

**Subject:** Presidents' Letter About Higher Education

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The public college presidents in Virginia signed a letter in December 2002 thanking Virginians for their passage of the bond issue for higher education facilities. The letter also described the effects of the severe reductions in state support on our students and faculty and the ability of our institutions to serve Virginia. The letter was broadly disseminated, including copies to the Governor and every member of the General Assembly.

The attached "Presidents' Letter" will be published in the Virginian-Pilot, Roanoke Times, Daily Press and Richmond Times Dispatch on Sunday, April 6. It will also appear in the Monday, April 7, edition of the Washington Post.

# A message to all Virginians

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## From all the presidents and chancellors of Virginia's public colleges, universities and 23 community colleges

On behalf of the students and future students of our institutions, we express our sincere appreciation to Virginians for the overwhelming passage of the General Obligation Bond Issue for higher education facilities.

You have made the first commitment to higher education for Virginians. But there is a difficult road ahead.

As the presidents and chancellors of Virginia's public colleges, universities and community colleges, we are committed to helping to respond to Virginia's current budget crisis and to minimizing the impact on students as a result of the large reductions in our education budgets. We reduced spending last year, we are reducing it more this year, and we will reduce it even further next year.

We strongly believe, however, that it also is our responsibility to communicate the negative consequences of the operating budget reductions on both current and future students.

- There will be almost 1,500 fewer faculty in classrooms and labs next year than there were last year and over 500 of those are full-time professors.
- Almost all of our colleges and universities will have even larger and more crowded classes. It will become common for students to stay at least four and one-half years to earn an undergraduate degree at additional cost to students and families.
- No four-year institution has the faculty and other resources to take more students. A lack of faculty will restrict the number of additional students that can be served at some community colleges.

The fact that enrollment must be decreased or restricted at universities and colleges comes at a time when Virginia has a growing population that includes increasing numbers of high school graduates. Virginia colleges and universities rank among the very best in the nation and Southeast, but rankings will drop unless the budgets are restored.

The alarming reduction in state support for the education of our citizens will negatively impact Virginia's economy. Colleges and universities cannot keep pace with the needs for educated citizens and groundbreaking research. They cannot respond to the critical shortages of health care professionals, teachers, technicians, researchers and other skilled workers.

The negative consequences for Virginians are our utmost concern. Our intent is to provide each student with an education of the highest quality, and this requires adequate financial resources. Public colleges and universities have only two sources for almost all of the income that provides for students' education: state support and tuition and fees. When state support is not provided for more students, and even decreased by hundreds of millions of dollars, the only recourse is to increase tuition significantly to partially restore our budgets.

As leaders of Virginia's public colleges and universities, we want to educate more students, produce more and better graduates, prepare workers to fill available jobs, create the best new ideas and raise the standard of living for all Virginians. We firmly believe that to do any less is to compromise the future of our Commonwealth. Virginians must decide if they are willing to continue to make the public investments that will keep our institutions both accessible and excellent.