

Illinois enters July without finished budget; Blagojevich mandates daily special sessions

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On Sunday, Illinois entered into a new fiscal year without a full budget on the books.

Fighting between the Democratic leaders of the House and the Senate has caused a delay, forcing legislators to adopt a temporary budget for the month of July. Although the temporary budget continues basic services and payouts for state employees, a comprehensive budget that deals with the state's climbing expenditures is still in the works.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Senate President Emil Jones want to raise the level of spending by about \$5 billion. Through increased business taxes and the addition of more casinos, they hope to start implementing health insurance for everyone in the state and raise the level of money given to schools.

"These one-month stopgap emergency budgets are necessary for now," Blagojevich said in an Associated Press report, "but a continuing stream of one-month budgets is nothing more than a Republican budget in disguise."

House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, wants to limit overall spending, end a couple business tax breaks and instead rely upon natural growth to prop up the budget. It is estimated that his version would produce an additional \$1 billion, which would be funneled into the school systems. Republican leaders support a similar, albeit smaller, budget.

The deadline for passing a budget was originally set for the end of May. However, because of special rules enacted after this deadline, the Republican minority now have a say in the process, adding additional complications to the negotiations.

As a result of the delays, Blagojevich has ordered the General Assembly to meet in special sessions starting on July 5 and run "without fail every day, seven days a week, until we pass a budget that helps people."

The order has come as a shock to some as the temporary budget was passed with the stipulation that legislators would not be asked to be back at work in Springfield until July 10.

Madigan has repeatedly said that the version of the budget that passed the House is the highest that will be allowed.

"(Blagojevich has) offered no new ideas to be considered by those special sessions," House Speaker Michael Madigan said. "We are still \$3 billion apart."

For the budget being pursued by Blagojevich and Jones, critics claim an increase in taxes will hurt the economy. The issue has been muddied even further as a recent report from UIC's Institute of Government and Public Affairs placed Illinois near the bottom of Midwestern states for non-agricultural job growth. For the House version, critics are concerned that there is not enough money to cover mounting expenses for pensions, union COLA's and Medicare costs.

Despite the governor's order, legislators do not expect to be finished soon.

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