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Area lawmakers slam budget

By **CRYSTAL LINDELL, JG/T-C Springfield Bureau**

Wednesday, May 3, 2006 10:29 PM CDT

SPRINGFIELD -- Although Eastern Illinois University will see a small bump in its state funding, area lawmakers still are unhappy with the overall budget.

The state's spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1 was approved on a 64-49 party-line vote in the House on Wednesday, and neared a vote in the Senate late Wednesday.

Eastern is getting a 1.4-percent increase in funding under the new budget, but state Rep. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, said the school should have gotten more money.

"You're raiding \$1.1 billion out of the pension funds, and you're going to sell the student loan debt, and the best you can do is a 2-percent increase?" Rose said.

State Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon, said he plans to vote against the budget in the Senate and agreed that the Eastern needs more money.

"Will the folks at Eastern be happy that they got anything other than a zero or a cut, like they've gotten the last three years? Sure they will. And I'm glad for them," Righter said. "The concern is how long it's going to take us to get back from the previous three years of under-funding."

State Rep. Roger Eddy, R- Hutsonville, said that although the spending projects in the budget might be good, he was opposed to the funding methods.

"I can't vote for a budget, even if I'm in favor of some of the spending, when I'm not going to vote to raid the pension funds," Eddy said.

Eddy was hopeful about one spending initiative.

"There's an attempt in there to add a few more correctional officers, however it falls way short of what's needed to secure the safety of what's needed to secure the safety of those facilities," Eddy said.

The budget is set to fund 250 correctional officers across the state. Eddy's district has two prisons, one in Lawrenceville and the other in Robinson.

Righter said Republicans were left out of the negotiations.

"All the project money is going to Democrat member's districts," Righter said. "We never submitted, as we had in the past, specific capital project proposals. I have a number of needs in my district, just like everyone else."

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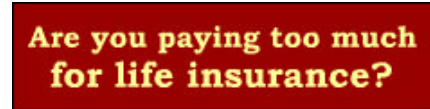
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