The maximum awarded to University of California students is $12,192 a year, but only $9,084 for the same student at a private university. This difference narrows choices for low-income students. It also adds to the tax burden for Californians. This is because at private nonprofit schools, Cal Grants are supplemented by private donations. These students provide the state with a high return on its investment. Our Cal Grant students graduate at an 89 percent rate, close to the overall 91 percent rate. At public universities, taxpayers subsidize the remainder of a student’s education, even after the Cal Grant has been paid.

Over the last 15 years, this maximum award value has decreased by more than 37 percent, adjusted for inflation. The Legislature is looking at Assembly Bill 831, introduced by Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla, which would reverse this trend and equalize Cal Grants allocations. I will lead a delegation of USC trustees and leaders Wednesday at the state Capitol to encourage our elected officials to pass this bill and send low-income students a clear message: “You will not be punished for exploring your full range of academic options.”

At USC, we will continue recruiting the most talented students regardless of economic background. It is my hope that the state likewise treats students at public and private universities equally.
On April 8, President C. L. Max Nikias led a delegation of USC trustees and administrators to meet with state legislators in Sacramento. That same day, his OpEd—in which he calls on the state government to pass a bill to increase funding to Cal Grants for students at private universities—was printed in the *Sacramento Bee*.

1. (left to right) Trustee Christopher Cox; Randolph Hall, vice president of research; Martha Escutia, vice president, government relations; Thomas Sayles, senior vice president, university relations; Provost Michael Quick; Governor Jerry Brown; Trustee Robert Padgett; President Nikias; Trustee Lisa Barkett and her husband, Bill Barkett (*far right*); and Thomas McWhorter, dean of financial aid.

2. California Senate minority leader Bob Huff and President Nikias.

3. (left to right) Trustee Robert Padgett, State Senator Kevin de León, President Nikias, Trustee Lisa Barkett, Trustee Christopher Cox, and Bill Barkett.


5. A view of the Capitol rotunda.

At a special reception, President Nikias and the delegation met with many of the state lawmakers who are also Trojan alumni.

6. President Nikias and Assembly Member Matthew Harper.

7. President Nikias and Assembly Member Richard Gordon.

8. President Nikias and State Senator Jeff Stone.

*All photos by Eric Abelev*