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## BMCC responds to Governor's proposed community college budget

PENDLETON, Ore. – Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber on Monday (Dec. 1) revealed his proposed 2015-2017 biennium budget, 50 percent of which would be dedicated toward education. However, the Governor's \$500 million earmark for the state's 17 community colleges – though a 7% increase over the 2013-2015 biennium's appropriation – falls well short of what is needed to maintain programs and avoid tuition increases, said Cam Preus, President of Blue Mountain Community College.

"Our purpose is to provide an affordable education that leads to family-wage jobs, and this budget restricts BMCC's ability to do so in a cost-effective way that fully meets the workforce needs of our region," Preus said.

The Oregon Community College Association sought an appropriation of \$650 million for community colleges, which it believes would allow them to move toward the Governor's ambitious 40-40-20 goal (40% of Oregonians achieve a minimum of a bachelor's degree, 40% achieve an associates' degree, and 20% earn at least a high school diploma or equivalent by 2025). The OCCA believes the state needs to dedicate a minimum of \$550 million to community colleges to restore deep cuts from prior years and make initial strategic moves to increase opportunities for students, local employers and community economies. Preus said this amount would also put BMCC in a position to reduce the likelihood of tuition hikes, and could allow for program expansions.

"While the Governor's proposal isn't a 'cut' budget since community college's did receive a 7% increase, it isn't an 'investment' budget either," Preus said. "All it does is put us back to the funding level community colleges were at in 2007."

However, regardless of what the final community college budget looks like after the 2015 Legislative session, Preus stressed that BMCC is committed to providing career-technical education and job training programs, as well as an affordable education, even if it means the potential for needing to access reserve budget resources?

"Keeping BMCC affordable for our community and maintaining those programs that are critical for regional employers seeking to fill positions is a priority and the reason we exist," Preus said.

Currently, BMCC tuition falls in the middle of the pack for

*(more)*

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tuition rates when compared to other Oregon community colleges. If community colleges are allocated at least \$550 million in the next biennium, a tuition increase would most likely not be necessary. Preus met earlier this week with local legislators to make them aware of the impact the proposed budget would have on BMCC and its students.

“I wanted to make sure they understood that this (proposed budget) isn’t enough to grow service in our community without increasing tuition,” Preus said.

BMCC will also continue to grow its partnerships with regional education, industry and business leaders in an effort to share program and equipment costs, provide more opportunity for students and grow BMCC’s capacity and revenue without as much reliance on state funds.

The Eastern Promise is a prime example of these efforts. The partnership between BMCC, Eastern Oregon University, InterMountain Education Service District, Malheur ESD and Treasure Valley Community College provides opportunities for high school students to earn college credits at just \$10 per credit while still in high school. In 2013-2014, BMCC received nearly \$70,000 in Eastern Promise and dual credit tuition, saving regional students around \$1.23 million.

“We may not receive as much revenue as we would if these students were attending BMCC and paying full tuition costs, but we’re saving these students a lot of money and showing them the opportunities BMCC can provide after high school,” Preus said. “Many of these students often come to BMCC to finish or continue their post-secondary educations – they may not have come here without the Eastern Promise.”

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