

Stimulus cash may bail out state

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Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' decision to recommend the use of \$985 million in federal stimulus money to offset the state's projected 2010 budget deficit is good news for K-12 and higher education, an area legislator said. State Rep. **Sydney Carlin**, a Manhattan Democrat, applauded Sebelius' Friday recommendation, saying it would remove the need to make 5 to 10 percent cuts in the 2010 state budget. "That will save jobs," she said.

Assuming the legislature adopts the Sebelius recommendations, the one-time cash would have no bearing on the state's financial situation beyond 2010. But **Carlin** said future budget concerns would be helped by buying "time for the economy to rebound."

The budget was one of three major issues sharing headlines in Topeka last week, the others being discussion of a property rights bill, and passage of a controversial measure that would allow the construction of two coal-fired power plants in western Kansas.

In her amended budget proposal Friday, Sebelius retained her recommendation for \$600 million in cuts for 2010. But she said use of the stimulus money as a deficit offset would render cuts beyond that level unnecessary.

She called on the legislature to use \$367 million in stimulus money to maintain K-12 school funding at 2009 levels and restore higher education funding to 2008 levels. Sebelius also called for use of \$107 million to eliminate cuts in special education, \$430 million to maintain current Medicaid eligibility standards, and \$81 million to prevent cuts in public safety funds.

Carlin said Friday she thinks about \$9.6 million of the higher education money will go to either tuition or deferred maintenance, "probably the latter."

Area lawmakers maintained their usual difference of opinion over passage of the coal plant bill, with Republican State Reps. Richard Carlson and Sharon Schwartz praising it and **Carlin** criticizing it.

"I voted for this energy bill because I believe KDHE Secretary Rod Bremby overstepped his powers when he denied Sunflower Electric the air-quality permit it sought," Schwartz said. She said the bill "also offers thousands of desperately needed jobs."

"This bill means Kansas is once again "open for business," Carlson said of the bill, which faces a Sebelius veto and an override fight.

Carlin said she opposed the bill because "it has a major deregulation effect on Kansas... that's the piece I've always objected to."

Schwartz noted an ad hoc committee's work to rewrite a bill that would limit the rights of property owners around Kansas military bases, terming herself "very disappointed" to see the measure introduced this year without involving land-owners. She said she would support some sort of property rights measure "if we need to have that in statute," but added that the present legislation "is not the vehicle to accomplish this."

The committee is expected to present alternative language in about 10 days.

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