

State stuns Auraria, pulls \$37.5 million for new science building

Hole remains as science building now in jeopardy

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The state abruptly pulled \$37.5 million in financing earmarked for a science building under construction on the Auraria campus.

The fallout could mean the \$120 million facility will not be built, and the campus will be scarred by a giant hole in the ground.

Construction began in December on the five-story, 181,000- square-foot Auraria Campus Science Building, along Speer Boulevard, adjacent to Arapahoe Street.

The project's construction costs were estimated to be \$111 million, with an additional \$9 million for furniture and equipment.

It was being described as the first major building constructed on the campus in more than 20 years. It would have been shared by the University of Colorado at Denver, Community College of Denver and Metro State College.

The state's Joint Budget Committee pulled the financing Thursday because of new, lower-budget estimates for state construction projects.

"I'm well aware of the situation," said Bruce Benson, president of the University of Colorado, on Friday afternoon. "It is really critical that we get the financing reinstated and that this building is completed. Right now, it is just a hole in the ground."

Benson said the current science building is so unsafe that pregnant women are advised not to take classes there because of fumes from science experiments.

"This is like looking at the Justice Center, and saying, 'Let's stop construction and just leave a giant hole in the ground,' " said Stephen Jordan, president of Metro State College.

"This building is absolutely key to our ability to support where our economy is going to get the science-based manpower that we need," Jordan said, adding that it will limit the number of students the school can accept.

Tami Door, president and CEO of the Downtown Denver Partnership, said the downtown business community is a strong opponent of pulling the funding.

"It is a business issue as much as it is a higher-education issue," Door said. "It was a major investment and now the financing promised is 100 percent gone."

The money is unlikely to be reinstated, said state Rep. Bernie Buescher, D-Grand Junction, who chairs the Appropriations and Joint Budget Committees.

"What we have clearly seen (is) we are not immune to the forces in the national economy," Buescher said. "And in all likelihood, things are going to get worse before they get better. At the end of day, everyone wants money from the state. Can we spend money that we don't have? Absolutely not."

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