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TSJC president speaks out about safe guarding Amendment 50

By MIKE GARRETT
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With a state Legislative vote expected Thursday in Denver to help safeguard Amendment 50 that voters approved last November, outgoing Trinidad State Junior College President Ruth Ann Woods has prepared a list of important talking points to give Legislators plenty of ammunition to ensure that the amendment is implemented and upheld to protect funding for state community colleges and higher education.

Woods key points are:

■ Fifty-nine percent or 1.2 million votes cast by Colorado voters supported Amendment 50 with and it passed in 57 of the state's 64 counties. Amendment 50 was one of only two state ballot initiatives to pass last November.

■ Rural areas in particular like Las Animas County passed the ballot measure to preserve and protect their community colleges. Las Animas County voters passed it with a 62 percent margin while Yuma County led the state with 72 percent approval.

■ All state community colleges offer workforce solutions to a deteriorating economy and point to their enrollments being up 12 percent this past semester. Career and tech, remedial, transfer opportunities and open access to the colleges are all selling points.

■ Woods noted that the state has a unique opportunity in allowing Amendment 50 funds to play a more inte-



Ruth Ann Woods

gral role in providing Colorado workforce solutions and improve other service and educational opportunities. While the state's gaming community used state historic preservation as its cause for successfully getting its ballot measure passed,

Amendment 50 revenues will in turn substantially raise the state community college system from being one of the lowest funded in the U.S.

■ Implementing and assuring flexibility into Amendment 50 funding is crucial because of the state's need for increased educational opportunities. That promise can only occur if funding is not supplanted or siphoned off to other uses, Woods said. She pointed out that the state's CC system was assured by state Legislators before the vote that its funding would supplement, not supplant existing dollars.

■ State community colleges and higher education in general are facing state funding cuts under the anticipated huge state budget deficit. When state tax revenues start to increase again, community colleges

need assurance that they will receive their fair share of the higher education designated revenues.

■ The state community colleges need assurance they will receive 78 percent of the new revenues. Existing recipients like historical preservation and the colleges differ on their interpretations of how much the new dollars that existing recipients are to receive out of Amendment 50 funds.

In summary, Woods points to an Amendment 50 clause that clearly states that existing recipients will receive a share of annual, year-to-year, portion of the Amendment 50 dollars.

■ In addition to this "bonus payment," existing recipients are seeking a 6 percent annual compound growth for each future year. This provision is not in Amendment 50 and would otherwise cut into the colleges 78 percent of new revenues, which A50 voters were told would go directly to the CCs.

■ Another concern is that Amendment 50 will wind up being mixed in with Senate Bill 08-206 that was passed last year to fund a new \$110 million history museum and was passed without any thought for A50.

■ The state's current issue is that gaming tax revenues are lower than expected due to the bad economy and result in less revenues to now build the history museum. "That is entirely a separate issue and has nothing to do with A50," concluded Woods.