

February 7, 2011

Dear Colleague:

A week from today, President Obama will release his FY 2012 budget. Every indication is that the budget will be brutal – slashing funding in every category of program, but most especially slashing those programs focused on low-income Americans. In fact, Jacob Lew, President Obama’s Director of the Office of Management and Budget, announced in the *New York Times* yesterday that this budget proposal would cut community service block grants (*i.e.*, grassroots programs that have been working in low-income communities to provide poor people some of life’s basic necessities for over 30 years) by 50 percent. With the House already committed to cutting education funding before the end of FY 2011, the prospect of **any lack of commitment** by the Administration to **any** program creates a grave threat to that program’s continued existence.

Given COE’s commitment to the future of TRIO – and our understanding of the importance of the health of TRIO to the future of college opportunity in this country – our Board and its Public Policy team have been working for over ten months to impress upon the Administration both the human and the political costs of not investing in our programs. I want to summarize for you some of the steps we have taken:

- Since the release of the Administration’s FY 11 budget (February 1, 2010), COE staff had six meetings with top Department of Education and White House officials focusing on budget concerns.
- In May of last year, COE’s full Board of Directors met for over an hour with several staff members of the Domestic Policy Council in the White House to reinforce the value and effectiveness of our programs.
- In September 2010 in San Diego, when Roberto Rodriguez, Special Assistant to the President for Education, addressed the TRIO community at our Annual Conference, many COE constituents emphasized how level funding in TRIO was resulting in an inability to provide services to students and undercutting the President’s 2020 attainment goal.

- In December 2010, I met with senior political appointees at the Department of Education, the education staff at the Office of Management and Budget, and the top domestic advisors to the President in the White House to again press these concerns.
- Over the winter holiday and into January, you and your colleagues made thousands of contacts with the White House emphasizing that tens of thousands of citizens were concerned about the Administration's commitment to TRIO – and that they would look to the FY 12 budget to judge that commitment.

As a community we have learned a great deal over the last 30 years. One of the key lessons is that timing and organization matter. So today is not the time just to write individual letters or to make speeches, nor simply to “facebook” or “tweet.” Instead, now is the time to communicate with and organize everyone you know who cares about college opportunity – students, alumni, parents, college and high school faculty, clergy, county and state elected officials, local community and business leaders and your chamber of commerce. Be assured that as soon as I learn of the requested funding level for TRIO in the President's budget, I will let you know. Then you, your colleagues, and all Americans committed to college opportunity for low-income and first-generation students and learners with disabilities will have a clear picture of our next steps.

Sincerely,



Arnold L. Mitchem
President