

State Spending Can't Last Forever

THE days of palmy prosperity are not those most favorable to the display of public virtue or the influence of wise and good men," said Edward Everett more than a century ago.

Everett is remembered for his great oration at the dedication of Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1863, which was forgotten as historians recorded a brief address by President Abraham Lincoln.

There is a very good chance that the wisdom of Everett's observation on prosperity also will be overshadowed by the Oklahoma legislature's basic philosophy of "Spend it while we can, boys, and let somebody else worry about the future."

Like individuals and businesses, legislatures function more responsibly in times of adversity than in times of prosperity. Surplus funds available have our present legislature gyrating in a high state of euphoria.

A study made by the Kerr Foundation, Inc., showed that the cost of state government in fiscal 1975 increased \$68 per capita, making a total of \$613 for every man, woman and child in Oklahoma. It went up again for fiscal 1976, and with the surplus windfall, legislators could push the cost past \$1,000 per capita for fiscal 1977. Even inflation isn't going up that fast!

House Speaker Bill Willis, D-Tahlequah, was quoted as saying that the popular thing to do would be to apply surplus funds to bond retirement or non-recurring costs. Then he added that the legislature "would be derelict in its duty" if it did that because of demands for money for recurring operations.

School teachers are requesting that the legislature disregard standards of economic responsibility to appropriate most of the surplus cash for their benefit. Teachers' salaries could hardly be classified as a non-recurring expense of government.

The president of the Oklahoma Education Association stated that teachers would accept "imperative" future cutbacks in programs and salary reductions in future years if legislators will give them the money they are asking for now. Of course, that is not a binding statement and only those who believe in fairy tales could suppose that it would be done.

The legislature would do well to look at the situation in other states. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials reported this month that "an increasingly bleak future" has caused nearly all of 37 states sur-

veyed to delay capital expenditures and meet current obligations with money earmarked for future growth.

Secretary of the Treasury William Simon recently said the federal income tax system is in jeopardy and that if things continue as they are, we face a taxpayer rebellion.

Indications are that the legislature will boost both recurring and non-recurring outlays substantially, saving back only a modicum of cash as a token of their thrift.