

# Community, technical colleges deserve support

By Robert K. Knight

At a recent meeting of our state's community college presidents and trustees, Gov. Chris Gregoire spoke candidly about the challenges facing our state.

Required by law to submit a balanced budget, the governor submitted a supplemental 2010 budget that would mean additional budget cuts for Washington's community and technical colleges.

We can't afford that.

Gov. Gregoire has made it clear that she believes that an all-cuts budget would be "unjust, unwise and unfair." As she noted, "Investing in retraining now is the way to work our way out of the recession."

We agree.

Last fall — and again this quarter — we at Clark College have welcomed more than 16,000 "for credit" students.

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**ROBERT K. KNIGHT** is president of Clark College.

## Local view

That all-time record enrollment has extended to our adult basic education and GED classes at Town Plaza — as well as our Running Start program. It came as state investments in community colleges declined 11 percent.

How did Clark College deal with those reductions? With support from throughout the college community, we filled classrooms and added new sections.

We increased class sizes.

We used one-time funds to balance our budget. We hired more part-time faculty.

We did it all by carefully trimming our budget in ways that — as much as possible — minimized the impact on our students, who faced a tuition increase. However, tuition only pays for a small percentage of a student's education.

We join the governor in urging legislators to seek options to help us invest in our future.

Washington's competitive edge depends on a skilled and talented work force. We are asking our legislators to:

- Help us maintain open access for students by minimizing budget cuts.

- Provide the necessary financial aid that our low-income students need to attend college and prepare for new jobs and careers.

- Increase investments in the Worker Retraining Program to meet the unprecedented demand that will continue for years to come.

- Allow two-year colleges to maintain flexibility to manage local programs and meet local employer needs.

In unveiling his initiative to improve national math and science education, President Obama stated that U.S. students currently rank 21st in science and 25th in math compared with students around the world. The president wants to move the United

States "from the middle to the top of the pack."

We do too.

## Fulfilling a vision

With support from legislators and the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, we expect that our planned science, technology, engineering and math building will receive funding and be built during this decade. Our vision for that building is a first-rate facility that will excite our own students as well as K-12 students from throughout the region.

Ben Franklin once said, "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." Supporting Washington's community and technical colleges is a smart investment — in our students, our businesses and our region.

It's an investment that will drive economic recovery now and ensure economic prosperity for the future.