

Budget cuts affect state, education

By: Madison Hess and Shelby Ross

In order to cope with its rising budget crisis the state of Kansas, if no revenue comes in, will have to cut \$380,723,696. If this happens, education will be affected the most as it is expected that approximately \$189 million will be cut from it. This is not surprising because according to Republican Representative of the 52nd District Lana Gordon, more than 50 percent of the state's budget dollars are used to aid K-12 education. Another 10 percent is used on higher education opportunities.

The two most common options elected officials are considering to bring in revenue in order to aid the budget crisis include increasing the sales tax and repealing tax exemptions. However, Gordon feels there is another option.

“We can try to look for savings in the school budgets. Make sure they

are prioritizing their spendings,” Gordon said. “Some think raising taxes is the only solution and some think that is not a solution at all. We're searching to see what we can find to try to do the least amount of harm to individuals and to support our more vulnerable population which are those on government assistance and the elderly.”

The Legislative Post Audit, which Gordon supports, is a non-partisan group that does research and evaluation for the Legislature. This committee evaluates school districts' spendings and attempts to see if there can be any savings made. Gordon considers this a free accounting service for these districts.

“I think it is always better to try to look first to see if you can save the money before you think about raising the taxes,” Gordon said.

On the other hand, Senate Democratic Leader Anthony Hensley from Topeka believes that local school boards should make the decisions regarding the budget not the state.

“Efficiencies should be found at a local level,” Hensley said.

Contrary to Gordon’s views, Hensley suggests that the state should repeal exemptions on taxes.

“This is going to be a long process. It [the budget crisis] will probably be resolved on the last day, the last hour we are in session,” Hensley said. “There are a number of different provisions that can be made, but I feel there will be no further cuts in K-12 education.”

One of the districts that will be affected by the cuts is Auburn-Washburn USD 437. It will have to cut \$1.1 million.

“Students should know that the Board of Education is doing everything they possibly can to protect academic programming and activities, K-12, but the budget hole of \$400 million that the State must fill, would reduce our school district’s funding level to that of the school year 1998-1999 if no new revenue is found,” said Superintendent Dr. Brenda Dietrich in an e-mail.

Cuts in USD 437 include but are not limited to a 10 percent cut in all supply accounts and a 25 percent slash in field trip expenses. Students will also use older text books, have fewer extra curricular options and a possibility of higher fees. The district also plans to power down the heating and air conditioning in all buildings after 4:30 p.m.

Furthermore, other affects can be seen all throughout the state, one of them being the change in the Base for Student

Aid per Pupil. It now amounts to \$4,012.

However, the most predominant effect will be the larger class sizes.

“The ideal class size is 17 and it has recently grown a lot,” Hensley said.

“Still, Kansas does a really good job of meeting the Standard of Excellence.

However, if the cuts continue the achievement gap between black and white students will widen.”

Accordingly, Gordon also believes that Kansas can keep up the Standard of Excellence.

“I hope that the individual school district’s will do the best that they can with good teachers and administrators who make the right choices,” Gordon said.

The budget for next year will be made public in April. This will show if more cuts are to be made in K-12 education or if the plans implemented have worked.