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# Special Weather Statement

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## Governor's budget proposal amounts to \$4 million reduction for WKU, cuts statewide weather network

By AARON MUDD [amudd@bgdailynews.com](mailto:amudd@bgdailynews.com) 3 hrs ago

Western Kentucky University is facing a \$4.6 million cut and elimination of funding for its statewide weather network under a budget plan proposed Tuesday by Gov. Matt Bevin.

Under the plan, which still needs to be passed into law, most of the state's government would endure a 6.25 percent reduction in spending. Funding for the Kentucky Mesonet, a statewide network of weather stations based at WKU, would be eliminated.

Responding to Bevin's proposal in a statement, WKU President Timothy Caboni said it will only add to the mounting costs the university is facing.

"Governor Bevin has previewed the state's budget challenges for months, and we anticipated he would announce additional cuts to higher education tonight," Caboni said in the statement.

"The 6.25 percent reduction included in the budget proposal amounts to a \$4.619 million reduction for WKU. The budget also proposes to eliminate the Kentucky Mesonet funding, which is \$750,000, and we are planning for an increased pension obligation of nearly \$9

million.

“We recognize that the proposed cuts could have been much higher. For WKU, the overall proposal presents us with an even bigger fiscal challenge because it adds significantly to the \$15 million in reductions the University’s Budget Council is currently working to address.”

Stuart Foster, director of the Kentucky Climate Center and the Kentucky Mesonet, said in an interview Tuesday that, although he understands the state is in a tough spot financially, the state needs to invest in programs that bolster the state’s economy.

“The Kentucky Mesonet is one of those programs,” he said, adding the network provides critical climate data to weather-sensitive industries like agriculture.

“We provide high-quality data information to help farmers make better decisions in addition to providing a public service to help enhance public safety,” he said.

Foster added that Kentucky is a “top tier” of three states, including Oklahoma and New York, that have networks “of this magnitude.” The statewide network includes 69 stations in 67 counties.

“It would certainly be a shame to give that away,” he said.

Bevin’s budget isn’t all bad for universities. It also includes a \$300 million fund set aside for maintaining campus facilities, which Caboni said he appreciates.



“We are appreciative of the inclusion of asset preservation funds to support our infrastructure challenges,” he said. “We will have to study further the options for university matching funds that are included.”

Moving forward, Caboni said the university will continue to work with lawmakers as they now take up the task of creating a budget for the next two years. Their task will be complicated by a troubled state pension system, which is underfunded by more than \$40 billion.

“It’s important to understand that this is the beginning of the legislative process,” he said. “We will work diligently with policy makers throughout the session to advocate for a more positive final outcome for higher education and WKU.

As for Kentucky’s public schools, Bevin promised the current \$3,981 each student receives from the state under the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky program is “not going to be touched.”

However, in his address, Bevin also called on school districts to reduce “administrative overhead” and take up more of the cost for transportation and other costs.

Responding to Bevin's proposal, Bowling Green Independent School District Superintendent Gary Fields said it's misleading to say the state isn't cutting funding to students by keeping SEEK funding flat. Cuts to textbook funding and professional development ultimately impact students, he said.

“The fallacy of Frankfort is that we once again are hearing our leaders say that they aren't going to cut the SEEK allocation,” he said. “That's a lie ... It's a shell game.”

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