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## **Tuition Increases Need to Occur Less Often**

By Debbie Critchfield, President, Idaho State Board of Education

Increasing college and university tuition and fees is one of the hardest decisions the Idaho State Board of Education must make. The Board knows full-well it results in a heavier burden on students and families.

The Board in April approved resident tuition increases at Idaho's four-year college and universities. The increase across all the four year institutions averages just over \$400 per year.

About two-thirds of the increase will cover increases in employee pay and benefits. The rest will be used for operations and facilities intended to improve the student experience on campus. My Board colleague Emma Atchley said we need to "keep college affordable and accessible to students but the education they have access to should also be high quality and the institutions need proper resources to ensure that."

In 1980, tuition and fees contributed just over seven percent of the cost to run our higher education institutions. Due to growth in institutions' budgets, the increase in the cost of doing business and more demands on tax dollars, students and families are covering 46 percent of the institution's budgets.

Idaho is not an outlier. Policy makers in states across the country are cutting taxpayer contributions to higher education and have been for decades.

As a result, the Board is grappling with how to manage these yearly tuition increase requests.

I can tell you that as the new Board president, I plan to work with our institutions to continue to find ways to lower student costs.

We need to emphasize program consolidation where appropriate, in order to direct more resources to high-demand programs such as computer science and education. In addition, the Board's Open Education Resources initiative will provide textbooks for certain courses at little or no cost.

Students and parents are frustrated with rising costs, but a college diploma still has a strong return on investment. A bachelor's degree is worth about \$1 million more in lifetime income compared to a high school diploma.

A college education is not just a private benefit; it is also a public good. Research shows that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to live healthy lifestyles, have employer-sponsored health insurance and be more active in civic engagement.

With last month's appointments of Dr. Marlene Tromp as the next president of Boise State University, and of C. Scott Green as the new president of the University of Idaho, we now have new presidents in place at all of our four-year institutions. (Dr. Cynthia Pemberton at Lewis-Clark State College and Kevin Satterlee at Idaho State University were both appointed just over a year ago). All four new presidents are highly capable administrators who have pledged to take on challenges together, making this an ideal time to work collectively with stakeholders and policy makers to find ways to cut or at least contain tuition costs.

A college education is a great investment for individuals and for our state as a whole. We all have a stake in keeping it as affordable as we possibly can. Our students are depending on us.

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