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Barker calls on Clemson faculty to help with budget

By John Staed



Clemson University President James Barker sits in his office in Sikes Hall as he talks about the school and the changes there in the 10 years he has led it. (Photo by Ken Ruinard)

CLEMSON — Clemson President James Barker told the faculty senate Tuesday that tougher days are ahead, given future state budget cuts, and did not rule out layoffs, furloughs or the sale of university land.

Barker said the proposed state budget is, using a baseball analogy, only in the third inning, but the university faces multi-million-dollar cuts when federal stimulus money goes away after next year.

A state House committee has recommended \$22.7 million in cuts for the general education budget for 2010-2011, but used one-time federal stimulus funds to match that cut.

But in the Public Service Activities budget, which cover agriculture and programs like extension services, the House budget would cut \$6.2 million and only add back \$2.6 million of stimulus dollars, Barker said.

The total reductions would come on top of \$53.2 million already cut since 2008 from the state budget for Clemson and another \$5 million lost in endowment funding, Barker said. The stimulus plugs give Clemson time to plan for its future without panicking, Barker said, and asked the faculty senate members for their help in answering what will be a series of questions about the school's future.

Barker said he will host a town hall meeting March 30 to talk about the budget.

He also proposed providing questions to the university departments by April, then give people time to review those and make suggestions through the summer. The planning process would start in earnest in the fall. The process would be for the budget starting July 1, 2011.

"We have some time not to be reactive, but be reflective as we go," Barker said. "We need to figure out how to engage the colleges and divisions in this process."

At the core, though, the university should protect the education of students, he said. Faculty Senator Fran McGuire said he would rather see "a strategy" than a plan, which would make the university "more nimble."

Provost Doris Helms told faculty senate members it was important that "we want to let you know what we are thinking and get your response."

A more immediate issue facing the university is the cut facing the Public Service budget, and Clemson has to make reductions to meet revenues by July 1, Barker said.

Barker said when he became president 10 years ago, the state provided 40 percent of Clemson's funding. Today, it is 12 percent, the same as federal funding, he said. "We didn't ask for any of this," he said. "I think the real task ... is to realize that recessions don't last, but that universities do."

In the previous budget cuts, Clemson reduced 450 positions through attrition and retirements, required five-day unpaid furloughs, stopped construction on two buildings, cut travel and made other reductions to balance its budget. It also raised tuition and fees to generate additional revenues.

Barker said the university may have reached its limit on tuition hikes.

"We have had increases over a long period of time," he said. "We may be bumping up against some sort of ceiling."

The university has to find other sources of revenue through its properties, financial partnerships with industry, seeking more federal funds, a change in how salary raises are provided and land sales.

Clemson has 31,000 acres, much of it, like the Clemson Experimental Forest, restricted. But it has property that has no restrictions on it, he said, suggesting that could be a revenue source.

Barker said he is meeting with the state Senate Finance Committee Wednesday to make the case for Clemson's budget.

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