

A controversial cut made by the Senate Appropriations Committee has been restored and Missouri teachers performing extra duties for extra pay will get their money. The Senate has approved its version of the state's \$23 billion spending plan for the fiscal year that begins July 1st. The committee had cut the Career Ladder program, a \$37.4 million program that provides funding to approximately 19,000 teachers. Teachers who participate agree to do extra duties for additional money. The full Senate has reinstated the program, but only for one year. Several senators objected to the committee action during floor debate on SCS HB 2002, the budget bill that funds public education. Those senators argued that the teachers have been doing the extra work for months in anticipation of the legislature funding the program next year. They claimed the state had a moral obligation to fund the program and ensure the teachers got paid. Debate on Career Ladder highlighted the difficulties in the budget process this year. Gov. Nixon submitted his proposed budget in January, a spending plan that totaled nearly \$24 billion. State revenue though continues to sink as the recession fails to loosen its grip on the country. The poor revenue forecast and uncertainty about whether \$300 million in federal funding would actually be authorized by Congress prompted Nixon to request lawmakers cut \$500 million from the budget he submitted. The House cut \$224 million. The Senate committee cut \$506 million. The full Senate has restored the \$37.4 million Career Ladder program for the next fiscal year. Senators also restored \$14.8 million cut from higher education. An agreement has been reached to eliminate an exemption from state taxes now enjoyed by Medicaid managed care companies. That move is expected to net \$20 million. The budget bills (HBs 2001 – 2013) now return to the House. The two chambers will have to come to an agreement on spending by May 7th.

House Democrats have used an unusual move to take a payday loan regulation bill from a committee and order it placed on the House calendar for debate. That extraordinary move, though, might well backfire. House Democrats exercised the constitutional right to strip a committee of a bill and force it on the calendar. They claimed they had to, that the House Financial Institutions Committee had no desire to move the measure to regulate the payday loan industry. House Speaker Ron Richard, a Republican from Joplin, says the bill will go nowhere in wake of Democrats taking such a drastic step. HB 2116 is sponsored by Rep. Mary Still. Still says Missourians should be concerned about the conflict of interest in the committee which she said turned a legislative committee into a booster club for the payday loan industry.