

When I was growing up, times were a bit hard. My Mom was single for much of my childhood and raised her two kids as best as she could working two hourly jobs to make ends meet. But she was never bitter about that, at least not so my brother and I could see it. She paid our bills, provided for us, and made a loving home.

When an unexpected problem would befall us she had a pretty good attitude about that too. When the car would break down, or a water pipe would burst and she would have to drain the little bit of savings that she managed, she would always say, "at least we have it to pay." She would be grateful, not angry or depressed, that the money was there to pay this unexpected obligation.

That was an important lesson for me.

Recently something has happened that has not occurred since 2008. Longtime readers of my column know that I have been, no two ways about it, complaining about the fact that the State of Kansas has not added any more money to the community college funding formula since 2008. In fact, they cut it by 4% once during that period. Our bills, however, continued to rise over the last 11 years.

That means we have to charge more and more for tuition to the students. Tuition and fees have increased from \$62 a credit hour for on-campus Chanute students in 2007 to \$108 an hour for next academic year. (Keep in my mind some universities are charging upwards of \$380 an hour or more, so we are still quite a bargain by comparison).

This year, the thing I have long lamented about finally occurred. The Kansas Legislature passed and Governor Kelly signed a budget that put back the last of the 4% cut. Then they ADDED FUNDS to the community college funding formula. I have been president since 2010. This has never happened during my tenure as President.

Between the return of the cut and the new funds added, NCCC will stand to receive about \$180,000 more than we did last year, which is wonderful. I want to publicly thank the local legislative delegation in our service area for this – Thank you to Representatives Kent Thompson, Ken Collins, and Mark Samsel, Speaker of the House Pro Tem Blaine Finch, Senators Caryn Tyson, and Dan Goddard. Thanks also to Governor Kelly. Their combined leadership in making this happen is very much appreciated!

We have many people behind the scenes that helped these things along. I want to thank the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) for making this a priority and going to bat for NCCC and the community colleges as they often do. I especially want to thank Matt Casey, Governmental Relations at KBOR for his help. I want to thank Linda Fund and the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees (KACCT) for their work along with Allie Devine, John Donley, and Dan Murray who work with the KACCT under the dome who did an awesome job.

The two-year college formula is still approximately \$30 million underfunded, but for the first time in 11 years we are making progress and I am very thankful for that! Yes, there is more work to do, but I don't want you to think that I'm not very grateful, because I am.

So, what will the money be used for and what does that have to do with the story at the beginning of this column, you ask?

Recently the college has had a series of much higher than desired renewals on our health insurance due to circumstances beyond our control. A few of our employees have had a series of health issues, most

quite unavoidable, which has resulted in a spike in our costs. We have investigated and taken action on a series of things to lower the costs as we move forward which include changing the plan, trying to form or join consortiums, marketing our group to other providers, self-insuring, creating a wellness committee, having our employees pay more for family plans, etc. It hasn't worked yet or any changes implemented have had little effect. So we are looking at another 11.5% increase again this year, which amounts to paying an additional \$136,000 more for insurance than we paid last year.

As my Mom would say, "At least we have it to pay." And for that I am grateful.

If you have any questions about this or other issues at the college, please feel free to email me at binbody@neosho.edu.