

From the *Tallahassee Democrat*

House proposals slash \$95M from FSU, FAMU combined

BY ANGELINE J. TAYLOR • DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER • APRIL 24, 2009

At least one-third of the State University System's 45,000 employees would have to be laid off if the proposed House budget for higher education goes through, said Modesto Maidique, president of Florida International University.

That's why Maidique and nine other public university presidents convened for a news conference outside the Capitol on Thursday morning — to stress what they regard as an extreme budget situation. A budget year unlike any other in which jobs, class size and satellite campuses are threatened.

"This is Armageddon," Maidique said, standing by his nine colleagues. At Florida State University, the "draconian" cuts would equate to possibly closing 21 degree programs and the campus in Panama City. An estimated 350 faculty would be laid off, while other programs would have to be merged.

At Florida A&M University, about 250 faculty and staffers would have to be laid off. A six-month furlough would be initiated, programs would be closed and class sizes would be enlarged.

The total stripped from Tallahassee's two universities — according to the House budget proposal — comes to nearly \$95 million for the coming school year.

"We've become so worried," University of Florida President Bernard Machen said. "Actually this happened in the last 24 hours. We had a conference call yesterday.

"If we don't go there and don't make sure that everyone gets just how bad the situation is, we just may not be doing our job."

About \$285 million has already been stripped from the State University System during the past two years in an effort to meet difficult budget constraints.

University presidents say House proposals would deepen cuts beyond belief — \$500 million of basic state support plus another \$100 million in salaries for the 2009-10 school year, according to the Board of Governors. But they say the aftereffects of the budget cuts could be even more drastic for students.

Judy Genshaft, president of the University of South Florida, said the worst-case scenario for her university would mean a \$78 million cut.

"We're doing everything we can to retain our best and brightest professors for outstanding students," Genshaft said. "This is a budget worst-case scenario that could be very crippling to us."

Frank Brogan, Florida Atlantic University president, could not attend the news conference due to a funeral. However, each president said they understood the difficult position members of the state House and Senate are under.

Jaryn Emhof, press secretary to Senate President Jeff Atwater, said, "The president has been pretty open about his concern." She said it's important for students to be "equipped to compete" to enter into the global marketplace.

"We are working with the House in coming to an agreement," she said. "Compromise is part of the process."

In the meantime, John Delaney, president of the University of North Florida, said Gov. Charlie Crist understands the university presidents' concerns.

"Spending money on higher education is like priming a pump," Delaney said. "You may be pouring down your last cup of water that allows you to draw off many gallons."

The Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council of Tallahassee/Leon County e-mailed their members on Thursday, urging them to contact the governor and legislative leaders on behalf of higher education.

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Board of Governors to meet on budget negotiations

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The Board of Governors will hold a special meeting today by conference call to discuss the state House-Senate budget negotiations and the potential impact on Florida's 11 public universities.

The conference call meeting will start at 9 a.m.

Board of Governors Chairwoman Sheila McDevitt attended Thursday's historic news conference where 10 of the state university's 11 presidents stressed their concern about the House's proposed budget cuts for 2009-2010.

McDevitt said, "We're just worried about the numbers."

Since 2007, about \$285 million has been stripped from the State University System in an effort to meet difficult budget constraints. University presidents say House proposals would deepen cuts beyond belief -- \$500 million of basic state support plus another \$100 million in salaries for the coming school year.