

For Immediate Release:

**DEMOCRATIZING EDUCATION NETWORK (DEN)
LAUNCHES NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR FREE HIGHER EDUCATION
WEEK OF ACTION: OCT. 23 THROUGH OCT. 27**

NATIONAL VIRTUAL MARCH ON CORPORATE LOBBYISTS

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NATION, October 23, 2006, Monday is the official start date for a new campaign launched by the Democratizing Education Network, a national coalition of students, faculty, staff, and community members fed up with rising tuition costs and education cuts.

"This week we're targeting corporate officials to insist that they start supporting higher education as a fundamental right and social good." says Lindsey McCluskey, an undergraduate at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, "This week is only a beginning."

Public funding and access to higher education are dropping off at a staggering rate. A generation ago, the public shouldered more than twice the burden for funding higher education than it does today. Meanwhile, tuition has increased at rates three-to-six times inflation, and student loans and debt have replaced the grant system of the 1970s.

"These education cuts and tuition hikes are very painful to young people and they are costing America." says Ben Manski, a Liberty Tree Fellow specializing in higher education policy. "And the saddest thing about this situation is that the public didn't ask for it; the only voices at the state and national capitols speaking up for education cuts are those belonging to the corporate sector."

Most recently, in its 2007 budget, the Bush administration called for cutting spending for most financial aid and other college programs to their 2006 levels, holding back the maximum Pell Grant at \$4,050 for the fifth year in a row, and keeping spending flat on the Work Study and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants Programs, among others. Similar cuts are expected at the state level across the country. The members of the Democratizing Education Network are urging all high school, college and graduate students, faculty, staff, and community members to join this week's 'Virtual March on the Corporate Lobbyists' to reverse the current education cut trend.

"We're at a crisis point. We demand full public funding for higher education." said Professor Todd Price, a member of the Faculty Senate at National Louis University.

Critics like Price argue that when public funding is cut, administrators raise tuition and decrease financial aid, making higher education inaccessible to low- and middle-income people and increasing the debt burden on college graduates. Furthermore, administrators respond to funding cuts by relying more and more on low-wage and contingent labor, decreasing the quality of teaching and learning. And administrators also seek funding from for-profit corporations whose interests and financial influence often contradict the public purposes of higher education.

Katie Gregory, an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut, says she helped organize the week of action because, *"I can't sit by while political and educational leaders mortgage our future. I am calling on the corporate lobby to stop pushing education cuts and corporate tax breaks, and I'm calling on politicians to stand up to the lobbyists."*

This week's virtual marchers aren't merely against further cuts in higher education funding. They are promoting an alternative. In 2001, it cost 32 billion US to pay for the full cost of tuition and fees for all students enrolled in 2 and 4-year degree-granting institutions of public higher education. The Democratizing Education Network (DEN) supports, among other things, eliminating tuition at public institutions by fully supporting them with public financing. Funding for quality free higher education is available, DEN activists say, pointing to the 2 billion US poured weekly into the occupation of Iraq, as well as to the declining share of taxes shouldered by corporations and the wealthy.

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To find out more about the Virtual March on Corporate Lobbyists and for more information please visit the Democratizing Education Network's website:

<http://www.DemocratizingEducation.org>