



President's Report to the Senate
November 29, 2017 Regular Business Meeting
Jack Wilson, GSO President

Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

The House of Representatives recently passed a version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This version includes changes to the tax code that would make graduate school unaffordable. These changes are:

- Repeal of Section 117(d), which would make tuition remission taxable income
- Repeal of Section 127, which would remove a \$5,250 income exemption for employer-provided educational assistance
- Repeal of the Student Loan Interest Deduction, which allows us to deduct up to \$2,500 from interest payments on student loans
- Repeal of the Hope Scholarship Credit and Lifetime Learning Credit, which allow for \$2,500 and \$2,000, respectively, in deductions for tuition and educational expenses.

The Senate version of the bill does not include these provisions, fortunately. In order for the above changes to happen, the Senate bill needs to pass, then these provisions would need to be added via the conference committee process to reconcile the Senate and House versions. That final version then needs to pass the House and Senate by simple (cannot be filibustered) majority votes. Or best bet, nationally, is to make sure it doesn't get added to a final version of the bill.

Getting this done will require a lot of work on our part. Here's what we can do:

- The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (of which we are a part) encourages everyone to tweet out a picture of themselves with the following information: their name; their major; 1 short sentence on why their work matters nationally (e.g. "I do cancer research", "I'm learning why you forget things.", "I'm improving LIGO."); and by how much this tax bill will hurt them, both in absolute terms and as a fraction of their current income. Please do this.
- Starting now, please join our fellow grads in New York State and call Governor Cuomo (1-518-474-8390) and let him know how you feel about the House version of the tax bill.
- Friday, November 29th is a second National Call Congress day. If you or anyone you know is registered to vote in the NY 23rd Congressional district (it includes Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Chemung, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tompkins and Yates counties plus parts of Ontario and Tioga counties), we need as many people as possible to call Congressman Tom Reed (House Ways and Means) and remind him that grads in NYS are counting on him and to make sure he keeps to the statements he and Chairman Brady made about dealing with the offending provisions above.
- On December 4th call Congress (again) along with fellow grads from NY, TX, IL, and OH. If you already did so, thank you! Let's get another round in. This kind of repetition is how people in the House and Senate determine how much something means to us.

In the meantime, the Executive Board is working with a representative of the National Action Network to schedule an in-person meeting with whomever will listen. (If you can personally schedule your own meetings with our House and Senate staff it would also do wonders!) I have requested statistics from the Office of Enrollment and the Student Experience statistics on how much in student loans newly-arriving graduate students carry. OESE already keeps figures on student loans for undergraduates at the University.

Graduate Student Housing

We have secured a broad agreement that housing grads during the last two weeks of July for the purposes of apartment hunting is feasible. We have run into a hurdle on making this program accessible to International Grads: F-Type visas bar entry earlier than 30 days before program start. We are considering the feasibility of moving program start dates forward to accommodate. Finally, we are exploring the option of, instead, having the University reserve a set of apartments that international and distance students can rent out their first year.

Beyond this, the Chancellor agrees that we are past due on a dedicated off-campus housing strategy, especially for graduate students. The University is now exploring ways in which it can regulate in some unofficial capacity bad behavior by landlords. Options being explored also include a SU-operated apartment-listing website and (in the very long-term) re-building South Campus for graduate housing.

Off-Campus Transportation

Last academic year, a number of grads reported to the Executive Board difficulty getting to grocery stores from the Westcott area, primarily due to lack of transportation options. Students must, instead, walk to the nearest grocery store, which is hazardous during the winter.

The Student Association (SA, our undergraduate counterpart) has begun lobbying for a dedicated bus route around Euclid Avenue. There is an opportunity to extend the shuttle to the stores on Erie Blvd. I have requested from SA the details of their route schedule, and have begun to consider how this might interact with the CENTRO Westcott line (130/230/330/530), which is currently free for students between Irving and Westcott.

I request input from Senators on what the need is: when, where, to what extent, and the best way to address this need.