

## **Editorial**

### **College cutbacks brutal, damaging to our future**

It was an emotionally wrenching week for administrators and staff at Skagit Valley College.

By Friday, 38 employees had been told by college President Gary Tollefson that, come June, their jobs will be gone. Many of the 34 community colleges throughout the state were going through the same agonizing process.

The layoffs at the college are a brutal reminder that while the chickens have come home to roost they aren't laying any eggs. The state's budget woes are largely self inflicted. The recession was only the tipping point in bringing down our economic house of cards.

Gov. Chris Gregoire's declaration that one-time fixes for budget shortfalls are no longer acceptable is at least 10 years too late.

We have for decades borrowed against the future, rationalizing our public profligacy with the delusion that the economy will expand endlessly and that deficits were no big deal.

Sadly, the drastic cutbacks in state education funding strike at the very core of the best hope for our economic future — a highly trained and competent work force that can outproduce any workers in the world.

And even as the college budget axes were falling, Thursday's state revenue forecast delivered another message of doom, adding \$780 million to the projected deficit in the state's 2011-13 biennial budget. The forecast pushed the coming deficit to nearly \$6 billion.

The state's chief economist, Arun Raha, said the earthquake and tsunami in Japan contributed to a further dip in anticipated state revenue. Thus we will share in the economic pain inflicted on one of the state's largest Asian trading partners, a reality of our growing global interdependence.

The community colleges are an important economic driver for the state economy.

The Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges issued results of a study that found the colleges and their former students account for \$11 billion a year in economic activity.

The study, conducted by a firm specializing in economic modeling, also determined that community college graduates earn an average of \$49,000 a year, 35 percent more than workers with only a high school education.

But as Skagit Valley College is forced to cut 20 of its 120-member faculty the already long waiting list for students seeking admission will only get longer.

One must ask whether the community college system can any longer be open to any student with the price of tuition, regardless of their potential to succeed, as state law now requires.

It could be another of the very hard decisions thrust upon legislators in the near future.