

IDAHO PRESS-TRIBUNE

Wednesday, January 28, 2015 Serving the western Treasure Valley



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Idaho's community college presidents ask for more state help

Gov. Otter advocating for this sessions' focus to be on K-12

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI
The Associated Press

BOISE — Idaho community college officials argue they need more tax dollars to help improve the state's overall college enrollment and graduation rates, but legislative budget writers are facing pressure from the governor's office to keep the funding levels low.

“ We have reached as far as we can go with current levels of funding, and we want to help you move that needle to the 60 percent goal, and in order to do so, we are requesting your assistance.”

JOE DUNLAP, North Idaho College president

Presidents from Idaho's three community colleges presented their budget proposals in front of the Joint Finance-Appropriations budget committee on Tuesday. All three stressed that their top priority next fiscal year is to add additional staff and resources focused on enrolling more Idaho high school students in higher education.

State community colleges rely on tuition costs, state tax dollars and property taxes to operate.

Idaho currently has a goal — set by the state Board of Education — of having 60 percent of its young adults to hold a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2020.

“We have reached as far as we can go with current levels of funding, and we want to help you move that needle to the 60 percent goal, and in order to do

so, we are requesting your assistance,” said Joe Dunlap, president of North Idaho College.

Currently, a little more than 50 percent of all students enrolled in higher education take classes at a community college.

College of Western Idaho President Bert Glandon said that community colleges tend to have higher enrollment because they accept almost anyone.

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College **“ When you look at community colleges and universities, we wanted to make sure that there was a level of equity.”**

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He added that CWI has been one of the fastest growing community colleges in the nation ever since it opened in 2009.

“We take anyone to give them academic skills so they can realize they can move on,” Glandon said.

However, Gov. Butch Otter is advocating that this year's legislative session's focus should be on improving K-12 education funding. He has only proposed an overall 1.5 percent boost, or a little more than \$500,000 to the community college

budget. Otter is requesting a 4.4 percent bump to the state's four-year universities' budget.

“When you look at community colleges and universities, we wanted to make sure that there was a level of equity,” said David Hahn, Otter's budget chief. “We really tried to look at their top priorities. You won't see one that was given a million dollars. Would we have loved to

do more? Sure. But that equity was the focus.”

When pressed for clarification from committee co-chairman and state Sen. Dean Cameron, Hahn said the equity between community colleges and universities was not factor.

During Tuesday's budget presentation, presidents warned they may have to increase tuition if they do not receive more state funding.

DAVID HAHN, Gov. Butch Otter's budget chief