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3/18/12

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MONTGOMERY

Budget nightmare looms

Legislators hope to avoid special session over money matters

By Mary Sell Montgomery Bureau

On Friday, most state agencies were told they must cut their budgets by 10.6 percent in the remaining six months of the fiscal year in order to save the state \$188 million.

While they make those cuts — which could include pay cuts, layoffs or diminished services — they also are looking to state lawmakers to tell them what to expect in fiscal 2013.

There's an estimated general fund revenue shortfall of \$377.5 million to be addressed, said state Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, chairman of the Finance and Taxation General Fund Committee.

But lawmakers have said they want to pass the 2013 general fund and education budgets during their regular legislative session, which ends in May. Otherwise, a special session would have to be called.

"(A special session) has been discussed by the leadership, but at this time, we are going to do all we can to prepare the budgets in the regular session," Orr said.

Orr said lawmakers want to give state agencies as much time as possible to prepare for budget cuts.

"Because the cuts will be so significant across the budget, (we want to) give agencies as much lead time as possible to take the appropriate actions based on reduced funding," Orr said.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh said Thursday that waiting to deal with the general fund budget, from which most state agencies draw funding, won't help with finances.

"They are going to be ugly if we deal with them now or deal with them later," he said. "I'd rather deal with them now and save the taxpayers half-a-million dollars."

That's how much a special session could cost, he said.

Agencies are bracing for the cuts.

Before the Department of Mental Health can finalize its closure plans for several facilities, including one in Decatur, it has to make sure it will have enough community-based programs to absorb the 500 or more patients who will be displaced.

That planning depends, in part, on how much state funding the agency will receive in the next fiscal year.

"We are planning for the worst and hoping for the best," Tony Thompson, assistant to ADMH Commissioner Zelia Baugh, said in an email.

In his proposed budget in February, Gov. Robert Bentley cuts ADHM's budget by 10 percent in the next fiscal year. Meanwhile, agencies have been told to prepare for cuts up to as much as 25 percent. Bentley's proposed general fund budget would cut ADMH's current appropriation by about 10 percent to \$104.7 million. A 25 percent cut would give the agency \$87 million in the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

"If we receive the 25 percent cut, it gives us less funds to spend on the infrastructure, but we are planning with that worse case in mind,"

Thompson said. "Of course, we are hopeful for the 10 percent or less, which would give us more money to spend on infrastructure."

Agriculture and Industries Commissioner John McMillan on Friday told his 300 employees to prepare for a 7.5 percent pay cut because of proration.

"The sooner we have concrete numbers (for 2013), the sooner we can prepare for whatever we have to do," he said.

In 2011, McMillan was the first agency leader to lay off staff members.



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19	20	21	22	23	24	25

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Tennessee Valley Museum of Art
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[Muscular Dystrophy Association](#)
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