

Pressure mounts in Illinois House to pass budget

Liam Rinehart

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Illinois House members are in session today and are still under pressure to fully pass a budget through the General Assembly.

"I would repeat what I said about 10 times in the meeting: The House has passed a budget," said House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, on Wednesday. However, the budget that passed the House has not been sent to the Senate for approval.

The discussion leaders are having with utility companies to alleviate the rate hikes is one of the reasons why the budget has not been passed.

"It is held up mainly because of the negotiations with ComEd," said Representative Naomi Jakobsson, D-Champaign. "The people of Illinois and (especially) southern Illinois need relief for their utility bills."

Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Senate President Emil Jones, D-Chicago, attacked the proposed budget, saying it is a threat to important services. Their alternative would pump money into health care and education by increasing the taxes on business and embarking on a major expansion of gambling. Madigan countered, saying House Democrats will not go along with this.

The House's current version of the budget will generate an additional \$800 million compared to last year, an overall increase of around 2.8 percent. This is based mainly on natural revenue growth, ending some tax breaks and pursuing a small casino expansion. By some estimates, this version of the budget will come up more than \$1 billion short in the next year.

Madigan admitted that his version is unbalanced. "The budget would run a deficit in the next year," he said. He did respond to the proposed spending increases Gov. Blagojevich and Senate President Emil Jones have been pushing.

"I think it represents the high-water mark in the House for spending for the next budget year," Madigan said.

With the session adjournment deadline passed, new rules go into effect. Now a 3/5 majority is required to pass any budget that may come up. This has given Republicans a voice in the final legislation.

Senate President Emil Jones criticized the budget that passed the House saying it was not reflective of his values.

"As a Democrat, I care about education. I care about health care for all," Jones said. "This budget really doesn't reflect that."

However, Rep. Jakobsson is not worried about the deadlock. "The leadership will do what's best for the people of Illinois," she said. "We need to make sure it is in their best interest."

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