
News

Buchanan hopes funding will help UW transportation move forward

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University of Wyoming president Tom Buchanan is hoping for state support of the university's new transportation system despite a state surplus that's expected to be considerably smaller than that of previous years.

With Gov. Dave Freudenthal warning of the need for slimmer spending habits and a revised revenue projection due out soon, Buchanan has also adjusted his own expectations for this year's legislative session.

UW started a shuttle bus route last fall from a parking lot at the corner of 15th and Spring Creek, which has attracted riders in light of reduced on-campus parking. Buchanan said the university leased the additional buses for one year and will lobby for money to fund continued operating costs.

"The governor did not recommend the funding for those parts of the system," he said, though Freudenthal did recommend funds to purchase the vacant lot. Buchanan suspected that uncertain revenue projections are making lawmakers cautious about committing to projects that would require ongoing funding.

The university is also hoping to begin shuttle service from West Laramie to campus, with a possible stop in downtown Laramie, though funding for that project might also be hard to come by.

"I'll be talking to legislators and the Joint Appropriations Council and making arguments for why it's important for us to keep our momentum going. That will be a significant topic of discussion for us," Buchanan said.

A struggling national economy has prompted caution as lawmakers prepare to start the session on Tuesday, though Wyoming isn't facing a deficit like many other states are. Freudenthal warned recently that a lingering recession could catch up to Wyoming soon.

As far as other budget priorities, Buchanan said the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory is garnering support from Freudenthal and other lawmakers to receive funding for renovations, which UW has listed as a top priority. Freudenthal recommended \$25 million for the project.

Another important project that needs funding, Buchanan said, is the Fine Arts project, including a new art building and expansion of the existing Fine Arts building. Currently, funding is needed for final design planning for the new building. Construction would likely begin in the summer of 2010.

"That's a high priority for us. It's an important academic facility," Buchanan said. "So far, I have sensed strong legislative support to keep that funding in place and continue forward on that project."

A last-minute budget request Buchanan said he hoped would receive support is for radio transmission facilities to expand Wyoming Public Radio coverage in eastern Wyoming. The university recently purchased a broadcast license, which are hard to come by, and has a small period of time to act on that license.

Expanding outreach facilities in Casper and Cheyenne in partnership with Casper College and Laramie County Community College is a project Buchanan said the university would push for even if funding wasn't available this year.

"We've made a commitment to the state of Wyoming that we're going to do a better job reaching out and providing postsecondary education sites," he said.

The university will also look for matching funds and bonding authority to complete renovation of War Memorial Stadium and construction of an indoor tennis facility.

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