

REGENTS SAY Y2K A \$20 M PROBLEM, BUT LEAVITT RECOMMENDS ONLY \$5M

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The amount of money Utah's public colleges can expect to protect their computer systems against the millennium bug continues to tumble, and that might mean trouble for students returning from the holiday break a year from now.

College presidents initially requested \$45 million to upgrade and protect the computer systems and computer-dependent facilities at the state's nine public colleges and universities.

Too high, replied the state Board of Regents.

The presidents countered with a \$20 million, bare-bones plan.

The regents then asked a state computer expert to assess the problem. He came back with a \$12 million figure.

Then Friday, Gov. Mike Leavitt unveiled a higher education budget proposal that requests \$5 million to fix a problem that may cause entire campus computer systems to crash.

The money is needed to fix, reprogram and replace computers and computer chips so they do not freeze when the calendar turns to 2000. Systems that are not updated could read the year "00" as 1900 instead of 2000. The problem extends beyond computer networks. Many campus buildings depend on computer chips to control their heating, cooling and security systems.

But at the rate the Y2K funding proposals are dropping, Utah colleges might be lucky to get a box of new mouse pads by the time the 1999 Legislature sets the final budget.

And educators are predicting problems.

"Some of the {campus} buildings will be inoperable," said Higher Education Commissioner Cecelia Foxley.

Foxley has other budget worries as well.

This fall, the regents requested a \$64 million budget increase for next year. Leavitt countered Friday with a proposal to increase the budget by \$31 million.

Utah's public colleges and universities will receive about \$500 million in state funding this year.

"We never request a budget that we think is unreasonably rich," said Foxley.

"My hope is that one year soon it will be higher education's year," she added. "This state will not be competitive with other states if we don't reinvest in higher education."

Regent Pamela Atkinson said she is concerned about Leavitt's plan to boost faculty and staff compensation by 2.5 percent. She said she believes more should be spent because relatively low wages already make it difficult to recruit and retain top faculty.

"How can we {deliver} quality education if we don't have quality faculty?" she asked.

"We always say we need more funding, but we understand some of the limitations," regents Chairman Charlie Johnson said.