

# Louisiana Federation of Teachers

# Weekly Legislative Digest

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2016 Regular Legislative Session

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## Budget shoe to drop on Tuesday

All eyes and ears in Baton Rouge will be attuned to the House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday morning, when Gov. John Bel Edwards is expected to announce how his administration plans to deal with a \$750 million shortfall in the coming budget year.

When the special legislative session adjourned last month, lawmakers had not identified enough revenue to fill the looming budget hole. The administration must therefore propose a budget that is \$750 million short of what is needed.

The governor has no authority to raise revenues, and legislators are not allowed to increase taxes in the current session. That leaves only two possibilities: devastating cuts or another special session dedicated to raising the funds needed to operate government (or perhaps a combination of both).

### Higher Education braces for cuts

With much of the state's general fund budget locked up in dedications, higher education has been an easy target when the budget axe falls.

This week, representatives for the state's higher education systems, as well as programs like TOPS, convened to learn how badly their budgets will be clipped in the coming year. The room collectively gasped when a general fund reduction of \$180.3 million for colleges and universities, and \$233.2 million for TOPS and LOSFA were announced.

Those gasps turned to sighs of relief when it was explained that the cuts were based on budget figures prepared before last month's special session, when the projected deficit for 2016-17 would be over \$2 billion.

That special session reduced the projected deficit to \$750 million, and proposed cuts based on that figure were not yet available. They will be revealed on April 12.

### COLA for retirees proceeds

A bill that would provide cost of living adjustments for members of state retirement systems was approved by the Senate Retirement Committee and sent to the Senate Finance Committee for further action.

SB 2 by Sen. Barrow Peacock (R-Bossier City) would authorize the various state retirement systems to grant a COLA based on the performance of the systems' experience accounts.

Under the formula in Sen. Peacock's bill, members of the Teachers' Retirement System and the State Employees' Retirement System would be eligible for a 1.5% COLA; members of the School Employees' Retirement System and State Troopers' Retirement System would be eligible for a 2% increase.

In order for SB 2 to go into effect, lawmakers will have to pass two other bills, SB 5 and SB 18, both by Sen. Peacock. They deal with ways that system costs and liabilities are determined in relation to COLAs.

## **Only one TOPS bill escapes House committee**

### **Senate panel approves TOPS bill vetoed by Jindal last year**

Several bills aimed at changing or reining in the expense of the popular TOPS scholarship program were heard by the House Education Committee, but only one won enough votes to proceed to the floor.

HB 438 by Rep. Barry Ivey (R-Central) would create the TOPS Tech Transfer, a new category to help struggling students get a college education.

Students who have a 20 ACT score and 2.5 GPA would qualify for TOPS Tech Transfer. They would be required to attend a two-year school and, if they perform well enough, can transfer to a four-year college.

Requirements for traditional TOPS would be raised to a 21 ACT score and 3.0 GPA. Remaining the same would be a 17 ACT for TOPS Tech, a 23 ACT score for the Performance Award, and a 27 ACT for the Honors Award.

Another TOPS bill that would have passed, had it been heard, was deferred. HB 390 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would cap TOPS spending. An identical bill by Sen. Jack Donahue (R-Mandeville) was passed by the legislature last year, but fell victim to Gov. Bobby Jindal's veto pen.

Because Sen. Donahue is introducing the same bill this year as SB 174, Rep. Landry deferred her bill so that his could be the one to pass. The Senate Education Committee later approved SB 174 without objection.

While Sen. Donahue's bill caps the TOPS award per student at the 2016-17 level, it does allow for the legislature to raise the award in the future.

## **Controversial higher education consolidation bills rescheduled**

Bills aimed at consolidating the boards that oversee higher education were deferred by the House Education Committee this week, postponing what could be a bitter fight.

HB 152 by Rep. Rick Edmonds (R-Baton Rouge) and HB 169 by Rep. Thomas Carmody (R-Shreveport) are both proposed constitutional amendments. They would both abolish the Board of Regents and transfer its powers, duties and responsibilities to a new Louisiana Postsecondary Education Board of Trustees.

Rep. Carmody told lobbyists that he will defer to Rep. Edmonds' bill. New hearing dates for the bills have not been set. Similar issues have been defeated in the past.

A far less controversial bill dealing with three agencies partly overseen by the Board of Regents was approved by the House Education Committee without objection.

HB 842 by Rep. Chris Broadwater (R-Hammond) would abolish the boards that oversee the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium for Research and Education (LUMCON), the Medifund, and the

Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LOSFA), and transfer their duties and powers to the Board of Regents.

The intent is to streamline the education agencies and make them more efficient. In the case of LUMCON, Rep. Broadwater said, the bill would help the agency structure itself to attract revenue for the participating universities.

Another bill that was approved without objection, HB 881 by Rep. Jay Morris, (R-Monroe), would require higher education institutions to report on their research projects to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.

The intent of the bill, Rep. Morris said, it to let lawmakers know how much colleges and universities spend on research as opposed to instruction.

## **Panel okays bill to aid homeless and foster children in college**

The House Education Committee approved HB 906 by Rep. James Armes (D-Leesville), which provides assistance for homeless and foster children trying to navigate the college admission process. The bill authorizes schools to designate homeless and foster child liaisons in their financial aid offices. It also authorizes schools to give those students access to housing resources during and between academic terms.

## **Bill charts follow the progress of regular session legislation**

Follow the progress of legislation monitored by the Louisiana Federation of Teachers' lobbying team.

We've loaded our Legislative Resources page with charts listing bills in the joint LFT/LAE legislative agenda, Governor John Bel Edwards' legislative agenda, and bills that LFT both supports and opposes. The charts will be updated as needed; for up-to-the minute changes in bills, click on the bill number in the chart.

[Click here to visit the Legislative Resources page.](#)

## **Survey to better understand services for students with language needs**

The University of Kansas is conducting a study to better understand services available to children in schools and services available to students with language needs.

Researchers say "the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of to what teachers know about student language abilities and how they are able to identify students with specific language impairment. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. Survey responses will be anonymous and no identifiable information will be collected."

[Please click here if you'd like to participate in the survey.](#)

## **The week ahead...**

**Monday, April 11:** The Senate Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Committee will have a "discussion" of tax expenditures, which will include state income tax exemption on public employee retirement benefits.

**Wednesday, April 13:** The House Education Committee will consider many of the bills filed in relation to charter schools.

**Thursday, April 14:** The House Retirement Committee will consider HB 32 and HB 33 by Rep. Sam Jones (D-Franklin), dealing with cost of living adjustments. HB 907 by Rep. Bernard LeBas (D-Ville Platte) would increase the amount that retired teachers can earn as substitutes without affecting their retirement benefit.

The Senate Education Committee is expected to deal with its list of bills concerning charter schools.