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News briefs

University board plans for budget cuts

The administration that oversees Oregon's seven public universities, the Oregon University System, held its first meeting of the fall term Oct. 26 in Klamath Falls and was joined by Gov. John Kitzhaber via telephone and Chancellor Joe Cox.

Kitzhaber discussed with OUS his decision to rescind 2 percent of current budgets for all state agencies to mitigate the impact of an economic downturn that could reduce the state's general fund by more than \$290 million. The state agencies that have to make cuts include postsecondary institutions such as the University of Oregon.

Kitzhaber said the \$290 million could balloon into a larger figure if December economic forecasts follow a similar earthward trend. He asked OUS representatives to complete short-term and long-term plans that outline how the agencies can incrementally reduce budgets. The short-term plans, due Oct. 26, are to be focused on administrative reductions. The long-term plans, due Nov. 19, should deal with possible program cuts. Both plans should be specifically targeted, rather than across the board cuts, Kitzhaber said.

Officials also announced that Oregon State University-Cascade Campus enrollment has topped 300 students. The number of students attending the school full time won't be released for 10 days. The branch campus, the first of its kind, is located in Bend.

OUS Chancellor Joe Cox, who recently had angioplasty surgery to remove a blockage that was disrupting the flow of blood to his heart, is back working full time and was welcomed warmly by OUS representatives. Cox announced his retirement before recent health problems and said he will stay on board until a replacement is found. A nationwide candidate search will begin soon, OUS officials said.

—Eric Martin

Board members divided on issue of EMU tobacco sales

Several students and community members attended a meeting of the EMU Board Wednesday to speak out on the issue of tobacco sales in the EMU.

V. Pat Lombardi, a professor in the biology department, requested the board discontinue the sale of tobacco products in Erb Essentials, a convenience store located in the EMU basement.

Representatives from the University Health Center and the Student Health Advisory Board spoke in favor of the motion, citing health reasons for supporting a ban on tobacco sales in the EMU.

Members of the board appeared to be divided on the issue. Board member Andy Elliott, who expressed the strongest opposition to the motion, said the proposal was fiscally irresponsible and did not reflect student interests.

After debating the issue for more than an hour, the board voted to table the motion and vote on it in two weeks.

ASUO Senator resigns

ASUO Senate President Peter Watts announced the resignation of Sen. Ben Lacy at Wednesday night's senate meeting.

Lacy, who held the Arts and Letters seat, was asked to resign for not attending meetings, Senate Ombudsman Eric Bailey said.

The senate voted unanimously to appoint Kathryn Hale and Sonja Erickson to the ASUO Elections Board.

Senators also approved requests made by the Asian-Pacific American Student Union, the Vietnamese Student Association, and MEChA to transfer funds between accounts within each group's budgets.

'Weaving New Beginnings' promotes diversity

The ASUO will host "Weaving New Beginnings" tonight at 7 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom. This 7th annual event is aimed at maintaining a supportive and diverse campus environment by offering an opportunity for new students of color to meet their new professors, student groups and fellow students of color.

—Kara Cogswell

OPEU

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seeks bids from insurance providers across the country to provide competitive plans that aim for a balance of what workers need and what workers can afford.

But the soaring cost of prescription drugs, insurance company efforts to recoup losses incurred in previous years and increased use of medical care by seniors has pushed the cost of health care skyward, PEBB Administrator Mylia Wray said.

"The critical issue here is what has happened in the health-care industry in Oregon and in the rest of the country," Wray said. "We've seen a double-digit increase in 2000-01 and will see a 26 percent average increase on 2002 plans."

Wray said providing workers with the coverage they've become accustomed to for the last two years would raise costs by more than 45 percent in one year. As a result, one health plan for part-time workers will supplant the myriad of choices offered in the past.

Workers say the one plan offered is unaffordable.

Berglund files medical records and attends meetings at the Health Center 22 to 25 hours each week, she said. For health plan benefits, she is classified as ".5," or someone

who works half time. This means she is eligible for half the compensation afforded to full-time workers, who receive full benefits. Part-time workers receive contributions and subsidies to cover health-care costs prorated to full-time benefits.

But because basic health plan costs are rising while contributions and subsidies remain fixed, many will feel the pinch.

"(Contributions and subsidies) are not enough to cover the cost of insurance plans this year," said Helen Stoop, benefits administrator for University human resources. "The rates are so much higher."

Part-time workers said they also feel abandoned by the union that represents them, the Oregon Public Employees Union, which reached a tentative contract agreement with OUS in late September that established increased wages and health benefits for all classified staff in 2002-03. The OUS and union had been involved in contentious negotiations for months but averted a threatened strike by the workers Sept. 24.

Lewis said when he was hammering out a deal with OUS, "I had a feeling part-timers were in trouble, but I didn't understand how big a problem it was."

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