Local Student Speaks Out at Statehouse

In these tough financial times, … this phrase, which was initially alarming, has become the background noise of our lives, thanks to a regular media echo. But the truth of economic hardship is very real and many individuals are facing the challenge by taking steps to protect our future.

Samantha Mayo, a College nursing student and Cornerstone resident, is one of these responsible individuals. Kieclos believes that, as with many of society's current challenges, knowledge is key: “I feel that the beginning is to gain society begins with good education.” With a more educated population, many diverse jobs are available, and people tend to be more prepared with their money, says Kieko. She has demonstrated her commitment to the cause by taking a trip to the Statehouse. Mayo and more than 200 other college students traveled to the Capitol with the hope of personally influencing their local representatives. Their mission was to call on lawmakers for the continued support of programs that provide financial assistance to aspiring and current college students.

“With the rising cost of tuition, and the rising number of people applying for college, last year’s grant money is never enough for the following year,” says Kieko. Like so many others, she already is working two jobs and living on a tight budget, but she still must rely on state funding for a portion of her tuition costs.

According to Kieko, the visit was not in vain; the legislator seemed to truly listen and agree with the students’ concerns. “I spoke with (State Rep. Ryan Drackel, D-Scott) (Rep. Ritter, D-Scott), and (State Sen. Joseph Zakas, D-Drake).” She then told them how important it was for them to continue to work with Kieko, and how this could only be made possible through increased funding for student grants. The senators and representatives were very receptive, and she even told them about the worries of sending their own children to college in the future.

The overall response of the officials was encouraging. “I am hopeful,” Kieko says, “that legislators agreed with this and they will continue to support us, and that they are really looking into (raising) the stimulus money.”

For those of us who have never taken a trip to protect our government to advocate for a specific principle, the students’ efforts are inspirational, and they did not go unrecognized. “The legislators told me to keep doing what I’m doing, and they thanked me for coming to see them in person,” Kieko says. “It taught the power of face-to-face contact.”

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