If ever there was a time we needed Scarlett O’Hara’s indomitable optimism — this is it.

The state’s near financial collapse looks like it may take a good portion of Humboldt State University down as well.

Two recent budget meetings — one Friday and one Monday — laid out the potential strategies that may be pursued to cut out an estimated $16 million to $17 million from the university’s budget. The entire California State University system is expected to lose between $400 million and $700 million, with the latest estimate at $583 million, HSU spokesman Paul Mann said Monday.

Mann said — as is the case with all agencies at the edge of the state budget precipice — nothing has been decided yet.

”The chancellor has said in weeks gone by, everything is on the table,” Mann said.

Everything will depend upon what the state Legislature and the governor do in the coming days.

Before that, at least a portion of the campus staff — just under 400 members of the California State University Employees Union — will vote whether they’d accept furloughs. If a tally of the secret ballots favors furloughs, then the union representatives will negotiate the details of those. Union members from throughout the state will vote on the issue. HSU’s vote is set for Friday from noon to 1 p.m. Friday at 117 Siemens Hall.

The Chancellor’s Office has indicated, union Chapter 301 President Steven Mottaz said, that if the furloughs are voted down layoffs will occur. That could mean 2,800 temporary employees and 2,000 permanent employees statewide will lose their jobs, he said.

The proposed furloughs would be every other Friday, essentially a 10 percent pay cut, Mottaz said.

”Morale is pretty low right now,” Mottaz said. “They’re facing the possibility of losing their jobs or reducing their pay to levels that make it difficult to survive.”
At HSU, the union chapter represents four bargaining units comprised of health care workers; groundskeepers and maintenance workers; clerical and administrative support; and technical services.

A June 5 memo from Humboldt State University President Rollin Richmond said the guiding principles in making the reductions would be tying them to university priorities, maintaining some savings, and making targeted reductions versus across-the-board cuts.

Targeting cuts, Mann said, would give the administrators more flexibility in making the decisions. If you cut across the board, he said, you don’t allow for any variables.

Prior to the state’s budget crisis, university officials had been going through a process of prioritizing HSU’s academic offerings into five categories — from highest to lowest priority. The intent, Mann said, was to strengthen the university’s academic programs overall — strengthen the strong, maintain the middle and phase out the weak.

That prioritization will be one of the guidelines likely used when the cuts begin, he said.

The bottom line, Mann said, is these cuts come on a steady diet of reductions over the past six or seven years.