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AT 3:15 PM TODAY. DETAILS BELOW.**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SWELL BUILDS FOR EARLY COLLEGE COMMITMENT BILL

RALLY, BIPARTISAN SUPPORT & ECONOMIC FORECAST BEHIND MOMENTUM

SACRAMENTO — A swell of support is building among students, business leaders and legislators from both sides of the aisle for a bill up for a key vote today that would help supply the college-educated workers that experts say the state's economy desperately needs.

The Early College Commitment Act, or SB 890, would renew the promise made in the state's 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education: that every qualified student will have the opportunity to attend a community college or university. The strategy behind the bill is to convince students still in middle school to prepare for college early, when good study habits take root, and to educate parents what is required and what programs are available to make the road to college easier.

Its fate attracted more than 400 students to the steps of the state Capitol today to rally in support. They joined more than 8,000 students who entered the "Save Me a Spot in College" scholarship contest, the winners of which were announced at the rally.

Jack O'Connell, Superintendent of Public Instruction, presented scholarship awards to students at the event from throughout California, who said, "I am proud to have served as a partner in the 'Save Me a Spot in College' youth scholarship contest. This program is designed to inspire young people to aim high, and pursue college or career technical training that will prepare them for careers in the global economy of the 21st century."

The students hope state legislators are paying attention, since the bill is scheduled to be voted on today by the Appropriations Committee. The bill was introduced by Education Committee chair Jack Scott (D-Pasadena), and co-authored by a mix of Republicans and Democrats, including Sen. Mark Wyland (R-Carlsbad), vice-chair of the Senate Education Committee and Assemblyman Anthony Portantino (D-Pasadena), chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

"I've become increasingly concerned that we're not doing all we should to prepare for the future of higher education in this state," stated Senator Scott. "In fact, recent reports predict significant repercussions if we don't act soon. The demand for educated workers in California will soon outstrip supply and if we do not provide education for our citizens, we lose our competitive edge."

"We know California's needs an educated workforce, and the Early College Commitment Act will help us provide it by preparing the young people from our own state," said Abdi Soltani,

executive director of the Campaign for College Opportunity, an advocacy group created by the California Business Roundtable and others.

The Campaign for

College Opportunity

Last week's report by the Public Policy Institute of California showed the state will be unprepared to meet the future need for highly skilled workers. California is 40th — and slipping — in the rate of high school graduates going directly to college, according to a recent Sacramento State University study.

The bill, Soltani said, reflects the belief that education requires joint responsibility. It calls for creation of the "Save Me a Spot in College Pledge," to be signed by low-income students in grades six through nine who commit to finish high school, take challenging classes, achieve proficiency in English and math, and apply to college and financial aid programs.

"Students and their families must prepare and meet requirements and the state must do its part to meet the needs of the college-going, by ensuring a spot for them in college and making sure college is affordable," Soltani added.

In return for the student's effort, the state would guarantee her or him a spot in a community college or university, and provide financial aid for students who need it — a two-year Community College Fee Waiver or a Cal Grant. Participating school districts will offer "Roadmap to College" services to help students reach their goal.

Because it builds on existing programs, the entire proposal can be implemented now with virtually no new cost to the state. In the future, as more students prepare and go to college, the state will need to invest in their education, an investment which will be returned three-fold thanks to reduced incarceration and increased tax revenue from earnings.

About Campaign for College Opportunity: The Campaign for College Opportunity is a broad-based, bipartisan coalition, including business, education and labor leaders, and is dedicated to ensuring the next generation of Californians has the opportunity to go to college. For more information, visit: www.collegecampaign.org.

SATELLITE COORDINATES FOR EVENT FOOTAGE

Date: Thursday, May 31, 2007

Time: 3:15pm - 3:30pm PT

Ku Satellite: SBS6

Analog Transponder: 5

Downlink Freq: 11823 (horizontal)

Audio: 6.2/6.8

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