

Clark readies fundraising push as state cash wanes

By **HOWARD BUCK**
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If Olympia's sure to turn down the money spigot, where can fresh dollars be found?

Since last spring, Clark College leaders have worked to identify prime programs on which to mount an ambitious new, local fundraising push.

A preliminary consensus: Scholarships, health sciences, early childhood education and technology are critical programs or training areas most likely to rally outside support.

"These are programs that are key to what we do at Clark," said Bob Knight, Clark president.

"They're core to what we do."

The looming budget crunch of 2009 has swiftly upped the ante, as evidenced by state funding cuts proposed by Gov. Chris Gregoire on Thursday.

Under her plan, Clark and other community and technical colleges stand to lose 6 percent from their current budget in 2009-11. But final budget cuts could grow much deeper.

"We're cautiously optimistic," Knight said of the proposed 6 percent hit. "We've been saying, 'We're going to be part of the (economic) solution.' I think the

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governor see that, gets that," he said.

There's little doubt creative response is needed, however.

"We're getting less and less support from the state. There's more of a need now for funding from other sources," Knight said.

In that grim atmosphere, Clark's board of trustees and the Clark College Foundation board met two days before, on Tuesday, to review results of a privately conducted feasibility study.

The study followed community forums on strategic planning that Clark hosted last spring.

In person or online, the Salt Lake City-based Clements Group quizzed more than 100 community leaders identified by Clark. They were polled on a long list of academic, technical and career programs for those they believe most deserving of fundraising help.

Knight said the handful of favorites to emerge registered 80 percent support or higher.

"They're the core of what we do, that's why the rose to the top," he said.

The college declined to share survey specifics until Clark's board and the foundation meet again to draw up any campaign.

"The timing couldn't be better. We're all supportive of the things that came out," Knight said. A "good discussion" on Tuesday must now shift to how to capitalize on those areas, he

said.

"We've got some good ideas here, now, where can we go from here?" Knight said.

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