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El Dorado supervisors weigh more job cuts

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For El Dorado County employees and those who rely on county services, the bad news just keeps coming.

Faced with increasingly grim budget forecasts, the Board of Supervisors will consider eliminating 100 employee positions.

That represents about 5 percent of the county government's total work force, 1,965 employees.

The board on Tuesday directed Chief Administrative Officer Gayle Erbe-Hamlin to recommend which 100 jobs should be cut.

But Erbe-Hamlin said the job losses may not end there.

Although the board adopted a balanced budget in September, Erbe-Hamlin said the county now faces a \$20 million deficit for fiscal year 2009-10 if it doesn't act quickly to cut costs.

Latest projections show a dramatic decline in revenues from sales tax, property tax and interest rates, she said.

"Clearly, something must be done," she said. "It must be done in an urgent manner."

The proposed cuts, which would take effect by the middle of this fiscal year, would reduce the projected 2009-10 deficit by about \$12 million, she said.

Erbe-Hamlin said she had hoped to work with county departments on intensive reviews of their organizational structure and operations before proposing cuts, but that luxury is no longer available.

The CAO said she would present the board Nov. 18 with a recommendation identifying at least 100 positions for elimination. All 1,522 jobs supported by general fund revenues are on the table, except for deputy sheriffs' positions, she said.

The 100 positions would be in addition to 17 cut last month in the Development Services Department as well as seven positions in the Department of Transportation and about five in the Senior Day Care Program that the board agreed to eliminate Tuesday.

Supervisor Norma Santiago asked whether salary reductions had been discussed with employee organizations as an alternative to layoffs.

"Maybe we could still have people with jobs," Santiago said. "They wouldn't have as much money, but they would be working."

Erbe-Hamlin said only 10-day furloughs, or time off without pay, had been discussed.

Karen Guthrie, an attorney and member of Soroptimists International in Cameron Park, urged against deep reductions in county services needed to maintain health, safety and infrastructure. She said Soroptimists would again raise money to help support the Senior Day Care Program, which provides respite care for seniors.

Doug Nowka, Human Services director, said people in the community recognize the county's financial difficulties and have offered help.

Nowka said he received a letter from people who participate in the Senior Nutrition Program, offering to pay more for meals to help support Senior Day Care Services.

Call The Bee's Cathy Locke, (916) 608-7451.