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## ***St. Cloud Times To a Higher Degree***

**Earl H. Potter III**

**President**

**St. Cloud State University**

A recent St. Cloud Times Our View (“Even a 3% hike needs explanation,” March 5) requested justification for a proposed tuition increase that would affect students at St. Cloud State University and 30 other institutions of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. This is a valid question, easily answered with a few facts:

- A decade ago, the ratio of state support to student tuition at St. Cloud State University was 60 to 40; today the state provides just 38 percent of the cost while students have become responsible for 62 percent.
- State support per full-year equivalent MnSCU student has declined by nearly 45% since 2000.
- Despite the large reductions in state funding, in 2012 MnSCU schools educated 66,256 more students – an increase of 18 percent – and produced 16,054 more graduates – a jump of 62 percent – than in 2000.
- The inflation adjusted cost of educating a MnSCU student is down 12.5 percent over the past decade.

In short, despite our increased efficiency, cuts in state support have shifted the costs of education to students and their families. I think we can agree that this is not acceptable for the long-term economic prosperity of Minnesota and its citizens.

Those of us in Minnesota public higher education are not willing to shortchange our students, our state’s businesses and our communities. The MnSCU system and its institutions have a clear mission that must be fulfilled. That requires us to hire and keep good faculty and staff who are devoted to our mission and to provide them with the technology and facilities to support their work. To help accomplish this, we need the state to reverse the current trend and invest in higher education.

The major drivers of our budget increases are personnel related, including modest salary increases and not-so-modest hikes in the cost of providing employee benefits. For example, the employer portion of St. Cloud State’s health insurance benefits for its employees has gone up by \$700,000 for just the next half year.

Other cost increases are very much like those being felt by the average household or business: the bills for heating and cooling and some other utilities are up by double-digit percentages, and expanded facilities must be supported and maintained.

Last week in his address to the Minnesota House Higher Education Finance and Policy committee about the system's legislative request, MnSCU Chancellor Steven Rosenstone told members the system's goal is "focused on ensuring that Minnesotans from all walks of life have access to an extraordinary, affordable education that prepares them for the jobs and careers needed for communities across our state to thrive."

Implicit in that goal is a commitment to serve students and serve the state by increasing access and affordability to the system's colleges and universities and accelerating students' success in completing their degrees in order to strengthen the competitiveness of Minnesota's workforce. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, a typical graduate with a bachelor's degree earns about 66 percent more in a 40-year career than a person with only a high school diploma. Helping our students complete their degrees is key to their future success and the success of businesses that continue to require more employees with a post-secondary education.

Chancellor Rosenstone told the committee that the best investment Minnesota can make is in its human capital, from early childhood education through higher education. That investment must involve all parties – our state, our institutions, our communities and our students – in what may be the most important partnership for ensuring a stable economic future for our state. That is why the MnSCU proposal calls for shared responsibility, not only calling on the state for funding, but others to contribute to the solution as well. New state investment in MnSCU colleges and universities will be matched dollar-for-dollar by a combination of \$44 million in internal costs control and efficiencies on our campuses, \$20 million in privately-funded scholarships and \$33 million in matching private funds for internships, state-of-the-art equipment and technology.

In addition to graduating students who contribute to our state's workforce and well-being, our MnSCU institutions are significant partners in the economic health of their home communities. This past week MnSCU released the results of a new survey conducted by St. Paul-based Wilder Research on the economic impact of MnSCU institutions on their communities. According to its findings, St. Cloud State University and St. Cloud Technical & Community College add \$640 million and more than 8,000 jobs to the regional economy and generate \$36 million in tax revenues for state and local government.

Retaining high quality, affordable higher education opportunities must be a priority for all Minnesotans who care about the future growth and well-being of our communities. To address this objective, MnSCU is seeking a state investment which, although a small portion of the overall state budget, is critical for the success of St. Cloud State University and our sister institutions. Such an investment will help us hold tuition increases to the smallest amount possible while ensuring that we keep our promise to provide an extraordinary education to all of our students. This is the path to economic success for Minnesota.