

# THE GREEN WIRE

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Higher education is the foundation of opportunity in Missouri. Nothing will do more to prepare our children for the careers of the future. But today, the cost of college is increasing exponentially. All students should have the opportunity to earn a college degree through hard work in high school and college. Last year, tuition at state universities increased nationwide, by as much as 40 percent in some states. A Missouri NEA White Paper stated that Missouri tuition increased 45% between 1998-99 and 2002-03, and the state ranks second in the nation in tuition hikes over the past two years. During 2002-03, Missouri (-10.2%) was second only to Oregon (-11.1%) among states which cut support for higher education. This reduction followed a cut of -8.8% during the previous year for a two-year total of -19%.

Nationwide, due to record-high financial barriers, more than 400,000, low- and moderate-income high school graduates who are fully prepared to attend a four-year college will be unable to do so. Students and their parents are being forced to shoulder an even greater share of the rising costs of attending college. According to the Missouri Budget Project, over the past 25 years, in Missouri, the students' share of the cost of education has doubled, increasing from 25% to 50%. Higher education cuts have resulted in a \$1,700 per student annual average tuition increase for Missouri's public four-year institutions, affecting over 80,000 students. Institutions are passing the buck on to the cashed strapped students and their hard working families. Institutions must identify additional cost saving measures by avoiding excesses in order to ensure affordability.

In 1966, a student needed to work 20 hours a week at minimum wage to pay for college costs—today it takes 55 hours. Missouri's state support for public higher education has declined as a percentage of the overall state budget from 8.3% in FY1980 to 6.8% in FY2000 to 5.8% in FY2003. Missouri has the lowest per capita funding support for higher education among the surrounding states: MO--\$321, KS--\$496, AR--\$449, OK--\$477, IA--\$507, IL--\$411 and the cost to attend out of state is at times lower than in Missouri.

Missouri is rated "F" in college affordability by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. State Auditor Claire McCaskill, in an audit, further indicates the worrying trends in college affordability. Governors Carnahan and Holden both appointed commissions during their time in office to study college affordability and the results of the studies were remarkably similar. Once again, a Missouri Senate committee has been created to further study the lack of college affordability that plagues Missouri students and their families. It is time to take the results of these studies and craft legislation that helps Missourians afford the rising cost of a quality higher education.