

Submission for the KSPA Statehouse Reporter for a Day

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With an increasingly alarming budget situation facing them, the Kansas state legislature went back into session Jan. 28 while educators, parents, and students alike anxiously anticipate what will happen next. Schools faced a loss of \$288 per pupil last year and may very well lose up to \$2,400 more this year, heightening fears of program cuts, staff and faculty cuts, larger class sizes, and perhaps consolidation, especially for smaller schools.

“Every school district is suffering,” Representative Sheryl Spalding of the 29th district, said. “This state has an obligation to fund a suitable education for all students.”

Because they can raise more money per mill, raising their mill levy tends to yield more results for larger schools. Smaller schools, since they have less within their jurisdictions, receive the less per mill, but the state makes up this difference by raising the local option budget (L.O.B.) for smaller schools.

When asked what he believed the cause of this budget crisis was, Bill Otto, 9th district representative, said that the legislature “squandered” the extra money the state had during profitable years by forking out money for improving state roads and other unnecessary things. This fiscal year since June, the state has been forced to cut \$250 million from transportation, education, and Medicaid, and many other state-funded programs, and, according to Otto, another \$150 million in cuts can be expected in 2010.

Governor Mark Parkinson suggested in the State of the State address that the state raise the sales tax by one cent and increase the tax on tobacco by 55 cents to help combat the money deficit, but the House of Representatives voted not to increase the sales tax Jan. 28.

According to Ed Trimmer, Representative of 78th district, Kansans can help conquer the funding crisis by staying within the state to purchase items, encouraging entrepreneurial growth and thinking more about alternative energy sources.

Many legislators and citizens feel that part of the problem is how the state has been carelessly handing out tax exemptions to several organizations. According to Representative Don Svaty of the 108th district, if some tax exemptions were cut out, the state would have around an extra \$4 billion. Representative Svaty also stated that exemptions and requests for exemptions need to be closely examined before they are approved.

But what effect will further state budget cuts have on Humboldt? Classes have been cut since last year’s cuts, though programs have managed to stay in tact. If the legislature chooses to follow through with more

cuts toward education, many schools may be forced to cut more staff members, close buildings in favor of consolidation, or turn to four-day weeks, none of which are considered preferred options.

According to Humboldt Superintendent Robert Heigele, in order to avoid cutting programs, classes, and extracurricular activities, Humboldt has stopped buying classroom supplies and chose before the '09-'10 school year not to replace five teaching positions left open by two retirements, two moves, and by choosing not to renew one contract. Since nothing is definite at this time, Heigele, as well as most legislators, is reluctant to commit to saying exactly what will be cut. However, Heigele says that a legislative decision is needed by at least May 1 so that the district can make their decisions on what must be done.

“The prospect of cutting several of the programs and extracurricular activities that I’m involved in and absolutely love is a dreadful idea,” Darrah Tinkler, Humboldt High School sophomore, said. “I believe that whatever can be done to prevent further cuts to education should be done without delay.”

Tensions are bound to arise within the next four to five months of legislative session, but any legislator will agree that something must be done.