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Jenna DeNoyelles/ The Capital Time

Belated state budget promises more funds for PSU, PHEAA

BY ALLISON MILLS
LAYOUT EDITOR
MXA932@PSU.EDU

After nearly 80 days without a state budget, Governor Ed Rendell announced Friday an agreement on the already infamous Pennsylvania budget of 2009/10. With a \$150 million spending cut, new taxes on entertainment and cigarettes and the use of the Rainy Day Fund, lawmakers expect the budget to be finalized and passed by the end of the month.

Not everyone is optimistic. Sharon Ward, executive director of the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center (PBPC), expressed concern for the stability of the agreed-upon proposal.

"Lawmakers have built this budget agreement on a shaky foundation. It is premised on overly optimistic revenue projections and relies too heavily on one-time revenue sources. Lawmakers are essentially digging for coins under the sofa cushion to balance this budget," Ward said in a PBPC press release.

Despite including the first spending cut since Rendell took office, the \$27.95 billion

budget would meet Rendell's requirements for education, health care and economic development. Rendell never stopped pushing for education during the budget impasse.

"I refuse to accept a budget that will devastate education," Rendell said after vetoing a budget proposal in August.

The accepted, not yet approved budget would increase funding for Pennsylvania state-owned and related universities, a category that includes Penn State. Additionally, funding for Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) scholarships would grow, according to a Senate Republican News press release.

Senator Jake Corman (R-34), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, voiced relief that school funding would increase without also increasing taxes.

"This agreement reflects a balanced, responsible budget that does not require a broad-based tax increase," Corman said during a press conference Friday. "By defeating the Governor's proposed tax hike and keeping state spending at a lower level than any year of this Governor's tenure,

this budget compromise is a win for Pennsylvania taxpayers."

Rendell also cited the people of Pennsylvania as winners in the budget battle, but smokers and moviegoers could disagree.

The state cigarette tax would be increased by 25 cents and mini-cigars would be added to the tax. An entertainment tax would produce about \$100 million. Admission prices to theaters, dances, concerts and other performing arts, museums, historical sites, zoos and parks would no longer be exempt from the six percent state sales tax. Allowing table games in state casinos would initially net \$200 million and an additional \$300 million would result from increased business taxes. Lawmakers would clean out the Rainy Day Fund, using its entire \$755 million and take \$708 million from the Health Care Provider Retention, according to a PBPC press release.

With a tentative agreement in the works, the great budget drought of 2009 could soon come to its long-awaited end. But without a concrete piece of passed legislature, the state of Pennsylvania has yet to breathe its long overdue sigh of relief.

Surge in Enrollment Puts Strain on Parking

BY SEPIDEH SAFAEE
STAFF WRITER
SOS5034@PSU.EDU

Penn State Harrisburg is in the process of expanding the parking lots to accommodate the student body.

There are approximately 487 new freshmen and a total of approximately 4000 students attending Penn State Harrisburg. "We're still at the point where students did not complete the enrollment," says Dr. Don Holtzman Senior Director of Student Affairs. He says the official enrolment is not done until the sixth week of the semester.

"Penn State is looking to expand the parking lots," says Ed Dankanich, Director of the Physical Plant and Maintenance Operations. Penn State has a master plan for future location on parking as a result of increasing cars. The new parking lots are proposed to be built at the back of the Olmsted as of next summer, although nothing is certain right now.

If they receive the funding they will start plans for building near the Heat Plant, Penn State is also building more by the new housing to the west of the existing main lot behind Olmsted where additional parking will be added.

Penn State is working with Lower Swatara Township to coordinate the code and zoning agreement. "The Cost for the designs of the new lots will be estimate at a total of \$400,000 for 200 lots. \$2,000 per parking space," says Dankanich. The new construction may consist of up to 500 lots.

Ed Dankanich says they are still waiting for the funding and if the funding is approved a portion of the parking could be done in a year.

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