

Teachers Missing from New WA Higher Ed Task Force

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - To some, it is a glaring omission that Gov. Chris Gregoire's new Higher Education Funding Task Force, formed this week, includes no teachers. It will be chaired by an attorney at Microsoft, and is made up of 16 business executives and school administrators, but no instructors.

That concerns Bill Lyne, president of the United Faculty of Washington State, although he says it does not surprise him. Many teachers have been affected as university budgets have been cut by about 20 percent, and students have seen tuition hikes of at least 14 percent in the past two years. No matter who's on the committee, Lyne says new funding ideas will be welcome.

"All of those people who are on that task force know a lot about raising money. They don't know anything about running universities. So, they should focus on raising money, and leave the running of the universities to the people who have been doing it really well for a long time."

Lyne is also concerned that the governor is asking the task force to look at improving school performance and accountability. He says those are not problems; that the university system is at the top of national performance ratings, although it ranks 48th in terms of state funding.

"This state has for a long time been getting a world-class university system at well-below market rates. So, the idea that you can comb our budgets and find fat there that you can cut and make it cheaper, is just not true."

The governor's office says public four-year universities must increase the number of degrees they grant by 30 percent in order to meet the growing demand for skilled workers. The Higher Education Funding Task Force will meet through the summer and make its recommendations to the governor this fall, as she prepares next year's legislative agenda.