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## Legislature Sends Budget To Governor

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JEFFERSON CITY – Approving funding to run critical functions of state government with an emphasis on preserving education, the Missouri General Assembly today advanced 13 budget bills totaling \$24 billion for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The bills include a \$5 million increase for the K-12 school foundation formula, as well as restored proposed cuts by the governor to higher education.

Senate Appropriations Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, handled the budget bills in the Senate. He said the budget reflects the state's dedication to continue to make education the No. 1 priority.

"As we began the process, we made a commitment to fund our schools so that every child has an equal opportunity to a world-class education," Schaefer said. "This year, we met that commitment by adding money to K-12 funding while maintaining level funding for higher education."

Senate Leader Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, thanked Schaefer for his continued leadership and dedication to hold the Legislature's commitment to education spending without implementing a tax increase.

"We knew going into this process that Missouri faced a difficult budget year with a large revenue shortfall," said Mayer. "I commend Sen. Schaefer and his committee's tireless efforts for finding savings and efficiencies so our children do not have to see cuts to their educational opportunities."

The slow revenue growth, combined with an increase in mandatory expenses in programs like Medicaid and the end of one-time federal stabilization dollars, meant Missouri was forced to make \$200 million in reductions and cost avoidance to the budget. Despite this obstacle, through finding efficiencies, the Senate was able to spend \$50 million less than the budget proposed by the governor in January.

Schaefer said, "Unlike the federal government, which spends borrowed money, we are faced with the responsibility of not spending more than the state would take in. By cutting back spending where necessary and living within our means, we continued to protect education funding at all levels without a tax increase."

Gov. Nixon's original budget in January proposed \$106 million cut to higher education for the next fiscal year and later amended his cut to \$66 million using the mortgage settlement money to fill this gap.

"University officials warned of steep tuition increases, course reductions, and employee furloughs in the coming school year because of the cuts proposed by the governor," Schaefer noted. "Missouri's families should not be faced with this increase, and

we made sure no cuts were made so tuition is kept affordable, ensuring more of our state's citizens have opportunities to a higher education.”

The Senate's higher education funding bill restored those cuts in order to maintain flat funding for the state's colleges and universities, allocating \$65.9 million more than the governor's budget. The budget also maintained level funding in scholarships, so students have access to tuition assistance.

The budget again protects Missouri's K-12 students by increasing the foundation formula by \$5 million dollars. The \$3.009 billion the state will spend on the K-12 foundation formula will be the highest level of spending by Missouri on the foundation formula.

“Education is the greatest investment we can make as a state and is essential to strengthening Missouri's future,” said Senate Floor Leader Tom Dempsey, R-St. Charles. “The Legislature took the lead and made the tough decisions required to continue to ensure that core funding was left intact.”

Also included in the budget is a 2 percent increase in pay for state employees making up to \$70,000. According to census data, Missouri state employees rank 50th in the nation for wages. This change will give roughly 55,000 state workers a raise starting in July.

The budget bills also reaffirmed its commitment to Missouri veterans through a permanent funding source for Missouri's seven veterans' homes. The homes treating and caring for 1,300 veterans will receive \$30 million generated through a boarding fee on casinos. The money was removed from the Early Childhood Development Education and Care Fund, which will be replaced through tobacco settlement money.

"In this budget we worked to make government more efficient for Missourians," Mayer added. "Where the governor failed, the General Assembly succeeded in promoting those principles by working to control spending, allowing us to fund education and programs, like our veterans' homes, without a tax increase."

Lawmakers completed the budget one day before the deadline set by the state constitution and now moves to the governor for his signature. The state Fiscal Year 2013 begins July 1, 2012.

***Photo Above: The Rotunda in the Missouri Capitol was a bee hive of activity this week as legislators finished work on the budget and sent it to Gov. Jay Nixon. (SMT Archive)***

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