

## Finke: Hiatus to be spent balancing budget Lawmakers to meet this week to figure out how to forestall layoffs, closures

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SPRINGFIELD — Some Illinois lawmakers will spend their week-long hiatus from the veto session working on an issue that got barely a mention during the first half of the session - plugging holes in the budget passed last spring.

Working groups of lawmakers from both chambers are supposed to meet starting next week to figure out if money can be moved around in the budget to forestall layoffs and facility closures announced by Gov. Pat Quinn. They will also determine if more money should be redirected to specific state programs - particularly in human services - that were cut in the budget.

**"I think there are some real serious holes in the budget we are going to have to focus on," said Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, chairwoman of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee. "Some of the services we are providing are being threatened. We cut (budget) lines too deep."**

Where that money will come from is the issue negotiators must resolve. House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, said he does not want the General Assembly to exceed the \$33.2 billion bottom line of the budget they approved last spring. Any surplus revenue the state might collect this budget year should be used to pay off old bills, he said.

"If we're going to put money back into an area (of the budget), then that has to come from someplace else," said Rep. Frank Mautino, D-Spring Valley.

The four legislative leaders met with Quinn on Thursday to talk over a number of issues, including the budget.

Administration officials said they need \$310 million to cover shortfalls in operations expenses. Among other things, that would let the state avoid the layoffs and closures and provide pay raises contained in union contracts that Quinn cancelled. In both cases, Quinn justified his actions by saying the legislature did not budget enough money for them.

Pay raises still in jeopardy

Covering union pay raises may be a non-starter for budget negotiators. House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego, said the four caucuses agreed to consider how they could reallocate at most \$250 million. That would not include the \$76 million the administration said is needed to cover the pay raises.

"That would avoid immediate closures and stay within the cap of \$33.2 million," Cross said of the \$250 million reallocation.

The Quinn administration said enough money is available if lawmakers agree to additional budget cuts the governor made last summer. However, a significant part of those cuts - about \$276 million - involve Medicaid payments, which will have to be made at some point.

Another \$100 million involves cuts Quinn made to the salaries of regional school superintendents and to school transportation reimbursements. A plan to pay regional superintendents from personal property replacement tax money failed an initial House vote last week. And an increasing number of lawmakers are seeking restoration of some or all of the \$89 million in transportation reductions.

Senate Republicans said they are scouring the budget to determine if there is money sitting idle for certain programs.

"The Senate is going to participate in some of the working budget groups to find areas of common agreement where reallocations can be identified within existing revenue to address facility closures and other critical needs," said Patty Schuh, spokeswoman for Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno, R-Lemont.

#### Downstate hit hardest

Quinn said he will have to close seven state facilities and lay off nearly 2,000 employees because the General Assembly did not appropriate enough money for them. All but one of the facilities - which include the Logan Correctional Center in Lincoln and the Jacksonville Development Center - are outside of the Chicago metropolitan area.

"He seems to have picked just downstate communities," Cross said.

Cross said he assumes Quinn was trying to pressure Republican lawmakers into supporting a plan to restructure the state's debt, something Republicans oppose.

"His goal is to generate support for increased spending and a restructuring plan," Cross said.

The administration is still pushing a plan to borrow money already owed to state vendors. The latest version of the plan calls for borrowing \$4.5 billion and repaying it over seven years with part of the income tax increase. Since it involves borrowing, the plan needs an extraordinary vote of the General Assembly, and that means getting some Republican votes.

"We do not believe there is an appetite for that, particularly in our caucus," Schuh said.

Cross said he, too, remains against the plan.

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Illinois lawmakers will not be in session this week. They return Nov. 8 to begin the final three days of the veto session.

During the hiatus, working groups of lawmakers will meet to discuss reallocating money within the budget approved last spring. They've been instructed to keep the same \$33.2 billion bottom line for state operations.

Gov. Pat Quinn said he needs about \$310 million in additional spending to meet union pay raises and avoid closing state facilities and laying off employees.

Lawmakers could vote on whether to restore about \$376 million in cuts Quinn made to the budget as he signed it into law.