

Budget cuts worry state agency heads

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Arguing that Oregon's ailing economy can't be cured without quality education to improve the state's human resources, Oregon higher education officials are asking that their programs be shielded from special session budget cuts.

Another agency head warns that the recession means more crime so law enforcement shouldn't be reduced. And state tourism officials declare that because the state's depressed economy needs tourists, travel programs should be spared from budget reductions.

Throughout state government, department chiefs are polishing up their persuasive powers as the likelihood of new budget cuts increases.

Gov. Vic Atiyeh said last week that he will call the Legislature into special session early next year if a serious budget shortfall is predicted.

Chancellor Roy Lieuallen of the higher education system says the Legislature should not hold pet programs like basic school support and property tax relief harmless from the budget knife.

He said Oregon currently spends substantially above the national average on elementary and secondary education, but spends substantially below the national average on higher education. He said the disparity would be accentuated if lawmakers making special session budget cuts skipped over basic school support.

Lieuallen said the 1981 Legislature gave higher education a one-year budget and directed it to come back by March

15 with a proposed 1982-83 budget. He said the expectation was that the system would cut programs and enrollment to free up money that could be reallocated to remaining courses and students to preserve quality.

Now he is fearful that the Legislature in special session could simply preempt those savings from the higher education budget instead of allowing the system to reallocate them.

"I think inevitably there is a fairly direct relationship between the quality of education a region has and the economic health the region has," said Lieuallen.

State Police Superintendent John Williams says he has been meeting personally with lawmakers and city and county officials to build support for his department.

He says talk of budget cuts is "a little premature" but the state police are gathering statistics and arguments to present their case "as loud as we can" when the time comes.

"At one time we felt surely they wouldn't cut state police officers. . . . We felt on a priority basis our programs would stand the test, but the need to cut budgets was greater in the minds of legislators," says Williams, whose agency lost over 100 people.

"Tourism is a creator of jobs and sustainer of jobs and a good many businesses rely on the tourism industry to survive," says Shirley Eads, director of travel information. "It makes no sense to cut a program aimed at increasing that kind of business."

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