



PRESS RELEASE

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THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS PICK UP CLIPBOARDS IN EFFORT TO FREEZE TUITION AT UC & CSU In Face of Budget Cuts, Signature Effort for First-Ever Student-Led Ballot Measure

With California's looming budget deficit, massive proposed tuition hikes, and the de facto cancellation of the Governor's "year of education", college students are again being hit hard.

But this time they're prepared: under the banner of Students and Families for Tuition Relief Now, they are organizing the first-ever student-led ballot initiative to freeze tuition at UC and CSU.

Having just received the Attorney General's official title and summary, the group's thousands of volunteers – donned in ubiquitous bright yellow T-shirts – have fanned out across 30 campuses and surrounding communities across California. Their goal is to collect 434,000 valid signatures in an attempt to qualify for the November 2008 ballot.

According to a recent study by the Public Policy Institute of California, an overwhelming share of residents (84%) said college affordability is a problem. Tuition has almost doubled in the past six years in UC and CSU, and many students and parents – especially those in the middle class – cannot afford it any longer. Neither can the future of California's economy, which depends on an educated workforce. "It's already a struggle paying my tuition, and it seems like there's no end in sight," said Valencia Henley, a student at Sacramento State. "Without this law, I will seriously need to reevaluate my decision to stay in college."

The proposed law – the College Affordability Act of 2008 – would freeze tuition for 5 years for resident undergraduates in both UC and CSU. After those five years, any future tuition increases would not be allowed to exceed the inflation index. The law would raise new revenue specifically for the cost of educating UC and CSU students through a 1% tax on millionaires' income over \$1 million (which the Legislative Analyst's Office recently estimated would raise \$2 billion of new revenue annually.) The law would also establish an accountability process requiring UC and CSU administrators to report to a citizens' panel of students and parents on how the new revenue is being spent.

UC Berkeley student organizer Hilda Morales highlighted two important aspects of the initiative: "This initiative is a win-win. It will both create new revenue for the UC and CSU systems in tough budget times, and in doing so it will also prevent budget woes from being shifted to the backs of students."

Campaign Director Chris Vaeth commented on an added benefit of the campaign: "Since anyone signing the petition must be registered to vote, we expect this effort – in addition to freezing tuition – to register and turn out hundreds of thousands of new young voters. The impact of students working on this campaign will be felt in November and beyond."

This is also one of the few initiatives since Proposition 13 in 1978 to involve a large volunteer base. "We're volunteering because we believe in the issue, not to get paid per signature," said Stephen Searles, a UCLA student organizer. Since most students are plugged into the internet, the campaign is one of the first to develop a downloadable official petition on the campaign website.

The campaign has launched an interactive website at www.tuitionreliefnow.org. The site features the full text of the initiative, Q&As, and how to volunteer and contribute. The campaign has support from Greenlining Action, a multi-ethnic public policy organization.

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