

## **Patricia S. Schroeder: Governor can help improve textbooks**

By Patricia S. Schroeder - Special To The Bee  
October 1, 2007

Much of the debate about college textbook legislation has been tragically light on facts, mired in anecdotes and short on vision.

Some believe that faculties are kept in the dark about the price of textbooks and supplemental course materials. In reality, publishers go to incredible lengths to supply instructors with information, enabling them to make informed decisions on which learning tools are best for students.

There are two textbooks bills on Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk. Assembly Bill 1548 is a serious bill that would require publishers to extend the practice of disclosing prices to faculty, and listing changes between editions and the prior copyright date of editions.

AB 1548 goes further by requiring faculty, institutions and bookstores also make changes to improve transparency and help lower student spending. The bill would require bookstores to post their retail pricing policies, prohibit the selling of free, sample instructor copies (this practice increases new and used textbook prices), ban conflicts of interest in choosing course materials (a policy publishers support), and encourage faculty to order early.

The second bill, Senate Bill 832, is a politically driven document introduced nationwide by the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) without success. SB 832 requires publishers to repeatedly provide faculties with the same product information, wasting faculty time, adding costs and likely driving up textbook prices.

Publishers do understand the financial pressures on students and have greatly expanded the selection of lower-cost printed and digital course materials. Choices range from no-frills editions and books online by the chapter to custom books containing only the materials professors use in class -- lowering costs and increasing efficiency -- and e-books by the thousands. Digital course materials include online graded homework with e-tutor, online research sites, video lectures and online quizzes.

According to the 2005 Government Accountability Office study on textbooks, publishers design products to "enhance the education experience" and are "assuming roles that have traditionally belonged to postsecondary institutions." A more recent study noted the continued focus by some "only on price may fail to best achieve student success or best meet public policy objectives."

Facts lead to critical questions. How and why do faculties make their course material choices? What materials lead to increased pass and graduation rates? And most vital, what is the price of failure?

The price of textbooks is important, but not more important than the success of California's students. Schwarzenegger can make a real, positive difference in the education equation by signing AB 1548.

About the writer:

Patricia S. Schroeder, a former Democratic congresswoman from Colorado, is president and chief executive officer of the Association of American Publishers.