

Capital Buzz – May 1, 2009

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*Voiceover:* It's time once again for your Capital Buzz, your Topeka connection. Here's your host, Bill Cochran.

*Bill Cochran:* I want to welcome everyone to today's show. This is Bill Cochran, your host for the Capital Buzz, and with me today is Shannon Jones, the executive director for the Statewide Independent Living Council. Shannon, I understand there has been some very interesting things going on at the capital the last few days. Would you like to bring us up to speed on some of those?

*Shannon Jones:* Yeah, Bill. It's Friday morning, and the veto session started on Wednesday, which, most often, the veto session is a wrap up time for legislators kind of put the final touches on any of their budget bills so that they can leave town and be secure in knowing that the state budget is going to be okay until the next January. This year, as most everybody knows, we've got some really drastic economic times going which has impacted a lot of the folks that we associate with and serve and consider our family in the disability community, so things are getting pretty ugly up here right now.

*Bill:* This... Why don't you kind of describe to us, when you talk about the veto session, session –

*Shannon:* Session.

*Bill:* Yeah, the veto session. Is this just for the House or the Senate both or one or the other or just committees? How is this structured?

*Shannon:* It's for both chambers. If you recall last week, we had what was called the omnibus session, where each of the money committees, the Senate Ways and Means and then the House Appropriations put together a final budget bill to ensure that the state finances would be secure throughout the next – throughout the end of this fiscal year into the next fiscal year.

On Wednesday, all 125 members of the House came back, and all 40 members of the Senate came back. And then to further complicate things, Wednesday, we got a new governor as well. Lieutenant Governor Mark Parkinson is now our new governor, and Kathleen Sebelius has moved on to the Secretary of HHS in Washington, D.C.

So, where we are right now is the House has their version of how to make up the shortfalls. Again, last week when we talked the state revenue estimators took a forecast picture of revenues and expenditures and came up with the fact that the state is going to be short \$328 additional million dollars. So now, legislators are trying to come back and make further cuts, consider revenue enhancements to meet that gap, otherwise... States have to have a balanced budget. They cannot operate in a deficit budget pattern, unlike the federal government.

So where we are right now, the House has the omnibus budget bill that calls for an additional five percent cut to SRS, which is where many of our programs for people with disabilities reside. The Senate's version has a 2.5 percent cut to social service programs. And because still we are coming up short, the House went back in yesterday and amended that bill and wiped out another \$173 million. One of the things they are calling for is that all state employees salaries will be reduced by five percent. That, in my opinion, is drastic. We know particularly that regional offices of SRS and people in the field, they are being overworked. They are being inundated with folks that are needing our services, and now, to me, just doesn't seem to be the time to be cutting their salaries by five percent.

But that is what the House voted on yesterday, the House Appropriations Committee. So, that is the package that is going to be presented to the full House. Could be today, Friday, or they could delay it until next week, Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday.

Now the Senate is taking kind of a different approach in that, I told you, it calls for a 2.5 percent across the board cut including education, but they also introduced what's called an allotment bill yesterday. Allotments don't happen very often, but the last time we had one was back in 2002-2003. If you recall Governor Graves was the governor at that time, and our ending budget balance went below zero, so the governor has the authority to, again, just call for across the board cuts or they can make targeted cuts.

SRS has been asked to come up with a list of further reductions. They presented that to the House committee yesterday, and it calls for eliminating a lot of programs that benefit a lot of folks in our family, again. So, our message, what I want to stress so clearly to advocates throughout the state is that they have got to call their senators and representatives starting today and ask legislators to not cut social services anymore. We have cut through the muscle, we are to the bone.

We want all state agencies... All state agencies have already taken the cut. Some of the things they are considering is maybe delaying like the franchise tax, corporate tax, the decoupling... There are a couple of tax bills that are being heard right now in the tax committee that could ultimately bring in a hundred million dollars, which would certainly help delay or even deny any further cuts to social service programs.

*Bill:* Oh, that would be about a third of what they are looking for, isn't it?

*Shannon:* Yeah, exactly. A couple of the things that we have been talking to legislators about that I think folks should keep in mind too is that for every tax dollar that we pay the state, fifty-one cents comes from individual income taxes. That's you and me and everyone that is out there paying their taxes. Fifty-one cents of your tax dollars goes to revenue. Thirty-three cents of the state tax dollar comes from sales tax. All of those taxes are paid by citizens.

*Bill:* Right.

*Shannon:* But only six percent, six cents of the state tax dollars comes from corporations. And I got to tell you that business owners that are up here today saying that they can no longer, they can't take anymore tax...

*Bill:* Tax burden?

*Shannon:* We're trying to... Anymore tax burden. What we're saying is those tax cuts that they have received in the last two years, let's just suspend those for a couple of years until we get through this hardship time. You know, as we have all been saying, we need to spread the pain. We all need to sacrifice a little bit, and it's our position that social services has already cut, like, 9.7 percent, and it's time for the rest of Kansas citizens to buck up and share some of that pain as well.

*Bill:* Well, what do you want us to do at the grassroots level, Shannon?

*Shannon:* Well, I can't stress enough, I think what is going to impact folks, legislators – senators and representatives, all of them carry around their laptops. They all read emails, and the best thing to do right now is to email them with the simple message don't cut social services anymore.

You know, we have been reasonable. We have compromised. We are going to try the best that we can to serve all the folks that centers for independent living serve throughout the state, but we cannot take anymore cuts.

*Bill:* Anybody that's, Shannon, looking for those email addresses. Let's talk about that for just a second. Give somebody some tools. As I recall, you can go to Kansas.gov, click on the legislator button, and go right in there and you can pull up your legislator, their contact information, their email address, everything at Kansas.gov. Isn't that correct?

*Shannon:* Absolutely. And it's [www.ks.gov](http://www.ks.gov). And that's the easiest way. And you can you can just click. You can email every single senator, every single representative and deliver the same message. And I would encourage folks to write personal stories, too on whether it's they themselves or their friends or neighbors that are being impacted by any type of human service cuts. Let them know those personal stories as well, because that goes a long way.

*Bill:* what do you see as a timetable for how this is all going to play out if you were guessing, Shannon?

*Shannon:* (Laughs) In my crystal ball...

*Bill:* Yeah, get your crystal ball.

*Shannon:* There are all kinds of rumors going around that they might do the budget bills this afternoon. I... In my opinion or in my crystal ball, I don't think they are going to do it until next week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. You know, the legislature has 90 days to complete their business, and the 90<sup>th</sup> day is next Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>. So they have that amount of time up until next week, and they normally use all that, every inch of time they have to get things done up here. And because there is 165 legislators there is usually 165 different opinions, but they all need to know to please consider revenue enhancements

rather than going any deeper and calling for any other cuts to human services, social services, home and community based service programs is not the way to go. We have hurt too much.

*Bill:* Shannon, in early December we started talking about a freeze on the PD waiver. Do you have any updated information on how far that waiting list has built up to already?

*Shannon:* You know, last week we talked and we have numbers through the end of March and there were 552 people on the waiting list. We should be getting some new April numbers here.

*Bill:* There were how many people on the waiting list?

*Shannon:* 552 people.

*Bill:* 552 people? Ok.

*Shannon:* Yes.

*Bill:* I know that can really put some extreme pressure and stress on families trying to figure out a way to make ends meet and just survive. So I really think folks need to realize how much that really is impacting families.

*Shannon:* Oh absolutely. Absolutely. Again, on this list there are 26 suggestions on this SRS reduction list. It calls for cutting rates, it calls for cutting CDDOs, it calls for cutting centers for independent living; it's an ugly bucket list. None of those cuts are in the bill, but legislators have asked for "what would it look like" if we had to do an additional 5% or 7% or 10% cut across the board. So what we're trying to tell legislators is that people are hurting already and Kansas has a long tradition of being neighborly to our brothers and sisters. Now is not the time to go back on that rich tradition.

*Bill:* How do you see our new Governor fitting in to this pattern of things? Is he favorable towards many of the programs SRS were working towards? Sympathetic to those things? Or have you had any contact there that you can pull from?

*Shannon:* He gave a "state of the state" address to the house and senate members yesterday. He is certainly in favor of doing all these revenue enhancements rather than cutting. He knows that programs have taken enough cuts. Education has taken cuts, social services has taken cuts. He is standing strong that we can't cut anymore. We need to go for revenue enhancements. Maybe we can bring in more money on the revenue side, rather than cutting folks and cutting state employees salary.

So he was very strong on that message yesterday and I felt good about his position. That is the exact opposite position of the speaker of the House Mike O'Neal that we are going to just keep cutting and aren't going to consider any revenue enhancements. So the line has been drawn. That's politics. The art of politics is supposed to be compromise. So we hope that as constituents contact their legislators and

let them think about the situation that we're really in they'll consider that compromise and not cut any more to SRS.

*Bill:* Well, Shannon, lets just really urge our listeners out there tuning in via the internet and the radio to this broadcast to click those emails and write those letters. Lets go to work on this and see what we can accomplish. We know that working together we get a whole lot more done than working by ourselves.

*Shannon:* Absolutely. Write early, write often and maybe if they do happen to come home maybe late Saturday night or Sunday and you see your legislator at church or at the grocery store, give them a call and let them know where you stand.

*Bill:* You're right on there. It's surprising how many in the last couple of weeks of those individuals I have ran into just out in the community. Not in a session where you're actually dealing with those issues, but one-on-one discussions where, just like you said... at the stores and actually at the lumber yards even, ok?

If you'll just pay attention for those individuals and know them by name and spend some time with them they really do pay attention to those comments and those discussions and they value that. They really want to hear from you. It's not like you're intruding on them, you're actually going to help them do their job if you give them some information to work with.

*Shannon:* Absolutely.

*Bill:* Well Shannon, it looks like we are about out of time for today. We're going to have to wrap this session up. Is there anything you'd like to close with?

*Shannon:* Call early, call often. Lets keep up the fight. I know we can do it, we've done it in the past and just gotta hang on for the ride.

*Bill:* Ok, we'll pay real close attention to these next couple of days and we might end up with a special report before next Friday we'll see how the week develops then. Does that sound ok?

*Shannon:* Sounds perfect, thanks Bill.

*Bill:* Alright, this is today's Capital Buzz, we thank you all for tuning in.

*Voiceover:* You've been listening to Capital Buzz. Thanks for listening and be sure to tune in next week for the next edition of Capital Buzz, your Topeka connection.