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**SUS presidents warn of budget-cut 'Armageddon'**

Florida's university system has long been notorious for its political infighting, but the university presidents were all harmony today as they gathered at the Capitol to rally against proposed state funding cuts that could amount to as much as 26 percent -- on top of the tens of millions of dollars they've already lost in the past two years.

The House proposes cutting roughly $260-million from the 11 state universities, while the Senate proposes adding $120-million. But both chambers' proposals include the use of federal stimulus money, which university leaders aren't willing to include because they say they cannot fund programs and tenured faculty positions on money that runs out after three years.

Thursday, in a rare joint visit to the Capitol, 10 of the 11 state university presidents (FAU's Frank Brogan had to attend a funeral) held a press conference to stress the real-life implications of the proposed cuts to their institutions.

"I've seen ups and downs in the budget in my 23 years as president," said Florida International University President Mitch Maidique, the longest-serving leader in the system. "And I can tell you this is not just another budget cycle we emerge from. If some of the worst scenarios come to pass, this is armageddon for the state university system."

University of Central Florida President John Hitt said he has already lost $50-million in state funding over the past two years, and UCF...
could lose between $22-million and $57-million more depending on where the two chambers end up.

The higher cut, Hitt said, could lead to the closing of 25 academic programs, and the firing of 330 faculty and 290 staff members. Other presidents Thursday, including the University of South Florida's Judy Genshaft, listed similar cutbacks and changes.

"The House cut for us means $78 million," Genshaft said. "That's the equivalent of our entire College of Arts and Sciences. That's 15,000 students. This is not us being alarmist. But we are alarmed."

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