

Save Our Universities, Invest in Our Future:

Public colleges and universities are danger all across the nation from funding cuts and lack of support. *Higher ed is the "Other education crisis"* because:

We have an "education tax" of student loan debt where 70% of our graduates have a balance of about \$20,000 because of cuts in state and federal funding (slide #19). Nationally, total student loan debt is almost \$1 trillion. It is higher than aggregate credit card debt and growing faster. This is immoral and a generational betrayal. Our youth should have the same opportunities that we did.

"Education is the civil right of the 21st century." There is no equality without opportunity. Only three public universities are listed in the top 25 nationally. The other 22 universities are wealthy, private institutions where tuition is over \$35,000/yr. Soon, public universities and our graduates will not be able to compete and our graduates will be stuck in a permanent underclass.

"We are losing the race in the 21st century world economy." Only 15 American public universities are listed in the top 100 worldwide. China and India already produce more scientists and engineers than the US and many US companies (e.g. Microsoft) now "import" most of their engineers because they can't find enough qualified American graduates.

There is a "brain drain" in our Colleges and Universities where many of our best and brightest faculty are either leaving, being laid-off, or retiring and not being replaced (vacancy savings). Montana is 51st nationally in faculty salaries, nearly last in retirement benefits and health care premiums are exploding. We must be able to compete for talent to provide quality.

We must support HB 13 because:

"Great education depends on great teachers." Pass HB13 at the proposed levels to provide a modest pay increase for state workers and a respectable state contribution to the pay plan. Cuts in the current funding levels for HB 13 will undoubtedly lead to bigger tuition increases and continue the brain drain.

"Fund the student, fund the classroom" means accountability and the certainty that our public education funds are being spent wisely and where they belong, in the classroom. HB 13 supports the student and supports the classroom.

Educating Montanans is the best investment of public money and the best way to win in the 21st century world economy. Today, "human resources" are THE most valuable asset, wages are higher for college graduates and educated Montanans are much less likely to be unemployed.

America was built on great public universities and we need to rebuild them with both state and federal funding because Montana can't do it alone. Our goal should be "Straight A's" in terms of: Affordability, Access, Academics, Achievement, Advocacy and Accountability.

Straight A's for the Montana University System:

- **Academics-** Quality instruction and scholarship in programs that benefit our all of our stakeholders.
- **Access-** All qualified students have an entry portal in the MUS at appropriate level for lifelong learning.
- **Achievement-** Assessments show consistency in meeting goals with excellent local and national rankings.
- **Advocacy-** Montanans view the MUS as an asset with real *value* and see education as an investment.
- **Affordability-** We have sufficient funding to provide a quality college education without excessive student loan burdens or dropout rates.
- **Accountability-** Higher ed must be accountable to the Montana public and our stakeholders to prove our *value* and to sustain public support.