

## **Budget action panned**

Staff and wire reports

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Two area lawmakers criticized the 2009 budget adopted Thursday, saying they voted against it because it did too much damage to K-12 education.

The budget legislation, passed 70-51 in the House and 27-11 in the Senate, was sent to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius for her signature or veto. It is designed to eliminate a projected \$199 million deficit for the fiscal year ending June 30. Slightly less than half the adjustments consist of cuts in spending, with accounting changes and refinancing of state bonds comprising the rest.

Public schools would lose almost \$28 million in base state aid plus more than \$4 million in funds for special education programs. Those reductions were endorsed by the House, but senators wanted to reduce base aid by less than \$7 million and leave the special education funds unchanged.

The measure's passage highlighted a week that included debate on the death penalty and cell-phone regulations, among other issues.

State Rep. **Sydney Carlin** said she opposed the budget bill because it would result in a \$101 cut per pupil in USD 383. While this amount differs among districts, **Carlin** said many have begun considering options that could include eliminating drivers' education and summer school, going to four-day weeks or having longer school days.

"It will be a change in the way people deliver education," **Carlin** said.

State Reps. Tom Hawk and Sharon Schwartz, whose district includes the northern part of Riley County, also voted against the bill.

"The education cuts ... hurt small rural schools significantly more than our suburban counterparts," said Schwartz. "For instance, the cut to one of our rural districts results in a reduction of around \$200 per student. In comparison, this cut only represents a \$66 reduction for a larger district."

A different Riley County voice - that of Republican Sen. Mark Taddiken - supported the bill, as did Sen. Roger Reitz.

"We are trying to be judicious and make the steepest cuts where they will have the least impact on the well being of our state," Taddiken said in an e-mail. "In that regard, I will continue to support measures that don't reduce K-12 education funding as much as other agencies. It still needs to remain our number one funding priority."

In other developments:

; The House Transportation Committee considered a bill that would outlaw the use of text-messaging while driving. Meanwhile, the House Energy and Utilities Committee considered a bill that would require telephone companies to quickly release cell-phone location information to law enforcement during emergencies.

; The House Energy and Utilities Committee and senate Utilities Committee are drafting bills related to a

comprehensive energy plan. Both measures would overturn the denial of an air-quality permit to Sunflower Electric Power Corp., which wants to build two plants in Finney County.

; Senate members debated a bill to abolish the death penalty, which proponents estimate would save the state about \$1 million in 2010. A hearing on that bill is scheduled Feb. 26 - 27 in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

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