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Contra Costa braces for more budget cuts next year

By Rick Radin
Contra Costa Times

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MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa County expects to spend nearly \$1.21 billion in the 2011-12 fiscal year, down about \$23 million from what it is on track to spend in the year ending June 30.

Meeting that general fund goal will involve significant staffing cuts to several departments, including the Sheriff's Office, according to a proposed budget from County Administrator David Twa.

But how relevant the proposal will be is open to question because of the uncertainty about state funding, said Supervisors John Gioia, of Richmond, and Federal Glover, of Pittsburg.

More than half the county budget comes from the state and federal governments, Glover said.

"When we hear from the state, the numbers could be more devastating," Glover said. "The governor has said he is not going forward with the tax measures in June."

The proposed budget calls for 138 job cuts out of more than 8,000 employees, principally in the sheriff's, probation, conservation and development, and district attorney's offices.

The largest reduction would be in probation, where 42 of 334 positions would be eliminated.

The cuts would result in 1,720 serious and violent felons remaining unsupervised in the community, according to a department analysis of the proposal.

The need for job cuts could be reduced by the county's contract negotiations with its three largest unions, Gioia said.

Negotiators have targeted about 6 percent savings in salaries and

benefits.

"Lower wage and benefit levels and greater sharing of pension costs could result in fewer job cuts," he said.

The need for job cuts could also be reduced by retirements, Gioia said.

County pension system CEO Marilyn Leedom has said that retirement applications have doubled in March compared with the typical total for this month.

The 2010-11 budget projection of a year ago said the county might have to pay \$77 million per year over five years in addition to its contracted pension contribution for each employee.

The amount needed to maintain current and future payouts has been reduced significantly because of the stock market rebound over the past year, according to the 2011-12 budget proposal.

The board of supervisors must agree on a proposed budget in April, but the critical issue of state funding might not be known for a while, Glover said.

"I'm guessing maybe May, but who knows when we'll (hear)?" he said.

The county plans to maintain its 8 percent reserve

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