

MIRS Capitol Capsule

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Watered-Down WSU Mandate Makes House Budget

The House passed today a Higher Education budget that mandates Wayne State University (WSU) study whether having its medical school board members also serve on the clinical board is a conflict of interest, but doesn't hinge future state funding on the result.

Today, on a 61-45 mostly party-line vote, the House passed [SB 1099](#), a \$ 1.8 million (\$1.676 General Fund) Higher Education Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) '09. The budget represents a 2.7 percent increase over last year, which was less than the 3 percent increase recommended by Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**.

Part of the difference was the result of the House budget setting aside \$2.4 million to fund Indian tuition waivers (which some Republicans oppose) and another \$2.4 million increase for the state competitive scholarship program, a change that would increase the maximum scholarship from \$1,300 to \$1,400.

But the bill that passed today was a dodged bullet for WSU, said WSU Spokesman John [TRUSCOTT](#).

He said WSU officials "feel lucky" that boilerplate language in the Higher Education budget that penalized Wayne State if it didn't make an organizational change was removed in committee this morning by a Rep. Pam [BYRNES](#) (D-Chelsea) amendment, which passed 17-12.

Prior to this change the bill had included language that would have pulled state funding from WSU for allowing board members to serve on both the board of their private medical practice and the medical school (See "[Budget Language Could 'Destroy' Med School](#)", 5/12/08).

Byrnes' amendment reads, "It is the intent of the legislature that the governing board of each state university examine university operations for potential conflicts of interest." Truscott called the language "fairly innocuous", in that it suggests boards do something for which they are already responsible, adding, "We are very confident that this language isn't going to affect us."

However, on the House floor WSU alum Rep. Aldo [VAGNOZZI](#) (D-Farmington Hills) attempted to amend even this language out of the bill. This Vagnozzi amendment was defeated via quick gavel.

The Republicans attempted to amend the bill on the floor, as well. Two of the offered amendment appeared to be quite politically potent and were adopted to protect vulnerable Democrats. But ultimately a "clean" substitute stripped the amendments out before final passage.

An amendment offered by Rep. Dave [AGEMA](#) (R-Grandville) would have prohibited in-state tuition for illegal aliens. This amendment was passed overwhelmingly on a 90-17 vote.

Rep. Rick [JONES](#) (R-Grand Ledge) offered an amendment that would have required that Michigan high

school graduates who finish in the top ten percent of their classes should be accepted at Michigan universities before the schools could accept out-of-state students.

"We should be making sure that our own students get a chance to get that education first," Jones argued.

House Majority Floor Leader Steve [TOBOCMAN](#) (D-Detroit) argued against the amendment.

"I appreciate his (Jones') sentiment," Tobocman said. "But I think this state has been well-served by the freedom that our constitution gives universities."

Tobocman also added that in most cases where the legislature has tried to control university policy, it's done more harm than good.

Nonetheless, the amendment passed easily on a 71-36 vote.

Other GOP amendments were gaveled away. They included:

- To cap tuition increases at the inflation level if a university accepts the state funding increase;
- To cut 5 percent of funding per quarter for universities that offer same-sex benefits to employees;
- To divvy up the funding increase equally by student; and,
- The GOP transparency amendment to require website postings of spending.

Entering the House Appropriations Committee hearing this morning, the WSU language was seen as an attempt by the House to weigh in on the WSU-Detroit Medical Center (DMC) staring contest, with some wondering if Chair George [CUSHINGBERRY](#) (D-Detroit) was pushing his own agenda with the language (See "[WSU-DMC Battle Could Mean State Bailout](#)," 03/17/08).

All along, Cushingberry said the WSU language was needed to prevent the school from facing federal penalties that could subject it to potentially millions of lost Medicaid revenue. WSU didn't share Cushingberry's concerns and felt the move was politically motivated.

"The Dems really stood up for Wayne State today, and they should be commended," Truscott said, noting it couldn't have been easy to go against Cushingberry.

"We feel pretty good about the results," said Truscott, adding that seeing a contingent of WSU medical students — lab coats and all — appear during yesterday's scheduled meeting must have motivated the Dems. "I think they saw these bright, great kids, who all live in Detroit and bought houses in Detroit and want to work in Detroit, and knew that WSU is good for Detroit."

The budget, [SB 1099](#) (H-1) was reported out of committee with Bill [CAUL](#) (R-Mt. Pleasant) voting with the Dems in favor, the GOP voting no and joined by Morris [HOOD](#) III (D-Detroit), and eight issuing passes: Bruce [CASWELL](#) (R-Hillsdale), Rick [SHAFFER](#) (R-Three Rivers), Darwin [BOOHER](#) (R-Evart), Goeff [HANSEN](#) (R-Hart), John [PROOS](#) (St. Joseph), Dave [AGEMA](#) (R-Grandville), Chuck [MOSS](#) (R-Birmingham) and Mike [NOFS](#) (R-Battle Creek).