

STATE REGENTS ALLOCATE LARGEST APPROPRIATION IN HISTORY

From State Regents for Higher Education

■(OKLAHOMA CITY) The largest higher education appropriation in state history was allocated Friday by the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education.

The \$636.2 million appropriation includes a \$71.4 million or 12.6 percent increase over higher education's fiscal year 1996 appropriation, making fiscal year 1997's appropriation the largest dollar and percentage increase ever received by Oklahoma higher education.

The funds will be used to support academics, student services, financial aid programs and other special programs for almost 229,000 students.

Colleges and universities will now budget the funds and submit their 1996-97 budgets to the State Regents for approval on June 28 for the new fiscal year that gets under way July 1.

"We commend the legislature and governor for recognizing the importance of higher education to Oklahomans and to all of Oklahoma," said Hans Brisch, higher education chancellor. "We will use the funds efficiently to meet rising costs and to offer Oklahomans needed programs and services that for the past several years we could not afford."

Of the \$71.4 million in new state funds, \$65.5 will go to colleges and universities, agencies, higher education programs and State Regents' operations, bringing the total for this group to \$595.4 million. The remaining \$6 million in new funds will support financial aid programs and special programs, bringing the total for these areas to \$40.8 million.

Allocations from the new funds include \$37.7 million for rising costs, such as \$12 million in contributions required by law for the Oklahoma Teachers Retirement System, and employee insurance, property insurance and utilities. Institutions will also use these funds for other institutional priorities, such as salary increases, new staff positions and

library funding.

The Regents also allocated \$4.9 million for utility, insurance and maintenance costs required to operate and maintain facilities opened as a result of the 1992 capital bond issue.

To more equitably fund the budget needs of higher education institutions and constituent agencies, \$6.5 million of the new funds will be directed to institutions and agencies which experience the greatest gap between identified needs and allocated state funding. On average, Oklahoma colleges and universities receive \$58 in state funds for every \$100 in identified needs.

Other allocations by the State Regents include:

- ✓ \$5.6 million for system improvements, such as the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History at the University of Oklahoma, the Food and Agriculture Product Research and Technology Center at Oklahoma State University and the new West Campus of Tulsa Community College;

- ✓ \$2.8 million to support the first year of a multi-year funding plan to strengthen teacher education by implementing 23 recommendations for improvement made by a review team of national education experts and state leaders;

- ✓ \$1.2 million to the Section 13 Offset Program, which funds capital improvements at two-year colleges and Rogers University; and

- ✓ Fees to enable institutions to access OneNet, the state's education and government telecommunications network; OneNet user fees, which cover operating costs, are \$28,800 per site for each college or university;

In addition, a total of \$3.85 million of the new funds will go toward ongoing financial aid programs, including:

- ✓ The Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program, which provides scholarships to high school students with financial need who take the courses and make the grades for college;

- ✓ The Oklahoma Tuition Aid Grant Program, which awards need-based grants that cover part of the cost of attending college; and

- ✓ The Regional University Baccalaureate Scholarships, which fund the educations of academically outstanding students at Oklahoma's 10 regional universities.

Also, \$2 million was allocated to the State Regents' Research Matching Grant

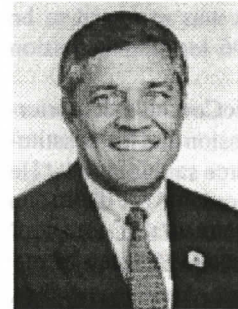
Program, which matches competitive research grants awarded to Oklahoma colleges and universities.

"Higher education has entered a new era in Oklahoma history," Brisch said. "The resources that higher education received this year will allow us to achieve a new level of quality and service for Oklahoma and its citizens."

"This is a promising first step in our five-year plan to achieve funding that is equal to the average funding at similar colleges and universities in other states. We are moving forward."

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vote to override the veto, Sen. Darryl Roberts, D-Ardmore, blasted the governor's decision, calling it hypocritical.



Sen. Darryl Roberts

"This is the height of hypocrisy," he said of the governor's vetoes in general. "In the governor's budget, was there an airplane or a \$23,000 increase in his operating budget?"

Roberts referred to the increase in the governor's budget increase for mansion expenses and the state jet with an estimated price tag of \$2.5 million.

"The worst vote I've made in years was to let the governor bust his budget to purchase an airplane," Roberts said.

Also vetoed by the governor was a section of SB802 allotting \$919,155 to the Oklahoma Indigent Defense System's (OIDS) operating budget.

Wintory said the veto has serious ramifications on the recently passed habeas corpus reform which limits the number of death row appeals prisoners can make.

Due to the funding shortfall, a shortage of attorneys to defend death row inmates will result in not being able to utilize the new reforms.

"Without OIDS," Wintory said, "we cannot follow the time lines set forth by the habeas corpus reform."

According to the message issued with the rejected legislation, the two sections of the bill were vetoed to prevent "fiscally irresponsible levels of overall spending."

"We naturally associate democracy, to be sure, with freedom of action, but freedom of action without freed capacity of thought behind it is only chaos."

John Dewey
"Democracy in Education"
The Elementary School Teacher
Dec. 1903