

## Austria announces roll out of higher education plan

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COLUMBUS — Working to revitalize our economy, attract more quality, high-paying jobs to the state, and position Ohio as a leader in cutting-edge research and innovation, State Senator Steve Austria (R-Beavercreek) today announced the roll out of a bold higher education proposal as part of the Senate's version of House Bill 119, the state budget. The Senate's plan makes significant investments in higher education designed to increase affordability and accessibility at Ohio's colleges and universities, encourage more college students to live and work here after they graduate and proposes an organized state commitment to provide incentives to attract top research talent to the state, thereby fostering an environment for new business investment.

"In recent years, through tax reform, the Third Frontier program, Ohio CORE and other important initiatives, the Senate has worked to implement important programs to allow Ohio's economy to compete for business investment on a global scale," said Senator Austria. "The plan outlined today represents the next step toward realizing the Senate's larger economic vision."

The Senate's version of HB 119 adopts a two-pronged approach to helping relieve the financial burden of a college education on Ohio's families and ensure more students seek higher education opportunities in the future. First, the Senate plan will freeze undergraduate tuition rates over the next two years at all state colleges and universities. However, to allow our higher education institutions to maintain the best programs possible to serve our students, the Senate will also increase the state's share of instruction (SSI) by \$253.8 million over the biennium, reflecting a 5.6 percent increase in FY 08 over current levels and a 9.8 percent increase in FY 09.

Recognizing the importance of higher education affordability not only for the financial well-being of Ohio's students and their families, but our future economic success, Sen. Austria fought hard throughout the budget process to implement a full two year tuition freeze. "To move our economy forward we need a strong, skilled workforce, and to accomplish this, education beyond high school needs to be affordable and accessible to all Ohio's students," he added.

In addition, the Senate version of the bill will provide more than \$657 million in student-based financial assistance, which includes maintaining funding levels for existing scholarship programs and additional money for programs added by the House, as well as \$10 million in new funding to create the James A. Rhodes Scholarship. Recognizing former Governor James A. Rhodes' foresight in identifying the importance of workforce development to our overall economy, the Rhodes Scholarship will specifically focus on the role Ohio's two-year colleges play in training Ohioans for the jobs of the future. It is important to note that the \$10 million in state funds represents one-time seed money to create an endowment, which will leverage an estimated \$55 million in private funds and provide scholarships all across Ohio for students to attend one of the state's 47 two-year community and technical colleges.

"To field a strong workforce that will be a catalyst in moving Ohio's economy forward, Ohio's two-year community and technical colleges must play an important role. These institutions provide a less expensive, accessible option for thousands of Ohioans looking to gain valuable career skills," said Senator Austria. "I am also committed to continuing to work on restoring other important student grants."

While working to make college more affordable for Ohio's students is key to building a skilled workforce, the Senate also recognizes that in order to reap the benefits of this investment, we need to foster a demand in Ohio for their skills, so our college graduates are not forced to move to other states to find a job. This concern is the genesis behind the Ohio Innovation Partnership (OIP), a program that combines the good work of the House and Senate, and invests \$150 million over the next two years to field two competitive grant programs designed to attract top researchers to Ohio, while encouraging more students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEM2 disciplines) that will most benefit Ohio's emergence in the global economy.