

# College plan faces hurdles on path

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**BOISE** — Leaders of an effort to found Idaho's first new community college in Southwest Idaho expect to put the matter to a vote next year — if lawmakers pass Gov. Butch Otter's plan to lower barriers to local taxpayer funding and spend \$5 million in state money on the project.

But getting that through the 2007 Legislature may be no easy task.

The new governor's plan is running into opposition from lawmakers on a conservative-leaning panel that often slams attempts to make raising taxes easier.

Otter favors lowering the voter approval requirement for a new community college taxing district to 60 percent of voters, from 66 2/3 percent. Such districts levy property taxes to pay for schools and colleges.

The Republican governor's proposal also includes a promise of at least \$5 million in state assistance to new community colleges.

But the bill to lower the so-called "supermajority" to 60 percent would first require at least 10 votes in the tax-wary, 18-member Revenue and Taxation Committee, where virtually all tax-related legislation starts.

And that panel includes tax hawks such as Rep. Lenore Barrett, R-Challis, and its new chairman, Rep. Dennis Lake, R-Blackfoot, who say they won't back the governor's plan.

## College backers see plan's success

### **Group for community colleges hopeful lawmakers will greenlight new Southwest Idaho system**

**BOISE** — Many lawmakers remain optimistic the legislative foundation for a new community college in Southwest Idaho will come this year.

"It's been an issue for 20 years," said Sen. Elliot Werk, D-Boise. "Now, you've got the perfect storm."

That "storm" includes several factors. The region around Boise is growing and has become one of the largest U.S. metropolitan areas without its own community college. The private education-oriented J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation has offered \$15 million in seed money for a Boise-area community college.

Meanwhile, Boise State wants to shed its community college and professional and technical school functions. President Bob Kustra favors moving community college classes to the BSU-West campus north of the Idaho Center in Nampa, while shifting its Larry G Selland College of Applied Technology to a site in Meridian.

"There are now 1,200 students" taking classes at the Selland college, Kustra said. "It could probably be seven times that size, if it had the space."

Gov. Butch Otter's \$5 million promise of state support also has placated lawmakers whose districts include North Idaho College in Coeur d'Alene, started in 1933, and Twin Falls' College of Southern Idaho, founded in 1964.

The existing colleges had feared the \$22 million their schools currently get from the state would be cannibalized by a new campus.

Existing community colleges in Idaho are also funded with property taxes and student fees and are run by local boards.

"We have two community colleges that are already operating effectively," said Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert. "And those of us who have studied community colleges know the local governance of the community college is inherent in their longterm success."

Backers of a new community college in Southwest Idaho fear the region's economy will suffer without one. Groups including the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce want to start a community college in the growing region that includes Ada, Canyon and Gem counties. They said they would be ready to put it to a vote by May 2008.

Ray Stark, a Boise Metro Chamber lobbyist, also says some out-of-state companies, which he wouldn't name, that had considered the region for relocation moved elsewhere. They decided the existing education system wouldn't produce enough trained workers, Stark said.