

Guest column

Revenue should be part of fix for La. colleges

By some measures, Louisiana's current financial shape is the worst since the early '80s oil bust. While Louisiana has suffered like other states from the deepest recession since the Great Depression, much of our fiscal problem is self-induced. We shot ourselves in both feet when, during flush economic times, we enacted the largest tax cuts in the state's history in 2007 and 2008. It was a nonpartisan effort — one rollback signed by Democratic Gov. Kathleen Blanco and one by Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal.

Predictably, when times got tough, the state lacked sufficient revenue to pay for necessities. And, again, we are shooting ourselves in the foot.

In response to three years of continuing revenue shortfalls, the state has imposed multiple cuts on higher education despite Louisiana's job market having changed dramatically in the past quarter century.

Today, more of the good-paying jobs now require people to work with their brains rather than with their backs.

The proof is in the numbers.

In 1980, almost two-thirds of Louisiana's labor force had a high school education or less, and 25 percent lacked a high school diploma. Today, more than half Louisiana's labor force has at least some college, with more than a quarter of the labor force having at least a bachelor's degree, according to the Economic Policy Institute's recent update of its analysis of the U.S. Census' data.

Balancing the budget by offering fewer higher education opportunities and making those that are offered more expensive is shortsighted. Instead of relying only on cuts, Louisiana needs a balanced approach that includes revenue.



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WHO I AM:

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MY SUBJECT:

Slashing higher ed is short-sighted