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Rookie legislators must face state deficit head-on

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ST. PAUL — It's tough to be a new Minnesota legislator this year, facing what many predict will be a \$7 billion budget deficit.

Rep. Roger Reinert, DFL-Duluth, can relate to a tight budget. He has dealt with the same issues as president of the Duluth City Council.

"We had to make lots of cuts in Duluth," he said. "We closed parks, shortened library hours. I've been through hell. I came in saying to people, 'Set priorities and make it happen.' If they don't work, we'll make new priorities. For good or bad, Duluth prepared me."

Reinert loves working in Legislature. "I'm getting a Ph.D. in government. It's the educator and student in me loving this high level."

There is a flipside to the experience, though, because he has big shoes to fill and expectations to meet. "People know me, so expectations are high. They are expecting me to be effective right away. So I've put in a lot of long hours here."

Some rookies look at the massive deficit as a wake-up call.

"Even the veterans haven't had experience with a budget [deficit] this big or an economy this bad," Rep. Paul Anderson, R-Starbuck, said. "I'm just listening and seeing what others are saying and I try to offer my new perspective where I can."

Even a normal session — one without a huge deficit to plug — is tough on new legislators. The budget problem just makes it more difficult for 23 freshmen — 12 Republicans and 11 Democrats — who began their service on Jan. 6, following orientation seminars offered by the House.

Anderson said that beyond the deficit, the entire experience has been a steep learning curve. "There is such a deluge of information coming my way. It's a little overwhelming. I am always wondering what to save and



REINERT:
 Freshman representative from Duluth says City Council work prepared him for Legislature

what not to save."

"As a state and country we have been living beyond our means," Rep. John Persell, DFL-Bemidji, said. "This is an opportunity to put us back on our footing. We should pay our bills and make a positive impact fiscally."

Rep. Tim Kelly, R-Red Wing, admits that he was naive about the budget.

"It first felt like a whirlwind," Kelly said. "Now I am getting a little antsy to get something moving. I am naive about this massive deficit problem. I thought it would get the ball moving."

Kelly said he ran into something similar to this on the school board in Red Wing. It had to cut 10 percent of the budget during his two-year term. "I'm not as apprehensive, I think, because I've dealt with this on a smaller scale."

Gov. Tim Pawlenty's State of the State address inspired Rep. Mark Murdock, R-Ottertail. He agrees with Pawlenty that the solution for the deficit starts at home. He thinks that individual households need to look at what they can do without, and it moves up from there, to the city, county, and state levels.

"I think we need to take a more common sense and open minded approach," Murdock said. "I worked in retail hardware — it's a people business. It prepared me to keep my head screwed on straight."

The duration of the deficit is disheartening for Rep. Philip Sterner, DFL-Rosemount.

"It's very daunting when you are trying to look at the end of it," he said. "I'll try my own part and try to put a face to the cuts we are discussing."

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House supports bill that would speed up the search for missing young adults

By Don Davis

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ST. PAUL — Brandon Swanson disappeared May 14, but his presence was felt Monday in the Minnesota Capitol.

The House voted 134-0 for a bill named after Swanson. It was written to speed up searches for missing young adults.

"It will mean big changes for anguished family members," said Rep. Marty Seifert, R-Marshall, who wrote the bill and negotiated agreements with law enforcement officials.

The measure requires police to quickly launch searches for young adults and for older adults in some cases.



Sertich

Swanson's car was found in a ditch near Taunton, southwestern Minnesota. Seifert said the search was delayed because Swanson is an adult and there was confusion over which county was responsible for the search. The bill requires law enforcement officers to accept a missing persons report without delay. Officers then need to determine if the person could be considered "endangered," and if they find that they must begin a search right away.

The Senate is expected to

debate the bill in coming days.

Rep. Tony Sertich, DFL-Chisholm, said that one family that could have benefited from the so-called Brandon's Law was that of Dan Zamlen. His parents, Sally and Dale, testified to a House committee last week that the search for their son began too late.

He went missing in St. Paul April 5 and has not been found, even though more than 1,000 fellow Iron Range residents have hunted for him along the Mississippi River near St. Thomas University, where he is a student.

Less to spend

The Legislature takes a \$6.8 million budget cut in a bill senators approved 59-6.

Other state government entities face a similar cut, such as \$370,000 taken from



Day

the governor's office and \$2.4 million less for the attorney general's office. In debating spending money on various state agencies, senators defeated a Sen. Dick Day, R-Owatonna, amendment that would have allowed a casino to be placed at Canterbury Park horse racing track.

"If you are looking for a billion dollars, this is your amendment," Day said. "This is something we can

do today on the floor of the Senate to give Minnesotans a \$1 billion, a \$1 billion, break."

But Sen. Don Betzold, DFL-Fridley, said gambling is not the way to balance the state budget.

No shaking

Representatives voted 122-12 to require child-care workers to be trained about sudden infant death and shaken baby syndromes, including that such problem can affect children up to age 5.

"This bill simply helps make sure child-care providers have accurate information about the risks of shaking a small child up to the age of 5, which in turn may help avert a tragedy," Rep. Phillip Sterner, DFL-Rosemount, said.

Shaken baby syndrome can result in serious injury or even death.

Minnesota law now has different training standards for child-care workers. Sterner's bill would clarify the law so all such workers get adequate training.

Public safety cut

The state's public safety budget would drop \$48 million, to \$1.3 billion, under a bill senators passed 34-31.

The public safety budget would help save money by requiring the Public Safety and Corrections departments to reduce its vehicular fleets by 20 percent. It also requires the correction commissioner to consolidate staff for facilities near each other and it eliminates \$1.2 million of dental services.

Also, the bill reduces the per-bed amount it pays to a private Appleton prison to save \$2.4 million.

