

For Immediate Release

May 13, 2015

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West Virginia Cuts to Higher Education Among Worst in Country *Shortchanging public universities and colleges reduces access to higher education, hurts economy*

[Charleston, WV] – Even as most states have begun to restore funding for higher education that was cut during the recession, West Virginia has continued to cut funding for public universities and colleges, according to a new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. As a result, tuitions have risen dramatically and the quality of education has suffered, which will make it harder for the state to attract businesses that rely on a well-educated workforce.

“Smart investments in public colleges and universities will help to strengthen West Virginia’s economy,” said Sean O’Leary, fiscal policy analyst with the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. “Communities with highly educated residents attract employers who pay competitive wages. Their employees then spend money in the community, boosting the economy of the entire area. That’s what West Virginia needs.”

When the recession hit in 2008 and tax revenue dropped, most states relied heavily on spending cuts rather than a more balanced mix of spending cuts and revenue increases. As a result, many states slashed funding for public colleges and universities.

Most states have begun to restore some of the cuts. But nationwide, states are spending 20 percent less per student on higher education than they did in 2008, after adjusting for inflation. With such deep cuts in higher education investment, colleges and universities have had to raise tuition, cut spending, or both.

As a result, tuition at West Virginia’s four-year public colleges has grown by over 32 percent since the 2007-08 school year. Across the nation, public colleges and universities also have cut faculty positions, eliminated course offerings, and even closed campuses. West Virginia University has fired 13 employees and has not filled more than 100 positions.

To reverse these disturbing trends, West Virginia needs to make higher education a priority. A large and growing share of jobs requires college-educated workers, and the only way to make sure West Virginia students are prepared is to keep higher education affordable. And in order to make sure West Virginia has enough money to fund higher education adequately, lawmakers must reject unaffordable tax cuts.

“States that are cutting taxes rather than investing in their colleges and universities are making the wrong choice,” said Michael Mitchell, policy analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and author of the report. “States should focus on providing access to quality higher education that will prepare students to become the highly-skilled workers that tomorrow’s economy will demand.”

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The Center’s full report can be found [here](#).