut to tuition assistance given by the state to Georgia students who attend private in-state colleges. The authors are Beth Holder, a trustee and alumna of Agnes Scott College, and Elizabeth Kiss, president of Agnes Scott.

According to the AJC:

House budget writers reduced the Tuition Equalization Grant — money paid to all private college students — from \$700 to \$500. The subsidy program has been around for about 40 years and is meant to help private college students pay tuition.

The \$6 million saved by reducing the grant would be plowed into the Technical College System of Georgia. Deal proposed a \$24 million cut in technical college funding because of an enrollment drop at the schools. Technical colleges, like University System of Georgia schools, are funded largely based on enrollment.

The cut has alarmed private colleges, which contend that the money is often a factor in a student's ability to enroll.

By Beth Holder and Elizabeth Kiss

The Georgia House of Representatives passed a budget last Tuesday that cuts \$6 million in tuition assistance to Georgia residents attending independent colleges in state. The \$6 million reduction in the long-standing Tuition Equalization Grant program would be used to cover technical college and University System of Georgia shortfalls. We believe this proposed cut is misguided for several reasons.

Cutting the TEG is NOT a smart use of taxpayer money. Much like the HOPE Scholarship helps keep our best students in Georgia and ultimately generates money for the state, the TEG helps thousands of Georgia's brightest young people attend and graduate from a private Georgia college — at a much lower cost to taxpayers than if these students attended public universities.

In fact, according to the most recent data available (2009 State Higher Education Executive Officers Report), the state of Georgia spent approximately \$4,051 for each bachelor's degree awarded to a student at private college versus \$65,516 per degree awarded at a public institution. That's 16 times less tax spending if a student attends a private institution.

Georgia students use the TEG, in combination with other scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study, to help pay for college. Private colleges do their share, raising funds from donors to provide institutional financial aid at an average of \$10,500 per student per year. Cutting the TEG means

some students won't be able to bridge the gap and will either drop out or transfer to a public institution at a much higher cost to taxpayers.

Our state needs more college graduates to ensure a stronger tax base and economy. As demand for higher education outpaces the state's ability to fund our public institutions, private colleges can pick up the slack, enrolling more Georgia students with a smaller impact on taxpayers.

A cut to TEG disproportionately hurts lower-income and minority students. Private colleges in Georgia educate more lower-income and minority students as a percent of enrollment than four-year public institutions. For example, at Agnes Scott, 34 percent of students are African-American and 48 percent of all students are eligible for Pell grants, the federal program for low-income students. Statewide, minority and low-income students also graduate at higher rates from private colleges. At a time when public policy needs to focus on getting more students, especially lower-income and minority students, to and more importantly through college, cutting TEG funding does just the opposite.

TEG has already been cut to the bone. Georgia students who attended private colleges in the early 1990s received a TEG award of around \$1000 per year. The TEG has already been reduced to \$700. The House-approved budget would reduce it by another 28 percent, to \$500. This would bring overall cuts to the TEG program to a whopping 58 percent since 2000. TEG is not a bloated program in need of a diet—there's no fat left to cut here.

The State Senate has the next crack at the FY 2014 state budget. We urge Senators to restore TEG funding and ask Gov. Nathan Deal, a long-time supporter of the TEG, to weigh in on this important opportunity to maintain a balanced system of higher education in Georgia. And we call on all Georgians who want to save taxpayer money while expanding college access and success to raise your voices against these short-sighted cuts.

—From Maureen Downey, for the AJC Get Schooled blog

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