

## You can't always get what you want

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Area lawmakers expressed an uneasy acceptance of the Kansas Legislature's approval Tuesday of a \$13 billion spending plan that restricts cuts to higher education funding and includes a modest reduction in K-12 education funds.

It wasn't what they had hoped for, but it isn't as bad as they fear it might become.

The budget, which goes into effect July 1, reflects an "impressive" 6.8 percent reduction in the revised 2009 budget, said Sen. Roger Reitz, R-Manhattan. It also utilizes \$585 million in federal stimulus funds, he said. Those funds were recommended by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius to avoid a deficit at the end of fiscal year 2010. The trimmer budget was achieved through cuts to many state agencies. Included in those were a \$25 million - or 0.7 percent - cut in K-12 funding, and a \$36 million - or 4.25 percent - cut that falls close to the four percent higher education officials previously agreed to absorb. Many other agencies experienced cuts of 10 to 13 percent.

Rep. **Sydney Carlin**, D-Manhattan, said K-12 education was cut more severely than she had hoped. "We had to cut K-12 education and higher education proportionally to be eligible for the stimulus funds," she said.

Tom Hawk, a Manhattan Democrat, said funding for in-home and in-community care of people with physical and development disabilities was also cut. "It's a catch 22 because if people end up in nursing homes it's three times as expensive," he said.

Even more concerning to both representatives is the likelihood of further cuts after the state's consensus revenue estimates are released April 17. A glimpse of the state's financial outlook, through just-released March sales tax data, shows revenues down \$57 million from what was expected.

"All things are subject to change," **Carlin** said of the upcoming estimates.

Hawk said the situation would likely get "unpleasant" if revenues did not improve before an omnibus bill - a last minute catch-all where fiscal changes can be made - is passed.

"I was disappointed March revenues weren't up," Hawk said.

Despite the loss in revenues, several other pools could be used to compensate, Hawk said. Fifty million dollars in gaming application revenues, could be plugged into the budget, Hawk said, adding that a change in tax policy that involves freezing tax breaks for businesses could also help.

A bill ensuring funding of the State Children's Health Insurance Program passed out of the House and Senate last week, securing its support in 2010, **Carlin** said.

The bill will provide low-cost health insurance for families who do not qualify for Medicaid.

According to **Carlin**, families at or below 250 percent of the poverty level will qualify for the initiative. For a family of four, **Carlin** said, a 250 percent poverty level equates to an annual household income of \$53,000.

"We don't expect everyone who makes \$53,000 to apply," **Carlin** said. "But for those families who are struggling, or people with exceptional needs, this will really help," she said.

Reitz, also in support of the initiative, recognized the \$8 million required to fund SCHIP - appropriated from tobacco taxes - meant some local initiatives would likely not get funded.

Using the "Raising Riley" childcare program as an example, Reitz said a reduction in funds to such programs was "unsettling."

"In a sense we are having to decide which programs are less worthwhile," he said, adding "they are all good programs."

Unless something is done to improve the state's financial forecast after the stimulus money runs out, 2012 will be "a disaster," Reitz said.

"In 2012, the state will end the year with a deficit of \$549 million," he said. The senator cited "modest tax increases, reallocating resources and establishing trusts dedicated to specific programs" as initiatives that might help ease the fiscal constraints.

Also in the legislature:

· Kansas workers whose employers are not subject to federal wage laws will get a bump in salary when legislation that passed out of the Kansas House last week takes effect in July.

**Carlin** said Senate Bill 160 will see the state minimum wage increase from \$2.65 to \$7.25.

The \$2.65 figure, set in 1998, is the lowest in the U.S., **Carlin** said. "I'm very pleased we finally had a chance to vote on this."

The bill, **Carlin** said, will affect workers whose employers are not covered by federal wage laws, including some small businesses. The federal minimum wage is currently set at \$7.25 per hour.

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