

Are 2-year colleges crying wolf?

By TIM RICHARD

personal property tax (on business inventory and equipment). So instead of

the community colleges' property tax base growing eight or nine per cent,

Nikkels said, it will actually level off next year.

In Gov. Milliken's budget-cutting order really chopping at community colleges harder than at universities?

Five community college officials from southeastern Michigan began a television conference Friday talking about "a 7.5 per cent cut," but before they were through the figures were down to 2.5 per cent for Schoolcraft College and Oakland Community College.

The officials called the conference to warn: "If it becomes necessary, as we believe it shall, to reduce expenditures further to balance the state's budget, the governor, the bureau of the budget and the legislature must recognize that community colleges have already more than paid their share. Any further reductions can only result in forcing us to drop our historic and unique 'open door' admissions policy."

THEN CAME the hard calculations. First, the college officials—led by Schoolcraft President C. Nelson Grote and OCC Vice President for Business Wally Nikkels—compared their alleged 7.5 per cent cut for community colleges' as compared to a two per cent cut for the four-year institutions.

What the comparison didn't show, they admitted later, was that the four-year institutions have no property tax authority while community colleges do. Thus, a state aid cut of two per cent for the four-year schools amounts to a greater percentage budget cut than for community colleges, where the state provides only two-fifths of the support.

Then newsmen determined that the "7.5 per cent" cut the community college leaders were talking about was calculated against the governor's budget proposal. The actual appropriation bill that became law was somewhat less.

SO MILLIKEN actually cut \$6.6 million of an appropriation of \$95.7 million this fall when he ordered cuts to balance the state budget.

The college leaders didn't calculate the percentage, but newsmen determined it was 6.8 per cent.

Grote said state support provided 38 per cent of Schoolcraft's budget. Thus, a 6.8 per cent cut in state support actually meant a budget cut of 2.5 per cent for the northwestern Wayne County district.

Nikkels said state support provided 34.4 per cent of OCC's budget. A 6.8 per cent cut there meant a budget cut of 2.3 per cent.

GROTE SAID community colleges are funded on a calendar year basis and will therefore have to absorb the entire cut in the month of December.

A broadcast newsmen asked if the community colleges would seek a change in the law to prevent future single-month cuts.

"No," said Grote. "We fought for calendar year funding so we would know pretty much what we were going to receive from state aid in September. We wind up ahead in years where there are supplemental appropriations. But we wind up behind in years when there are cuts."

Another factor working against community colleges, Grote said, is that winter enrollments haven't been dropping 7.9 per cent in recent years as they did traditionally.

Schoolcraft is anticipating a 10 per cent increase in credit hour enrollments this winter. Other officials said they were having the same experience.

Reginald Wilson, president of Wayne County Community College, explained why: "There is high unemployment, and people are using their unemployment benefits to enroll in college. And the veterans who can't find jobs are using their benefits (which contain living stipends) to attend. Of 18,000 students at our college, 2,000 are veterans."

THE COLLEGE officials had other complaints about how their two-year institutions are treated by the state.

Grote said four-year colleges get flat appropriations, but community college support is based on actual credit hours. "They knew they wouldn't be funded beyond a certain amount. We thought we would be," he said.

Nikkels said the new single-business tax, which takes effect next year, will result in elimination of the so-called

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