

Lawmakers eye budget aid from stimulus

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State legislators are hoping the \$787 billion federal economic stimulus passed by congress Feb. 13 will help Kansas meet the increasing distance between what it has and what it needs to fund the state's many agencies and programs.

With the current legislative session coming to a close, lawmakers here are beginning the arduous task of writing 2010 budgets for schools and other state agencies under conditions that point to a \$700 million deficit in revenues compared to state spending.

State Rep. **Sydney Carlin**, D-Manhattan, described the 2009 state budget bill, signed into law by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius Feb. 17, as "pretty good" considering the adjustments that had to be made to account for the state's declining revenues.

Carlin said in the final version of that bill, the governor used her executive powers to reduce the cuts in K-12 education from \$66 per pupil to \$33.

"She also preserved \$4.5 million in special education funding," **Carlin** said.

Carlin said the legislature was now working on the 2010 budget, and she expected most state agencies "to have additional cuts."

"My committee (the House Appropriations Committee) has been cutting 10 to 15 percent from state agencies," she said, adding the committee has looked at the Department of Commerce and the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation thus far.

Carlin said she did not yet know what was in store for higher education or K-12 education but expects "K-12 education to have more cuts too."

"I am afraid to think about what will happen for higher education," she said, adding "we still have to see what the stimulus package does."

Sen. Roger Reitz, a Manhattan Republican, said the Senate's general consensus was across-the-board cuts were most appropriate.

"The governor is uneasy about cuts to the K-12 education system, and I am too, but I'm also worried about higher education," he said, adding that deciding which programs were worthy of funding would involve "tremendous soul searching."

"I think the logical approach will involve substantial cuts in (all areas of) education next year," Reitz said.

Carlin said she hoped the \$1.7 billion Kansas expects to receive in federal economic stimulus funds may help ease the strain on Kansas' budget.

"It is categorized for certain areas and will come in over a period of time," she said, "I'm not yet sure how it will be allocated."

According to **Carlin**, however, a Friday announcement that \$380 million of the economic stimulus funding is pegged for transportation projects, including the expansion of K-18 between Manhattan and Fort Riley was positive news for Manhattanites.

"That's major for my district," she said. "I am pleased that jobs will be created in that area."

Rep. Tom Hawk, D-Manhattan, was also hopeful about the distribution of the federal stimulus funds.

He said requirement for the state to "maintain current funding efforts" to be eligible for certain federal funds - such as social services and possible education dollars - will "help us keep the priorities we have had."

"I know the cuts will be much more painful this year," he said. "But we won't know the full story until we start to get more information on the stimulus and see what the state revenues look like in mid-April."

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