

Party-line votes give OK to budget

Higher education receives a smaller budget cut than was proposed in the last session, but the process may continue

By Brook Reinhard
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon Legislature concluded its second special session to balance the budget late Saturday night, passing the buck to Gov. John Kitzhaber, who has yet to formally indicate whether he will veto the proposal.

The Legislature was meeting for the second time this year to rid the state of an \$846 million budget shortfall caused by Oregon's faltering economy. The final budget, which passed entirely on party line votes, cut \$343 million from state programs, upheld \$98.6 million of pre-approved cuts and drew \$480 million from Medicaid funds, tobacco settlement money and the Education Endowment Fund.

Higher education's budget was cut by \$43.3 million, a smaller amount than was proposed in the last special session.

Erin Watari, a student member of Oregon's higher education board, said the Legislature's cuts weren't unexpected.

"I don't think it's satisfactory, but look what's going on in the state," she said. "I don't think higher education is a state priority."

Joelle Lester, executive director of the Oregon Student Association, agreed that the Legislature could have harmed higher education far more than it did in the plan approved Saturday.

"Of course I'm not happy with it, but I do think we've minimized the damage," Lester said. "We've made the best of a very tough situation."

The proposal passed Saturday night did not include any "sin tax" increases for beer, wine or cigarettes. Kitzhaber indicated

Cuts to Oregon universities

The Oregon Legislature ended its second special session Saturday night with a plan trimming about \$43.3 million from the Oregon University System, including:

\$38,141,866 from OUS General Fund

\$1,968,759 from the state extension service

\$3,133,890 from general research funds for agriculture and forestry

SOURCE: Oregon Legislature

earlier this week that he would allow the Legislature's budget to pass if it included a 50-cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes.

"This Republican plan really doesn't solve anything," the governor said to reporters Saturday night. "The convoluted Enron-like financing scheme that this is predicated on pushes the state of Oregon out onto a very dangerous financial ledge that's both irresponsible and unnecessary."

"I don't think it's satisfactory, but look what's going on in the state. I don't think higher education is a state priority."

Erin Watari
student member,
State Board of Higher Education

Kitzhaber was referring in part to the Legislature-created Education Endowment Fund, which voters must approve in the May 21 election for the balancing plan to work. Saturday's legislation uses the fund to cover nearly 25 percent of Oregon's budget shortfall.

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Even Kitzhaber has expressed reservations about the bill's impact. A nearly identical version of the bill reached the governor's office last week, and Kitzhaber sent a copy to Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers with a cover letter that said he does "not believe that the bill will result in the anticipated increased revenues."

He also said in the letter that "I think this measure sends the wrong message to young Oregonians."

"It really doesn't make a lot of sense. How much of your Sunday business will end up being what was your Saturday business?"

Ken Hand
owner, Downtown Liquor Store

Kitzhaber said he won't sign or veto the bill, which will become law automatically after 10 days of inactivity from the governor.

The current bill is identical to a previous one Kitzhaber said he would let pass. The previous one failed because legislators forgot to include a provision stating that it would take effect immediately.

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The Oregon State Legislature passed the bill last week, and Gov. John Kitzhaber said he won't veto it. The Oregon Legislative Revenue Department said the law should generate about \$3 million annually in state taxes, much of that money being earmarked for Oregon's education system. But local liquor store owners doubted the bill will live up to the projected revenue predictions.

Ken Hand, owner of the Downtown Liquor Store in Eugene, said his store will not open Sundays.

"It really doesn't make a lot of sense," he said. "How much of your Sunday business will end up being what was your Saturday business?"

But owners of stores in major tourist areas may benefit from keeping their doors open all week. Mike DeGiusti, owner of Dexter Liquor and Blue Moon Video, near Dexter Lake, said he may forego his day off and stay open, especially during summer when tourism is high.

He added he'll probably make money from staying open the extra day because people will rent videos.

"I'll try it for a while and see how it goes," DeGiusti said.

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