Education Committee Speech

Good evening. My name is Cody Woodruff, and I am the Executive Chair of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, or SIYAC. I don’t know if anyone’s noticed, but we had some special guests at the Capitol today. Des Moines and Davenport both got a visit from the Westboro Baptist Church, and they were protesting because, “the youth in this nation have absolutely no hope.” I stand before you tonight to discuss education funding not as Executive Chair of SIYAC, but as one of those “hopeless” youth. These words and opinions are my own and no one else’s.

When I attended the Condition of the State address, I, like many, was disappointed with Governor Branstad’s proposed funding for education. I respect the Governor, as well as the Lt. Governor and entire General Assembly, but I oppose House File 80. As a high school student who dreams of going to Harvard in two years, believe me, I understand the concerns of a tight budget, but education is one of the best things you can invest in. Without sufficient funding for our schools, you will literally alter the lives of thousands of students like me.

One of my closest friends and one of Iowa’s brightest young leaders, Pablo Haake, told me about how his school had to cut programs and great teachers because they could not afford. He explained to me that with this proposal his school will most likely have to make more cuts, and he fears that more valuable teachers and programs will have to go. That is where the biggest impact will be for students.

Unfortunately, I am no stranger to a lack of funding for some programs. My school’s fine arts program has been heavily underfunded, and it’s hurting things like band, choir, speech, debate, and school plays and musicals. Part of what shapes us as students are the programs we’re involved in, and high school is a time when we try new things! We want to explore all kinds of unique extracurricular activities, but we cannot explore them if they are not there. With this proposal, many schools throughout the state may have to decide what programs get to stay and which ones have to go.

Teachers are some of the hardest working people in the world, and if you don’t believe me, talk to my language teacher who calculated he made **$0.16 an hour** one year with all of the extra time and money of his own that he put in. Not only do teachers work hard, but they touch our lives as students, especially in high school.

I would not be standing before you today if it weren’t for my teachers, and every aspect of my life would be different. Without my drama teacher, Mr. Wright, I would not have found my love for acting. My former debate coach, Mr. Fink, taught me valuable verbal skills that you all will get to see in action when I lobby for SIYAC’s bills throughout this session. And my past and current principals, Dr. Aylsworth and Mr. Blackmore, have inspired me to lead in my school, my state, and my country. Without any of these teachers or the many others that have changed my life, I would not be the person I am today.

Funding schools adequately is the **key** to a successful future for our state and our nation. You are investing in those youth who will someday be where you’re sitting. You are shaping the lives of my generation, of young Iowans, with this bill, and we urge you, in the name of this state and this country’s future, to vote no! Thank you for this opportunity to speak tonight; it has been a privilege and an honor.