

Community college bill passes

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Mortimer

By BRYAN CLARK/Post Register

BOISE — A community college in eastern Idaho is now one step closer to becoming a reality.

A bill that creates the fund in which \$5 million will be held to help pave the way for a community college in eastern Idaho passed the Senate 27-7 on Thursday. The bill already passed the House, so it now heads to Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter’s desk.

Otter has been a vocal supporter of turning Eastern Idaho Technical College into a community college, even including it in his State of the State address, so he is expected to sign the bill.

Floor sponsor Sen. Dean Mortimer, R-Idaho Falls, said recent Idaho history has shown that community colleges can play a vital role in economic development. For example, the College of Southern Idaho in the Twin Falls area has worked closely with yogurt-maker Chobani to train workers in the skills they need.

“They are partners in economic development,” Mortimer said. “They are critical in addressing specific, near-term workforce needs.”

Before any state funds are used, local voters would have to approve the creation of a taxing district to fund the community college. Mortimer said the \$5 million in state support will show voters they won’t shoulder the burden alone.

“Creation of the account sends a strong message of support from the state for this effort,” Mortimer said.

Majority Leader Sen. Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls, reminded his colleagues that if voters don’t approve the taxing district the state can always just transfer the funds back where they came from.

“If folks at home don’t see the value of it and think they have an adequate higher educational series of opportunities, then wonderful,” he said. “But please give us a chance to try and do this.”

A few senators spoke in opposition to the bill. Sen. Lori Den Hartog, R-Meridian, said the state shouldn’t commit to support the project until local voters approve a taxing district. The \$5 million was being used as “a lure” to try to win their votes, she argued.

The bill puts the “cart a little bit ahead of the horse,” she said.

Others responded that they thought providing a “carrot” was perfectly acceptable.

“I’m fine with that,” said Sen. Grant Burgoyne, D-Boise.