

## **La. tuition rises more than funds cut**

**BY MARK BALLARD**

September 11, 2012

---

Over the past quarter, at least until recently, Louisiana has bucked the national trend of decreasing state government funding for higher education and increasing tuition costs paid by individual students, a Cato Institute researcher said Monday.

“I suppose the story for Louisiana is, if you just got out of college, you can say, ‘Thank you, Louisiana taxpayer,’ ” said Neal P. McCluskey, associate director the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. “If you’re a Louisiana taxpayer, you might be saying, ‘Wait a minute, why am I paying more so that someone else actually going to college can pay less?’ ”

McCluskey said Monday he prepared his report for testimony before a Senate subcommittee in March.

Generally, McCluskey said, many critics nationally blame the escalating costs of higher education on the drop in financial support by state and local governments.

The statistics gathered by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association show that increasing tuition offset reduced appropriations and resulted in increased spending per pupil, he said.

“What I found is that most states increase the amount they brought in for tuition per pupil far in excess of the losses they may have had from state and local appropriations,” said McCluskey, of the Washington, D.C., think tank that promotes limited government. “It looks like Louisiana had increased state appropriations and decreased tuition revenue per pupil.”

“If you look at data historically, tuition has been kept intentionally low,” Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education Jim Purcell said. “Because we are a poor state, the state has chipped in a large percent of the overall funding pictures.”

Since the 1980s, state government has made huge investments in higher education, including expanding a community college system and bringing overall funding levels up to the average levels for the South, Purcell said.

During the past four years, Louisiana changed laws and procedures to make it easier for colleges and universities to raise tuition.

At the same time, state government reduced state dollars for higher education by more than \$420 million.

Purcell said economic conditions, such as the recession, have required Louisiana and other states to adopt a more market-based approach to funding higher education.

“Most recently we have followed the national trends in shifting revenues from state appropriations to increased tuition,” Purcell said. “But the bottom line is higher education is still a bargain in the state of Louisiana.”

The report released in March by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, a professional organization based in Boulder, Colo., measured the annual educational appropriations and tuition against the number of full-time students enrolled in higher education institutions in each of the 50 states between 1986 through 2011.

Though the annual appropriations by state and local governments rose and fell annually, McCluskey said he calculated the trend during the 26-year period and found that real appropriations dropped 22 percent.

The data, when analyzed as a trend, also showed that during the past quarter-century, public colleges and universities raised tuition revenue by about \$2 for every \$1 cut in appropriations by state and local governments, McCluskey said.