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UNCW's budget cut but marine funds grow Legislators expand biotech program

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RALEIGH | When it comes to UNCW, the state budget giveth and taketh away.

The budget proposal debated in the House on Monday night would cut about \$1.3 million from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington but would give the campus a new, recurring \$2 million appropriation to support expansion of its marine biotechnology program.

In a year when state lawmakers are contemplating cuts to health care, public education and environmental protection, UNCW scientists are grateful that they have persuaded House leaders that their needs are important.

"We're excited," said Daniel Baden, director of UNCW's Center for Marine Science on Masonboro Sound.

The appropriation is "aimed at developing new technology based on marine science."

House Co-speaker Richard Morgan, R-Moore, got a tour last month of the biotech program at the lab that will benefit from the appropriation.

"They are doing amazing work there," Rep. Morgan said Monday before the budget debate. "It needs our support."

According to Dr. Baden, if the \$2 million appropriation survives the budget-drafting process and makes it into law, scientists will use the money to buy equipment, recruit new faculty and begin planning a new university-industry lab center that could open in Wilmington within five years.

Rep. Danny McComas, R-New Hanover, gets credit for getting the appropriation in the House budget plan, Rep. Morgan said. Importantly, the provision has an R, for "recurring," next to its listing in House budget documents. That indicates that legislative leaders want to provide the biotech program \$2 million each year.

Even so, the budget plan cuts all UNC campus budgets by 1.7 percent, meaning a loss of about \$1.3 million at UNCW, said Mark Lanier, assistant to Chancellor Rosemary DePaolo.

The campus will receive new dollars for enrollment increases, but with the cuts, the university, on a dollars-per-student basis, continues to fall behind, Mr. Lanier said.

The university already has an agree-

ment with drug developer aaiPharma in which UNCW scientists share research on marine life that might be used in treating human disease.

One continuing research project looks at a chemical produced by a type of micro-algae that scientists believe might treat patients with cystic fibrosis.

The industry-university biotech program also includes aquaculture efforts, in which scientists are determining the best way to produce food products from the sea.

"It's about recognizing any discovery that would have additional benefit to industry, for jobs and for the region," Dr. Baden said.

Nearly \$1 million of the appropriation, if approved, would be used to study and begin design on a marine biotechnology facility in Wilmington that would serve laboratory scientists

at the university and those working for its industry partners, Dr. Baden said.

If planning goes well, he said, the facility could open in Wilmington in three to five years.

General Assembly



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