

Debate on a government ethics bill has stalled in the Senate. Cape Girardeau Senator Jason Crowell wants to ban former legislators from becoming lobbyists for two years after they leave office. His proposal and suggested changes some of his colleagues want to make have forced the sponsor of the ethics reform bill to pull it out of Senate debate for now. It is likely to return next week. Crowell also would ban ex-lawmakers from getting jobs at state agencies or being appointed to judgeships until two years had passed. That makes no sense to floor leader Kevin Engler, especially in the term limits era. Lee's Summit's Senator Matt Bartle has some sympathy with the lobbying ban...but otherwise. "I worry about creating a policy that will have a long term negative impact on the ability of a governor to lead by tapping people who are in legislative service," he says. What has brought discussion to an immediate halt is a suggestion that former legislators could not even be hired by current legislators to serve on their staffs.

House budget committee members have been told to cut a little deeper as the committee chairman looks ahead and sees no reason to believe state revenues are turning around any time soon. The state budget submitted by Governor Nixon totals nearly \$24 billion, which would be \$2.6 billion less than the current budget. That still is too large for House Budget Committee Chairman Allen Icet who has asked his various appropriations sub-committee chairmen to trim an extra five percent. The cuts being pushed by Icet would come in the crucial General Revenue budget which totals \$7.2 billion. State tax revenues still lag well below levels necessary to pay all the state's bills; as much as 12% below. Icet doesn't see them rebounding over the next couple of years. The state also plans to use the remaining budget stabilization money approved by Congress, which would total at least \$900 million, perhaps \$1.2 billion if a promised \$300 million actually comes through. The five percent reduction target would total about \$300 million. Icet worries about making up the extra federal funds. "Next year at this time, if we do in fact have a, let's say, a \$900 million hole. If we are able to cut \$300 million this year, which I don't know if we can get to, that still leaves a \$600 million hole," Icet says. "My opinion is, again if nothing happens, there will be programs that are completely eliminated. You can't get to \$600 million by trimming around the edges." Much time remains in the budget process. The six sub-committees funnel their recommendations to the full House Budget Committee which must approve the bills and send them to the full House for consideration. Once the House approves a budget, it moves to the Senate for consideration. The two chambers then meet to reach agreement before a final product goes to Governor Nixon for consideration.