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## Voters approve bond to aid E. Idaho hospital

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho - Voters in Teton County in eastern Idaho have approved an increase in property taxes to keep Teton Valley Hospital afloat. About 62 percent of voters approved a bond issue on Tuesday that will provide \$1.4 million annually for the next two years to the hospital.

"Nobody should think it's a cure-all," Larry Young, County Commission chairman, told the Post Register. "The financial problems are deep and they were allowed to go on too long. The dollars themselves are not going to take care of the problem."

Property taxes will increase \$60 annually for each \$100,000 of assessed value. The hospital has a projected shortfall of \$2 million this year.

Officials blame the hospital's financial problems on the county's recent economic downturn and an increase in the number of uninsured patients. Officials said the hospital's budget increased in 2005 and 2006 during an economic boom that resulted in additional staff and more expensive equipment and services.

Interim Chief Financial Officer Calvin Carey said some of the hospital's auxiliary services will probably be cut, though he wasn't sure which ones. "They're very nice to have, but the reality is that we need things that support our mission, which is providing health care," he said.

Another possible way to get more money is going after unpaid bills.

Carey said that the hospital has \$4 million of unpaid bills on its books, and that he expected only about \$1 million be collected.

Without selling the bonds, the hospital faced being closed or sold to a private investor, concerns that for now have been pushed back.

"It's fabulous," said Nancy McCullough-McCoy, chairwoman of the hospital's board of trustees. "I'm so pleased that the county supported our request for some county funds for our hospital. It makes me know that all our hard work is worth it."

Officials also say the election might encourage private donors to help the hospital.

"It is a signal to people who might potentially contribute that the county is committed, too," Young said.