



## State legislature hopes to rework budget

By Christopher Wills, The Associated Press

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. - House Democrats hope to restore hundreds of millions of dollars to the Illinois budget despite an impasse over the only surviving idea for coming up with cash to cover those expenses.

Top House Democrats said Tuesday that many programs vetoed by Gov. Rod Blagojevich deserve to be restored, even without a specific source of revenue to pay for them.

"I'm hopeful that we'll at least be able to make some headway in avoiding the most draconian of the cuts the governor made," said House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, D-Chicago.

Several pointed to the Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse as an example, saying it will lose \$110 million in state and federal support, or 43 percent of its budget, due to Blagojevich's cuts.

But Currie and other legislators saw little chance that the House would also consider a new source of money.

Democrats talked of taking roughly \$300 million out of special-purpose funds and using it for general expenses, but talks with Republicans have gone nowhere. Each party blamed the other for the lack of progress.

Whatever the cause of the delay, Democrats said there was no reason to hold up action on restoring the governor's budget cuts. The fund "sweep" doesn't have to be done now, they said.

"As much as I would like to couple the override votes with the fund sweeps, if it doesn't happen now it can happen later," said Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, the Chicago Democrat assigned to seek an agreement on using the special funds.

Rep. Mark Beaubien of Barrington Hills, a top budget negotiator for House Republicans, said it would be "irresponsible" to increase spending without adding revenue to a state budget that's already deeply out of balance.

But he sees little chance that any of the spending will end up being restored.

Anything that passes the House would also have to be approved by the Senate, which doesn't yet have any plans to consider the issue, Beaubien noted. And even if lawmakers OK the money, Blagojevich would still make the final decision on whether to spend it.

The Democratic governor last week used his veto powers to cut \$1.4 billion from the roughly \$9 billion budget approved by the Legislature. He said the budget was \$2 billion out of balance.

The House had refused to support various Blagojevich plans to come up with money to close the deficit. Some of the failed ideas include privatizing the state lottery and refinancing the state's pension debt.

The House is scheduled to vote Wednesday on overriding the governor's vetoes.

Doing that could be difficult, even setting aside questions of revenue.