

On the chop block

Local and wire sources

With the education establishment watching nervously, the Senate Ways and Means Committee Thursday took up the question of how to offset a \$328 million gap between revenues and expenses in 2010.

The House Appropriations Committee completed its own proposal Wednesday, drafting a bill that Rep. **Sydney Carlin** said would trim education funding by nearly 5 percent beyond the approximately seven-tenths of one percent reduction previously agreed to. **Carlin**, a Manhattan Democrat, is a member of the appropriations panel.

Under the revised Appropriations Committee proposal, **Carlin** said base state aid would drop to \$4,137. In USD 383 it was about \$4,400 in 2009.

State universities, community colleges and vocational colleges would lose \$29 million.

The cuts would be on top of those included in a budget legislators previously approved for the 2010 fiscal year. Legislators thought that budget would balance when they approved it at the end of March. But last week, officials and university economists issued a new fiscal forecast, slashing projected revenues.

Carlin said the House committee originally approved a 3.3 percent reduction in education spending. But later in the day it moved another \$16.2 million in funding that had been proposed for education into public safety, making the total proposed reduction on education just short of five percent.

Carlin said she voted against the shift in committee. "Hopefully the Senate Ways and Means Committee will come out with a different amount so we can negotiate it in conference committee," she said, calling

proposed five percent reductions "a great concern."

Supt. Bob Shannon said cuts of the level being discussed would wipe out potential revenue gains for USD 383 prompted by student enrollment increases. "Where we would have thought we could plan next year wouldn't be there and we'd be back to where we were this year," he said. Either way, he added, "we'll deal with it."

Kip Peterson, spokesman for the Kansas Board of Regents, said the House proposal would translate to another 3.75 percent reduction in higher education spending. "If those additional cuts are implemented, a tuition freeze would be definitely off the table," Peterson said. At K-State, that would translate to about \$7 million in additional cuts. Peterson said Regents want to see what the Senate Ways and Means Committee proposes before reacting in detail.

Both houses of the full Legislature will consider their own budget-balancing proposals, with the end-product being negotiated from whatever is approved in the separate chambers.

Among other proposals still being discussed to fully balance the budget, Peterson noted, are 5 percent salary cuts for state employees, furloughs, delaying tax reductions, and decoupling the state from federal tax exemption stipulations.

"It's still early in the process," Peterson cautioned.

The Appropriations Committee also was proposing to reduce spending on social services and in other areas of the budget. It expects its proposed cuts to the \$13 billion spending plan to exceed \$200 million.

Other committees would consider proposals to boost state revenues, such as tapping gambling funds or diverting revenues from cities and counties.

"We all recognize the problem," said House committee Chairman Kevin Yoder, an Overland Park Republican.

Public schools already have seen their base aid and special education dollars reduced about \$26 million, or less than 1 percent, for fiscal 2010. But Republicans, who hold majorities in the House and Senate, noted that many state agencies and programs have seen far deeper cuts.

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