

Illinois still searching for a budget solution

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SPRINGFIELD, IL (ST. LOUIS PUBLIC RADIO) - Democratic leaders in Springfield, Ill. say they should finish their work on the state's 2011 budget by the end of the month.

House Speaker Michael Madigan will call members back to the state Capitol sometime this month. Democrats are scrambling to get a deal together by the end of May; after that, the state Constitution requires a three-fifths majority.

"There needs to be a regrouping," said Representative Beth Coulson from Chicago's North Shore. "Hopefully they'll allow some input from all of us on the budget."

The Senate last week approved its version of a spending plan that hikes cigarette taxes by \$1 a pack, gives Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn broad emergency spending powers, and punts a \$4 billion pension payment until January, after the elections. But Representatives have refused to go along with much, leaving many, like Chicago Democrat John Fritchey, frustrated.

"Without question, your options are as follows: there will either be borrowing, or payment deferrals, or deep cuts, or a tax hike," Fritchey said. There is no budget that will be crafted if you say no to all of those options."

Senate President John Cullerton, also a Chicago Democrat, urged fellow lawmakers to keep Illinois' fiscal difficulties in perspective.

"I've been to some national meetings with other Senate Presidents. Virtually every state in the nation is going through the same thing we are," he said. "So that's the first thing."

Cullerton admitted that politics are a huge factor in Illinois' budget tangle, but said partisan troubles in Illinois are nothing like the rancor on the national level.

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