

## **WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**TO:** Members of the Board of Trustees

**FROM:** President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of Becca Kenna-Schenk, Executive Director of Government Relations

**DATE:** February 9, 2018

**SUBJECT:** **Legislative Update**

**PURPOSE:** Discussion Item

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### **Purpose of Submittal:**

For this agenda item, Becca Kenna-Schenk, Executive Director of Government Relations, will provide a brief update on the 2018 Legislative Session and answer any questions the Trustees may have.

### **Background:**

#### *State Relations*

The 2018 Legislative Session began on January 8, and the “short” sixty-day supplemental session is scheduled to conclude March 8, 2018. On January 18, the Legislature approved the 2017-19 Capital Budget and accompanying bond funding bill after not approving the capital budget last year due to a stalemate over water rights and a 2016 state Supreme Court ruling known as the Hirst decision. As expected and consistent with proposals from last session, Western received \$27.131 million in capital funding in the 2017-19 budget.

Typically, during even-year supplemental legislative sessions, the Legislature adopts supplemental changes to the state’s biennial operating and capital budgets. Western’s budget priorities for the 2018 session include:

- \$1.2 million per year to increase capacity in STEM degree programs;
- \$1 million per year to establish a degree program in Marine, Coastal and Watershed Sciences;
- Maintenance and Operations funding for the Poulsbo SEA Discover Center; and
- Supplemental Capital Budget funding for minor capital construction improvements not addressed in the biennial capital budget.

The Legislature is also considering various policy proposals related to higher education this session. Among the items being considered are bills related to providing free tuition and fully funding the State Need Grant, decoupling student and activities fees from tuition increases in state statute, open educational resources to reduce textbook costs, suicide prevention and behavioral health, and financial aid programs for all Washington students regardless of immigration status.

#### *Federal Relations*

Congress has announced plans to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) this year, which could have widespread impacts for higher education. The Committee on Education and Workforce in the House of Representatives approved a proposal in December known as the PROSPER Act,

which attempts to simplify the FAFSA, maintain funding for the Pell Grant program, and include a Pell Grant bonus for students taking 15 or more credits. However, the PROSPER Act also proposes changes to financial aid programs, accreditation, and campus free speech that could negatively affect Western students. The Senate is currently working on a bipartisan proposal and Congress likely has a lengthy process ahead for reaching a final agreement in reauthorizing the HEA.

The federal government briefly shutdown at midnight January 20 until Congress passed a short-term spending bill on January 22 that will keep the government operating through February 8, 2018. The shutdown came after Republicans and Democrats in Congress reached an impasse over immigration policy and extending the legal status of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. Last year, President Trump ordered an end to the DACA program and it is scheduled to expire March 5 unless a new plan is approved.

**Strategic Questions:**

1. Do the Trustees have questions about specific bills being considered in the 2018 Legislative Session?
2. Do the Trustees who attended the 2018 Regents & Trustees Day in Olympia on January 9, 2018 have any feedback or comments related to the event?