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State agencies react after AL General Fund budget signed into law

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By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - Several of Alabama's state agencies are reacting after lawmakers finally passed, and Governor Robert Bentley signed, a general fund budget. It took two special session to get a finalized budget, which was needed before Oct. 1.

"After a careful review, I signed the FY2016 General Fund Budget into law today," Gov. Bentley tweeted. "It isn't a perfect budget, but we have made important changes to the way our state budgets. State agencies will be ready to operate on Oct. 1." That's the day the state's new fiscal year starts.

[DOCUMENTS: [General fund budget 2015 and 2016 comparison sheet 1](#) and [comparison sheet 2](#)]

"We have made tremendous progress to fundamentally change the way our state budgets. [Wednesday] is an important step forward in that process," Bentley said. "I commend House and Senate members, including Speaker Hubbard, Pro Tem Marsh and Budget Chairmen Clouse and Orr, for prioritizing people over politics. I also want to thank members of the House and Senate who courageously voted to increase revenue for the General Fund."

ALABAMA DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH

State Health Officer Dr. Don Williamson said that if you look at the numbers, "It looks like we got hammered." But he went on to say a little deeper digging indicates the Alabama Department of Public Health, "should be ok..."

Williamson says you take out the \$42 million that was going to fund the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) because the federal government is going to pick up the state's share of costs. He says you can then add the \$11 million of carry forward money from FY2015 to FY2016 that the state no longer needs to use it for CHIP.

ADPH got \$22 million from the General Fund. The \$22M and \$11M get the agency close to level funding, Williamson said, which is around \$33-34 million. The agency is going over some line items that were in the 2015 budget that were not in 2016's to see how that may change the actual dollar amount.

The Alabama House of Representatives voted 71-21 Wednesday night to approve the budget, shortly after the Senate voted 23-9 for the spending plan.

Following Wednesday night's passage Bentley praised legislators for the efforts.

ALABAMA NURSING HOME ASSOCIATION

John Matson with the Alabama Nursing Home Association issued a statement giving the budget a thumbs up. "House Bill 12 and other revenue measures help fully fund Medicaid," he said. "Alabama nursing homes needed to do their part to make sure Medicaid is fully funded because of the critical services it provides to the citizens of our state."

ALABAMA STATE PARKS

The news did not sit well with the State Parks agency, which lamented a budget cut for the fifth state year. "They make the state's laws, and we must find ways to implement them," the division posted to its Facebook page. "We do not think it's fair to the people of the state, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors and tourists that enjoy our parks each year, for us to speculate today on how this transfer will impact the system," the post went

on. "This remains a very serious matter for the park system, and we expect to know more within the next week to ten days and will share that information with the public at that time."

ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

"While loss of ETF [Education Trust Fund] dollars is not ideal in any situation for k-12 education, \$80M of the Use Tax revenue taken from the ETF for FY '16 was as good for schools as it could be, as compared to losing the entire 100% of Use Tax distribution as was proposed in the Second Special Session," said Malissa Valdes-Hubert with ALSDE. "And, the fact that there were "back-fill" revenue measures for the ETF passed in the First Special Session helps to soften the diversion of use tax," she went on.

"Our schools have not been fully funded and have actually been underfunded since FY '2008. The two-bill package passed during the Special Session does not change the fact that our schools STILL NEED TO BE better funded and equipped so that our administrators, our teachers, our classrooms, and moreover our students can reap the benefits of a fully funded K-12 public education system in our state."

GOVERNOR BENTLEY ON BILL'S PASSAGE

There were some republicans who refused to vote for a single tax increase. Sen. Bill Holtzclaw posted a picture of the "Gang of Nine" on his [Facebook page](#) Wednesday with a caption saying "we all stood firm together and voted against the tax increases yesterday."

The governor said he was very happy with lawmakers who did vote for tax increases, something he said he would commend lawmakers for and continue commending them for.

When pressed on what he meant by "commending," the governor said "I'm just saying we help our friends that's what I'm saying, that's all I'm saying. I'm not saying we are going to hurt anybody I'm just saying we are going to go out of our way to help our friends."

The governor also praised the work of the two budget chairs, Rep. Steve Clouse and Sen. Arthur Orr.

Orr said the budget will avoid deep reductions to critical state agencies.

The budget gives level funding to Medicaid, prisons, mental health services, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Pardons and Paroles and the court system. Other agencies will see cuts.

Lawmakers for months have struggled over a \$200 million budget shortfall, and were forced into two special sessions. Earlier in the week legislators approved a 25-cent-per-pack cigarette tax and a transfer of \$80 million in Education Funds to help cover the projected gap.

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