

# The Republican.

## College presidents seek more funding

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By DAN RING

dring@repub.com

BOSTON - The presidents of the state's community colleges yesterday asked state legislators to increase their budgets and provide matching state money to boost private donations to their campuses.

The presidents, including those of colleges in Springfield, Holyoke and Greenfield, yesterday appeared together on Beacon Hill before a legislative panel that oversees public higher education.

After a two-hour public hearing, William F. Messner, president of Holyoke Community College, said the state's 15 community colleges were hammered by budget cuts during the state's fiscal crisis.

Messner said the college presidents are "being modest, maybe too modest," in seeking 6.5 percent increase for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

"We need more full-time faculty," said Messner, who presides over the oldest community college in the state. "We need more full-time staff. Either the state gives it to us, or we hike tuition and fees, which we don't want to do."

Ira H. Rubenzahl, president of Springfield Technical Community College, and Robert L. Pura, president of Greenfield Community College, also spoke before the legislative committee.

Pura said maintenance needs are so great at Greenfield Community the college's main driveway is deteriorated almost to the point where it will cause damage to motor vehicles.

During the hearing in front of the Legislature's Committee on Higher Education, the presidents introduced themselves to legislators and each spoke about key programs, enrollment and student services on their campuses.

While they generally didn't talk about their budgets during the hearing, the presidents submitted a written request for the 6.5 percent budget increase for each campus. They also sought \$1 million in state matching money for all the colleges to leverage private donations.

They said the 6.5 percent increase would be the first step in raising their budgets over seven years to a level of adequate funding.

Rep. Christopher J. Donelan, D-Orange, said he believed the Legislature could provide at least the 6.5 percent budget increase for each college.

The House last week completed its version of the state budget by providing about that level of an increase for each campus. The House didn't approve any matching money for endowments.

The Senate will approve its version of the budget later this month.

A House-Senate compromise budget will be sent to Gov. W. Mitt Romney late next month.

Donelan said about 15 years ago, the state paid more than 90 percent of the budgets for the 15 community colleges. The state now pays less than 40 percent.

"We've been divesting in higher education over the last decade," Donelan said.

Community college leaders told legislators they were forced to hike student charges in recent years to help compensate for budget cuts.

The state budget for Holyoke Community College, for example, dropped about 10 percent from \$16.1 million in 2001 to \$14.6 million this year. Over the same time, tuition and certain fees for a semester for a full-time student from Massachusetts rose by about 43 percent from about \$840 to \$1,200, a spokeswoman said.

At Greenfield Community College, the state budget fell by 11 percent from \$8.3 million in 2001 to \$7.4 million this year. Over the same period, tuition and fees for a semester for a full-time student from Massachusetts jumped 58 percent from \$931 to \$1,471.

The state budget for Springfield Technical Community College fell about 14 percent from \$21.9 million in 2001 to \$18.8 million this year. During the same period, tuition and fees for a semester for a full-time student increased by about 48 percent from \$879 to \$1,302.

Yesterday's hearing took place after a state Senate Task Force issued a report in March that found Massachusetts ranks 47th in the nation in per capita state spending on public higher education.