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Budget issues will influence prosecutions

The Lane County District Attorney's office will stop prosecuting some nonviolent misdemeanors to save its understaffed office time and money

By Parker Howell
News Reporter

Budget cuts to the District Attorney's Office may force certain criminal charges to go untried in Lane County starting next month. Beginning May 1, the agency will cease prosecuting 102 non-violent misdemeanors, such as theft under \$750 and possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, in an effort to save money. The move will reduce the agency's workload by 2,000 cases and save about \$270,000.

District Attorney Doug Harclerod said his office also will stop prosecuting about 1,000 drug felony cases and 650 nonviolent felony cases to save additional funds.

The reductions are part of the agency's plan to reduce more than \$1 million from its budget. The county is struggling to meet 9 percent across-the-board cuts to make up for a \$4.1 million shortfall projected in the county's Discretionary General Fund for the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

While the misdemeanor crimes will not be prosecuted at the county level, local police agencies will continue to arrest suspects, Harclerod said. He said arrests are necessary to "have some semblance of holding (criminals) accountable."

"We should have police out there arresting bad guys, no question about that," he said.

Harclerod said the cuts to misdemeanor prosecutions must be enacted before July because the department is understaffed. Only four of six misdemeanor prosecutor positions are currently filled. Harclerod said he won't be able to hire new lawyers because of budgetary woes.

He said an analysis of his entire department's workload would necessitate 32 attorneys, while he has only 24 on staff.

In an April 21 memorandum about the cuts addressed to county courts and police agencies, Harclerod said the reductions will be "a blow to public safety in Lane County."

"I deeply regret taking this action," he said in the memo.

The list of crimes that won't be prosecuted included prostitution, theft or credit card fraud of less than \$750, mail theft, prohibited camping and physical harassment.

The memo also included 38 misdemeanors that will be prosecuted, including fourth-degree assault, child neglect, drunken driving, resisting arrest, third-degree sexual abuse and unlawful possession of a weapon. Misdemeanors that are committed along with felonies will also be prosecuted, Harclerod said.

Harclerod also said in the memo that police officers may try to file misdemeanors as violations, which result in fines rather than

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MOVIN' ON UP



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

ASUO President-elect Adam Petkun (left) and his running mate, Mena Ravassipour, talk about their plans for next year outside the EMU on Sunday afternoon. The duo moves into the ASUO offices May 25 and still must rearrange staff positions and hire employees.

TAKING THE REINS

The new ASUO executives are planning and preparing for their administration's May takeover

By Jared Paben
Senior News Reporter

The days won't get any shorter for ASUO President-elect Adam Petkun and his running mate, Mena Ravassipour, now that they've nabbed the ASUO's top spot.

The new Executive elects are beginning the process of transitioning into their new roles, a process that includes, among other things, rearranging staff positions and hiring employees.

And the trick is they only have about a month to do it. Move-in day is May 25.

Current ASUO President Maddy Melton explained that the transitional process is important and time-consuming.

"I think the transition is pretty important when it comes to whether or not the

new Exec will hit the ground running, or whether they'll have to take a few weeks to feel their way around," Melton said. "Eddy (Morales) and I are really excited to spend a lot of quality time with Adam and Mena over the next four weeks."

Melton said last year she and current ASUO Vice President Morales determined the focus of their Executive staff by creating those positions and performing at least 55 interviews to fill them, all within three weeks of winning the general election.

Petkun said his goal is to have all of his staff hired by move-in day.

"To do that we need to lay out sort of a vision for what we want our office to feel like," Petkun said. "Maddy was telling me that it's really important to not only just

look for the best people for the job, but make sure the staff works well together. So, that's the major task."

Petkun said he and Ravassipour haven't finalized their vision for the staff, but he said it would look pretty similar to past staffs.

"We'll definitely have two staff members in the legislative positions since it'll be a legislative year on the state side of things," Petkun said. "Also, we're thinking very seriously about instituting a chief of staff position, which hasn't been done here in a while."

Petkun said the chief of staff would ensure the smooth operation of the office, make decisions and ensure people are responsible for their actions — in essence,

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Hong Kong Night 2004 showcases 'Enduring City'

Hong Kong Student Association members prepared food and performed skits to highlight the city's rich history during Sunday's events

By Jennifer Sudick
Freelance Editor

Popular European-style hot spot Lan Kwai Fong, located on Hong Kong island, serves brew and food to tourists and locals until early morning.

On Sunday evening in the EMU Fir Room, the Hong Kong Student Association's miniature version of the bar stood as a symbol of the integration of Western and traditional cultures in Hong Kong.

Presented by HKSA and sponsored by several campus organizations and local businesses, Hong Kong Night 2004 painted a picture of a city that has flourished in adverse circumstances through the hard work and perseverance of its people.

"In the past of Hong Kong people, there were hard times," HKSA Vice President Preston Lam said. "There has been hard

work for people to overcome those times."

Lam said the association chose the show's "Enduring City" theme to highlight the work of Hong Kong's people. HKSA President Arthur Law said the skits, focusing on issues such as the economic impact of the recent SARS crisis and the 1963 drought, helped explain the history of Hong Kong.

"It was about how Hong Kong overcame problems in the '60s and '70s," he said. "How a place overcame its own problems and became a more successful city."

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