

# State needs more study on community colleges

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Treasure Valley Community College of Ontario, Ore., is looking to establish three campuses in Southwest Idaho, which is close enough that 4,500 Idaho students already take classes on the Oregon campus. So what's wrong with that idea?

Plenty, in the opinion of Boise State University President Bob Kustra and State Board of Education President Rod Lewis. If TVCC came to Idaho, they fret that the area may be overserved by two-year institutions, which are normally viewed as venues for students who are not interested in earning four-year academic degrees. "If an out-of-state institution were to come into the region . . . we'd have no state oversight. We would have no insight into the academic offerings they provide, no ability to coordinate and ensure we're not duplicating resources," Lewis told Idaho legislators last week.

Never mind that Idaho already has no oversight over a number of four-year schools in the state, including BYU-Idaho and Albertson College. The only problem seems to be a perceived lack of two-year schools, and if TVCC can help meet that demand without a need for Idaho tax dollars, why not?

Gov. Dirk Kempthorne has offered what seems a cautious idea, proposing in his State of the State message at the beginning of the legislative session that the state spend \$5 million in seed money—\$3.5 million in ongoing support and \$1.5 million in a one-time allocation—to pay for expanded community college services, using some existing campus buildings and facilities.

But his go-slow plan would require existing two-year colleges such as College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls and North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene to continue to be partly supported by local property taxes. In Jerome and Twin Falls counties, \$3.2 million in property taxes goes to CSI. In 2006, about 15 percent of CSI's funding derives from that source. Will local property owners want to continue that levy if other schools get nearly all their money from the state?

State Rep. Ann Rydalch, who is pushing for a community college in her home city of Idaho Falls, would let voters in five districts statewide choose between paying for such a college with local property taxes, or by earmarking 4.5 percent of sales tax receipts for community colleges. Guess which they would prefer?

The J.A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation has shown a willingness to provide up to \$18 million to TVCC, or somewhat less to BSU to expand two community college campuses in Nampa. Such generous gifts are to be appreciated, but it does not seem wise to rush any plan to fruition simply because the money is available.

What Idaho needs, at this point, is a careful, comprehensive plan to ascertain needs throughout the state, how to meet them, and how to pay for it all. That's a lot to ask as this legislative session wanes, and may require an interim task force overseen by the State Board of Education to get the answers.