



ALLIANCE LEGISLATIVE REPORT (95-25)

NO BUDGET DEAL IN SIGHT

Governor Rod Blagojevich and the legislative leaders seem to be no closer to agreeing on a fiscal year 2008 budget. In fact, after a major meltdown over the weekend, they seem to be moving further apart. Tempers flared in the Capitol and in the Governor's mansion over the weekend as House Speaker Michael Madigan had planned to let legislators go home for a brief respite, but the Governor insisted that House members stay in Springfield. The Governor has been calling legislators into special session every day since the 5th of July, presumably to craft a budget. However, Senators seemed to get a pass from the weekend session as they only convened for minutes and less than 20 (of the 59) Senators were present on the Senate floor. About 80 of the 118 House members were present the last couple of days for their attendance roll call.

The legislature was to have had a budget in place by the end of May for the current fiscal year that began on July 1. With no agreement among the Governor, the House Speaker, and Senate President Emil Jones, Jr., the General Assembly slipped into overtime. Now, however, a 3/5 vote is necessary to pass any bill with an immediate effective date and Republican votes will be necessary to pass a budget in the House. This has brought House Republican Leader Tom Cross and Senate Republican Leader Frank Watson to the negotiating table and has made the prospect of reaching a budget agreement even more complicated and difficult.

In order to avoid a shutdown of State government services, both chambers did approve a one month temporary budget (see Alliance Legislative Report 95-24 at www.iasb.com/govrel/alr9524.cfm) the last week of June. On July 5, the Governor called lawmakers back into special session and has vowed to call a special session every day until a budget is approved. However, the Governor has specified that the sessions address specific non-budget issues. Besides the budget, there is a special session on State pensions and one on gun violence. According to the Governor, he will keep calling special sessions to address all of the "unfinished business" of the legislature.

Last week, during the special session on pensions, the House soundly defeated a bill that incorporated the Governor's plan to lease the State Lottery. Governor Blagojevich says that by leasing the lottery, billions of dollars would be generated to fund the State pension systems. Many legislators have concerns about selling off or leasing a State asset to pay for the day-to-day operating expenses of State government. The bill was defeated with 6 members voting yes, 78 members voting no, and 11 members voting "present".

WEEKEND BLOW-UP

The fireworks over the weekend included the Governor questioning the Speaker's Democrat credentials by saying that he was siding with "conservative Republicans" and abandoning his party's principals of providing health care and increasing education funding. The Governor continues to advocate for his proposal for universal health care paid for by a gross receipts tax. The Speaker questioned the Governor's leadership abilities. The two then sparred over who gets to set the time of the special sessions (the Governor says he can state the dates and times; the Speaker says the Governor sets the date but the Speaker sets the times). The Governor threatened to sue the Speaker over the session times.

When the Governor kept House members in Springfield throughout the weekend, the entire membership of the House was riled. A string of speakers (many of them Democrats) chastised the

Governor openly on the House floor. Republican members, in all seriousness, asked about the possibility of impeaching the Governor. The Speaker, then, invited all members of the House to attend the next budget meeting of the Governor and the four leaders. These meetings are usually attended by the four leaders, the Governor, and a few select staff members in the Governor's Capitol office. But over the weekend, over 60 legislators attended the meetings which had to be moved to the Governor's mansion.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Governor Blagojevich and Speaker Madigan remain at odds. Senate President Jones is still arm-in-arm with the Governor. Leaders Cross and Watson, often sitting back and watching the Democrats exchange blows, are pushing for fiscal restraint. To most observers, it is doubtful that a FY '08 budget will be approved before the end of the month. Another one-month budget extension appears likely.

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE TO MOVE FUNDING BILL

A panel in the U.S. Congress is scheduled to consider budget recommendations tomorrow (Wednesday) in Washington, D.C. The House Appropriations Committee will discuss funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – the federal funding for special education. A sub-committee had earlier proposed an increase of \$174.4 million for IDEA – the National School Boards Association and the other national education management organizations are pushing for much more funding to cover local school districts' costs for providing special education. Amendments will be offered Wednesday to provide additional funding above the sub-committee's recommendation.

Please call your congressman today and urge him/her to support amendments for additional funding for IDEA. This is especially important if your representative serves on the Appropriations Committee. Please provide anecdotal information from your school district regarding your lack of special education funding.

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***Denotes a member of the Appropriations Committee.**