



Democrats to foil special session order

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HARTFORD -- Majority Democrats will satisfy Gov. M. Jodi Rell's order to meet in special session Tuesday, but they will immediately gavel it to an end.

Instead, they'll meet again, possibly next week, to come up with about \$100 million in program cuts toward the \$340 million deficit Rell wants to erase before the end of the calendar year.

They said Rell can get another \$100 million in concessions from state unions because the massive falloff in sales and income taxes allows her to reopen negotiations with the nearly 50,000 unionized employees.

Democrats would also delay changes approved earlier this year to the tax on the estates of deceased persons, in order to generate another \$40 million a year.

Speaker of the House Christopher G. Donovan, talking with reporters after a four-hour, closed door caucus Monday, said Democrats believe Rell's proposed deficit-mitigation plan would threaten cities and eliminate 4,000 to 6,000 jobs at a time when the state's economy depends on them.

"We will not cut our cities and towns by \$84 million," Donovan said of Rell's proposed 3 percent cut to town aid in the two-year, \$37.6-billion budget that started July 1. "We're not going to

sacrifice 5,000 jobs. This recovery is about creating jobs."

Majority Senate Democrats on Monday night had not reviewed the House proposals.

A spokesman for Rell warned that Democrats, who run the House 114-37 and the Senate 24-12, are showing "an incredible and disheartening disregard" for the state's fiscal problems, which center on a sharp drop-off in sales- and income-tax revenue. The spokesman questioned the accuracy of the Democrats' claimed loss of jobs.

Donovan, D-Meriden, and House Majority Leader Denise W. Merrill, D-Mansfield, said Rell's budget proposal would lose about \$39 million in federal funding at a time when she's ignoring hundreds of millions of dollars in federal sources for anti-poverty programs and high-speed rail projects.

Earlier in the day, supporters and providers of children's programs, including school-based health centers, early childhood education, and the Connecticut Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs Inc., warned that Rell's plan to cut their budgets by \$47 million would mean fewer jobs and more kids growing up with health problems and in danger of becoming high school dropouts.

Rich Harris, a spokesman for Rell, said the administration is in the process of seeking more federal funding.

"The claim of 5,000 job losses is a made-up number from so-called leaders who are unwilling and unable to address the realities of this fiscal crisis," Harris said.

"The bottom line is the majority party is showing an

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incredible and irresponsible disregard for the red ink that's mounting daily," said Harris, criticizing nonprofit groups including Connecticut Voices for Children, which supports raising the 6 percent sales tax to 7 percent to create \$600 million in new revenue.

"That's \$600 million dollars out of the wallets of families all across the state in the middle of the worst economic times since the Great Depression, and at the same time, they're offering no alternatives to reduce state spending," Harris said in an interview. "What planet are they living on? The question is: What are they going to do to make state government affordable?"

Joe Andreana, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club alliance, said during a morning news conference in the Legislative Office Building that the 16-member organization, which operates at 50 different program sites serving about 60,000 youths age 6 to 18, has been able over the last four years to leverage \$4 million in state contributions to receive \$4 million from out-of-state sources.

"If, in fact, the \$1.1 million appropriation grant that was approved in our most current budget was to be removed, as the governor is proposing, that would represent something in the neighborhood of 5 to 15 percent of the total budget of our Boys & Girls Club," he said. "It would mean that 4,800 at-risk youths would remain on our streets, tempted by all of the illegal temptations that our teenagers are faced with."

Jessica Sauer, executive director of the nonprofit All Our Kin, said Rell's cuts would attack the state's next generation of kids, at a time when she offered United Technologies \$100 million in tax breaks to save about 700 jobs.

"The question to Gov. Rell is: what makes the employees of Pratt & Whitney and Sikorsky more important than the parents and teachers of the lower and moderate income families whose jobs are at stake here?" said Sauer. "Investing in children today saves money tomorrow."

Democrats in the House and Senate remain divided on how best to rewrite the state's landmark campaign-reform legislation of 2005, so no action on that is expected Tuesday.

State Sen. Gayle S. Slossberg, D-Milford, co-chairwoman of the legislative Government Administration & Elections Committee, said Monday that she and House colleagues need more time to work out a rewrite of the law that created the state's public-financing system for General Assembly races and statewide campaigns, including governor and attorney general.

"There is no agreement at this time," Slossberg said in an afternoon phone interview. "We're both continuing to work on possible solutions. There are a lot of options out there on how to design that system, and I'm still discussing with my colleagues."

Earlier this year, a federal judge threw out the law, stressing that it creates unfair obstacles for minor parties and petitioning candidates. The state is appealing the ruling.

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