Zingg: Now budget work begins

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Now that California State University leaders have decided to ask the state for a $333 million increase in funding, the hard work begins: trying to convince the governor and Legislature to provide the money. The CSU will begin lobbying for the funding hike in a number of ways, said Erik Fallis, a spokesman for the university system.

There will be meetings with legislators, efforts to inform the public of the CSU’s needs, and a campaign to rally students and their families to support the budget request, he said.

“I will be part of that effort, as is the case every year,” Chico State University President Paul Zingg wrote in an email to this newspaper Thursday. “There are regularly scheduled occasions for … visits (with legislators), and I will join the (campus) presidents in many other efforts, as well. Online, in person, regular mailings, newspaper columns/letters, whatever, whenever.”

Fallis said university officials will get their first formal look at what the governor has in mind when he issues his proposed budget in January, including a suggested allocation for the CSU.

After that, legislators, the public, and lobbyists for many groups, such as the CSU, will push their views of what should be done with the state’s money. In May, the governor will issue a revised version of his budget, and then the struggle will begin to get the Legislature to pass some version of it. That’s supposed to happen by July 1. According to CSU Chancellor Charles Reed, the university system has two sources of funding: allocations from the state and fees paid by students. As the state has slashed funding for the CSU, the university has continually raised the tuition fee all students must pay (although a large percentage have their tuition offset by grants and scholarships).

The latest increase in the tuition-fee, which is paid annually, came on Wednesday, when the trustees voted for a $498 hike. This year, the governor and Legislature cut the state allocation to the CSU by $650 million. And since the signing of the state budget, there has been the threat of another $100 million “trigger” cut if state revenues did not reach certain levels.

On Wednesday, the state’s nonpartisan fiscal analyst issued a report suggesting the trigger cut to the CSU would need to be made, along with additional cuts to many other public entities, such as
public schools, services for seniors and health care programs for the needy, according to the Associated Press.

The Legislative Analyst’s Office said the state is projected to face a $13 billion budget shortfall over the next 18 months.

In his email, Zingg said it was not a big surprise to hear the $100 million trigger cut would likely be coming.

“We are expecting the … shoe to drop in the next few weeks,” he wrote. “We’ve been anticipating that ever since that was announced in the governor’s budget plan for this year, and as we’ve tracked state revenues over the last six months or so.”

Zingg said Chico State’s share of the $100 million cut would be about $4.1 million.

“We can use one-time funds to cover it this year,” he wrote. “The problem, of course, is whether this additional $100 million cut becomes permanent. We do not have permanent funding to cover our share if that is the case.”

Fallis said the CSU as a whole faces the same problem that Chico State does. If the trigger cut happens, he said, “we would have to take a lot of one-time steps,” such as putting off buying equipment, postponing filling jobs, using up the last of the reserves.”

He added, “The problem is you can do them once. When you exhaust reserves, they are exhausted.”