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Sebelius tweaks, signs budget

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Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius signed off Monday on a \$13 billion state budget for next year, but not after tweaking some legislative proposals within it.

The spending blueprint, which takes effect July 1, trims money for schools, prisons and other programs and spends more than \$500 million less than this year's budget.

Lawmakers said the cuts were necessary to eliminate the state's budget deficit and bring state spending in line with diminished revenue.

The budget also contains nearly \$400 million in federal stimulus money that allowed lawmakers to avoid deeper cuts. And it includes \$1.2 million more to provide health coverage to 8,000 additional children from low-income families.

Sebelius, a Democrat, used her line-item veto authority to eliminate a provision requiring public universities and colleges to use stimulus money on building repairs. Sebelius said the added flexibility will allow universities to avoid tuition increases.

She also eliminated funding for the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp., a state economic development agency. Sebelius wants the agency merged into the state's Department of Commerce.

Many lawmakers support the agency, however, and Republican legislative leaders said Monday that they'll try to restore the funding, either through new legislation or an attempt to override Sebelius' veto.

Lawmakers warn that more budget cuts may be necessary if the economy and tax revenues continue to lag estimates. The state will release new economic forecasts Friday, before lawmakers return to Topeka in two weeks to finish the 2009 session.

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