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### **Locke may kill funding for Riverpoint project**

by Richard Roesler

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Local lawmakers, college officials and business leaders are scrambling to overcome Gov. Gary Locke's 11th-hour misgivings about spending \$31.6 million this year on a college building in downtown Spokane.

"It's a little disconcerting, I guess I'll put it that way. But we're not by any means going to give up," said Sen. Larry Sheahan, R-Spokane.

As lawmakers enter the final day of this year's legislative session today, the money is virtually a done deal in the Legislature.

Both the House and Senate penciled in the same amount - \$31.6 million - to build the shell of a combination library, classroom and office building at Washington State University's downtown Riverpoint campus. WSU officials say it's critical for the growing campus, shared with Eastern Washington University and other area schools, and badly needed by WSU nursing students.

"Both houses of the Legislature agree that that number makes sense," said Rep. Alex Wood, D-Spokane.

But Locke, who months ago proposed \$6.6million toward the project, is reportedly considering a line-item veto when the construction budget hits his desk. Instead of \$31.6million, WSU would get nothing for the project this year.

"We thought we made a good case for it," said WSU's Larry Ganders. "For whatever reasons, it seems to be a lightning rod."

Locke's point man on the budget, Marty Brown, confirmed Wednesday night that the governor is weighing the merits of the project, one of the largest in this year's small construction budget.

"He asked a bunch of questions: whether it's ready, how many students, where this fits in the priorities," said Brown. "I don't know that he's leaning one way or the other."

One of Locke's big concerns, he said, is that lawmakers refused to spend \$46million to expand a state prison in the Franklin County town of Connell.

"He had lots of heartburn about the fact that they weren't thinking about more prisons," said Brown.

Also, Brown noted that lawmakers passed a bill last year to get the state's universities to agree on a list of their joint priorities, starting next year.

Brown said Locke has wondered aloud if WSU is trying to jump the gun by tacking on a big-ticket item in a year that would normally be reserved for minor budget tweaking.

Local lawmakers say they're in a full-court press to convince the governor that the project makes sense.

"Avista has the corporate jet ready to fly a bunch of people over to talk to the governor" if they can just get a meeting with him, said Sen. Brian

Murray, R-Spokane. "We're going to put enormous pressure on the governor not to veto this."

Spokane Mayor Jim West has reportedly called Locke's office. WSU president V. Lane Rawlins and regent Bill Marler wrote a letter Tuesday. Regent Chris Marr has been talking to Locke's staff. Marr said in Spokane Wednesday that Locke was concerned about WSU's commitment to the nursing program at Riverpoint.

"We feel like that's a question WSU has answered very forcefully," Marr said. "Right now we're setting up a meeting to reinforce that message again."

"We just have to try to answer the questions and call any of our friends who have influence with him (Locke) and reiterate the importance of this to the region," said Sheahan.

One of those people with some influence with Locke is fellow Democrat Lisa Brown, the Senate Minority Leader. She met with Locke recently to discuss his concerns. Among them, she said, was that the project had suddenly jumped to the head of the line of college projects.

"Anybody who looks at it carefully will see that this thing's been waiting in line for quite some time," said Brown, D-Spokane. "The governor had some concerns. I feel like I addressed them successfully."

Like several other local lawmakers, she said she's optimistic that the money will survive Locke's scrutiny.

"I'm hopeful. We've worked very hard to get this project in the budget," she said. "It's such a linchpin for the future of the Spokane area."

The state has already spent millions of dollars on design work for the building. Brown and other proponents say that doing the project now instead of next year will save an estimated \$450,000. They say it's a key project for higher education and economic development, two of Locke's priorities.

"I'm hopeful, but we're not taking it for granted," said Sheahan. "We're going to keep working it until the final hour."

#### NOTES:

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#### CORRECTION:

(From Accuracy Watch, March 12, 2004):

Money would pay for Riverpoint building. The proposed \$31.6million in funding for Washington State University's Riverpoint academic center would pay for the entire building but not the land. Because of a reporting error, a story published

Thursday stated otherwise.