

Legislative panel looking at community college options

Committee to travel state seeking input

COEUR d'ALENE (AP) — The co-chairman of an 18-member legislative interim committee studying the possibilities of creating more community colleges in Idaho says balancing the need for the schools and funding them will be key.

"My goal is to expand the availability of community colleges to people needing an education across the state and to do it in a manner that is equitable to taxpayers statewide," Sen. John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene, told the Coeur d'Alene Press. "The real issue is going to be how to fund it."

During this year's legislative session, Rep. Ann Rydalch, R-Idaho Falls, and Goedde introduced a bill aimed at increasing the number of community colleges, and Gov. Dirk Kempthorne intro-

duced a measure that would have used \$5 million from the general fund to have existing colleges offer classes in schools and other public buildings.

However, the session ended without any action taken on community colleges by lawmakers, who did agree that the state should pay for an interim study by the committee.

"It's a good opportunity to look at a statewide community college system that is free of property taxes," said Rep. Jim Clark, R-Hayden Lake, who is on the committee. "The state should provide more financial resources instead of depending on the homeowner. It's about time we had a new vision and put forth some new ideas on how community colleges should be managed."

Idaho only has two community colleges: the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls and North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene.

Kempthorne made the establishment of more community college classes a priority in his State of the State speech in

January. Only 45 percent of Idaho high school graduates go directly to a college — the fourth-worst rate in the United States.

Boise State University President Bob Kustra has said the Idaho capital is the largest metropolitan area in the country without a community college.

Sen. David Langhorst, D-Boise, another member of the committee, would like to do something about that.

"Whatever solutions are out there, I want to make sure we have a sufficient community college presence in the Treasure Valley, where I think it's needed greatly," Langhorst told The Associated Press on Friday.

He said the committee will travel around the state to speak with Idaho citizens about creating more community colleges.

"One of the big questions is, how do you fund this?" Langhorst said. "I don't know the answer to that question, but I'm totally open-minded. I'm looking forward to a lot of public input."