

Legislature to look at education cuts

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The Kansas Legislature will have to look seriously at additional cuts in K-12 and higher education spending, area members of the legislative delegation agreed Saturday.

Those warnings were prompted by revised revenue forecasts issued Friday that the state will end its next fiscal year with a \$328 million deficit if additional adjustments to its proposed 2010 budget are not made. The Legislature reconvenes for its wrapup session this week.

Cuts in education "have to be considered in light of this huge amount" of projected deficit, said state Rep. **Sydney Carlin**, even though she wanted to be briefed by state budget experts before committing too firmly to that scenario.

State Rep. Tom Hawk said he was "guessing there will be additional cuts to both ... of 1 or 2 percent."

The reductions - in those or other programs - could be larger if the state does not do something to increase revenues, lawmakers added. Without some sort of revenue increase, it would probably take across-the-board reductions in education spending closer to 4 percent to wipe out the newly projected deficit.

Any cuts the legislature imposes would be on top of those already agreed to earlier in the session.

State Sen. Roger Reitz said Friday's revenue revisions were devastating, and that lawmakers will have to look at some sort of tax increase.

"You're not going to be able to cut yourself out of this jam," he said.

He said he believes the public will support appropriate tax increases.

State Rep. Richard Carlson, chairman of the House Taxation Committee, said everything will be on the table this week. But the first key, he added, will be to see what the House Appropriations Committee recommends when it convenes, beginning Tuesday.

"We will find a solution and balance the budget," Carlson said, even though he did not indicate how.

Hawk proposed several revenue-producing steps, among them decoupling Kansas from the federal income tax code, which would exempt the state from federal depreciation schedules. That step, Hawk said, would bring in an additional \$77 million in revenues. Carlson acknowledged that such ideas could be on the table, but did not endorse decoupling, saying he believed it would discourage investment in the state.

Hawk and **Carlin** suggested the state may look at its funding commitment to the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corporation for possible reductions. Both also said they had hoped until Friday that the worst estimate might not exceed \$200 million.

"I don't think anybody who thought they were protected can sleep tonight," Hawk said.

Hawk also made it clear that he would not support construction of two new coal plants near Holcomb this year. That measure has been a source of contention for two sessions. Hawk opposed the construction proposal during several votes last year, before voting to support a final measure that was vetoed by Gov. Sebelius.

"I don't think this year is a good year to have a plant built," he said. "We may eventually have to," Hawk added, suggesting he might support it at a later date "if we can close down some of the dirtier plants in eastern Kansas."

Hawk and **Carlin** also differed in their willingness to suspend the Capitol restoration project. **Carlin** said she believed the project should continue, but Hawk said he could support suspension during the economic downturn.

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