Chico State hit with $4.1 million cut

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CHICO — It isn't exactly Paul Zingg's worst nightmare, but it's bad enough.

Today, Gov. Brown announced "trigger cuts" would take effect, which means the California State University will be cut by an additional $100 million.

What does that mean for Chico State University and the other 22 CSU campuses?

"Access damaged, affordability decreased, quality diminished," Zingg answered in an email to this newspaper.

He estimated Chico State's share of the $100 million cut will be about $4.1 million. The cut applies to the current academic year.

Earlier this year, it seemed certain the CSU's state allocation would be cut by $500 million. And it sounded like the cut could grow to $1 billion if several tax increases the governor wanted extended weren't extended. Ultimately, the tax increases were not extended.

The fiscal landscape changed.

In June, when the state budget was adopted, the CSU faced a certain cut of $650 million, plus an additional $100 million cut if revenue fell short of projections.

The additional cut was referred to as a "trigger."

Today, Brown pulled the trigger.

Zingg, in an email, wrote that he regarded this latest development as nothing but bad news.

"It is a message that will stoke more fear about the future and anxiety over the prospects of recovery for our state, not confidence in it," he wrote. "Lives are in the balance now and nothing good comes from depriving people of hope."

The president added, "The CSU has been planning for enrollment growth in 2012-2013. Further permanent budget reductions as we are seeing today will jeopardize that plan almost certainly."

Dealing with a shrinking budget has been on the minds of Chico State officials for many months.
At a campus budget committee meeting in March, Chico State Provost Sandra Flake talked about cost-cutting measures that had been taken so far, including redesigning some large classes so they could be taught by fewer instructors, not filling vacant positions, hiring full-time faculty on a temporary basis, and postponing buying equipment.

Now, a proposal is being studied that could lead to Chico State having fewer colleges. Part of the reason for doing that would be to save money.

Going into the spring, Zinng wrote in an email Tuesday, "our focus will continue to be on providing classes and protecting our workforce, especially the folks who provide direct services to students, including, of course, instruction."

The CSU chancellor's office sent out a news release today stating that the additional $100 million cut reduces the state allocation to the CSU for this year to $2 billion. The total cut of $750 million means the CSU will receive 27 percent less than it got from the state last year.

Tuition increases this year raised $300 million for the CSU (after one third of the increased funding was diverted to financial aid), the release stated.

In the release, CSU officials indicated the campuses would be able to squeak through the spring semester with short-term savings measures.

"However," the release stated, "starting with the next fiscal year, extremely difficult longer-term tradeoffs will have to be considered, including the possibility of additional cuts to academic programs or further increases in tuition."