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Oregon leaders outline plan for diversification

By Brad Berton
Of the Emerald

Oregon and Lane County leaders are preparing a campaign to diversify the economy.

The near future may see a publicly-funded comprehensive economic recovery plan for Oregon as well as privately-funded local plans.

"This government is going to be a part of the solution rather than part of the problem," Gov. Vic Atiyeh said before outlining the Economic and Employment Recovery Plan before the special session of the Legislature.

If accepted by the Legislature, here are some of steps the plan would take:

- Transfer the Department of Economic Development (currently under the control of the Economic Development Commission) to the direct control of the governor.

- Create an Economic Development Action Council, which would bring state agency leaders together to help industries resolve problems with the state government.

- Direct each state agency to appoint an "economic liaison" to assure prompt responses to businesses.

- Provide \$2.3 million for economic development programs.

- Develop a program for "marketing" Oregon both nationally and internationally.

- Create new positions in the Land Conservation and Development Commission to provide local assistance in resolving land-use decisions.

- Finance a comprehensive engineering and high technology education and training program within the State System of Higher Education.

- Create an intensified tourist promotion program.

- Fund the Oregon County Development Revolving Fund, which would help counties lure industry.

- Extend or renegotiate terms of contracts for timber sales on state lands.

- Conduct an inventory of state lands to determine if any are feasible for industrial needs under sale or lease agreements.

- Create a panel to study Oregon's tax structure and determine its affect on industrial development.

- Initiate an effort to increase opportunities for national defense contracting in the state.

The Lane Economic Foundation, a privately-funded organization of local businessmen, has developed a comprehensive plan for promoting economic development and diversification in Lane County.

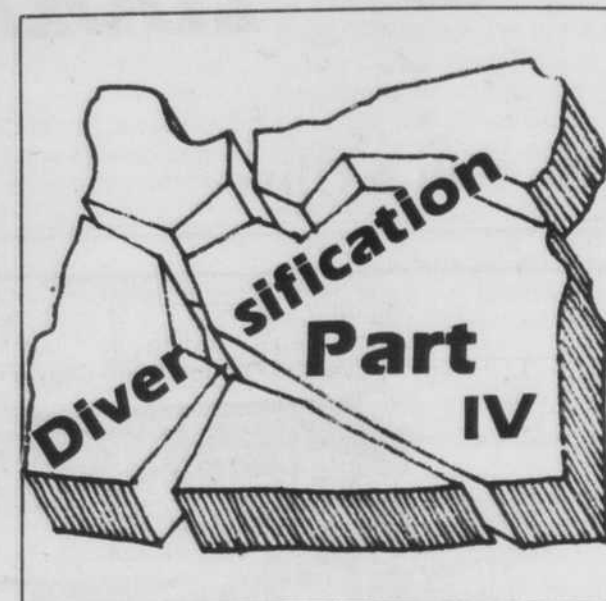
Tom Moreland, LEF's board chairer, says his group plans four programs.

Initiating economic research to "find out what kinds of industries can be developed internally or brought in from the outside" is the first LEF program, Moreland says.

"We want to reduce the list of viable industries to ones that we think can flourish here within a five-year period."

A list of possible industries will be developed for each city in the county, and strategies for recruitment will be considered, Moreland says.

The second program will attempt to deal with



"the smug image of Oregon's attitude toward outsiders," Moreland says, adding that "public relations firms are currently submitting proposals for dealing with that image."

The "development of a professional staff of experienced people who have dealt with diversification problems similar to Oregon's and Lane County's" is LEF's third program in the works.

The United Lane Forum is LEF's fourth program. The forum's central committee, made up of representatives from government, the public, business and labor, will bring together citizens and representatives from local institutions — such as Lane Community College and the University — to discuss possible actions for diversification, Moreland says.

The forum will publish a synopsis of citizen ideas, Moreland adds.

"I'm optimistic about it. I think that if we go about it in a logical way we are going to get the kinds of answers we need, and we will be very successful," Moreland says.

Along the road to recovery, many barriers need to be overcome.

Many agree Oregon's anti-business stereotype has been, and will continue to be, a major barrier to development.

But besides the image problem, a lack of available economic information will continue to be a barrier, says Mike Grove, University economics professor.

The huge federal deficit — which causes the government to compete with the private sector for available funds — hurts Oregon's chances for development also, Grove adds.

A report by the state's Legislative Research Office identifies several other problems for the state.

High unemployment, a wet climate, and a lack of large cities, technically-trained labor and air transportation are detrimental to Oregon's economic health, the report says.

And new veneer-stripping technology may make plywood production an important part of the wood products industry, more economical in the flat lands of the South, adds Bill Wooten, director of the Lane Economic Development Council.

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