



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Ohio House passes seven-day temporary budget extension while slots plan remains blocked

Standoff over slots-at-racetrack keeps spending talks at stalemate

Wednesday, July 01, 2009

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Columbus -- One state budget extension might not be enough.

As the standoff over slots continued between Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland and Republican Senate President Bill Harris Tuesday, the Ohio House passed a seven-day temporary budget while queuing up a second stopgap measure for a possible vote if needed.

With budget talks at a stalemate, lawmakers in the Democratically controlled House voted 94-2 to keep state government afloat for another week while trying to crank up the pressure on majority Senate Republicans to support a slots-at-racetracks proposal from Strickland. The first interim budget needed in 18 years, it was signed into law by Strickland before nightfall. It keeps spending for most agencies at 70 percent of current levels.

House Speaker Armond Budish, a Beachwood Democrat, laid the blame for the delay squarely on Harris, who has refused to allow senators to vote on Strickland's slots proposal as part of the budget without making it contingent on voter approval this fall.

"We believe there is a good plan that can be passed today, but unfortunately, the Senate is refusing to authorize a key part of the plan which generates over \$900 million of revenue," Budish said. "The Senate's rejection has put us in the spot we are today."

Voting against the rarely used maneuver were Reps. Michael Skindell, a Lakewood Democrat, and Lynn Wachtmann, a northwest Ohio Republican. Skindell said the temporary budget, with the 30 percent cuts, "offers despair, not hope."

Senate Republicans have not offered an alternative plan since Strickland announced his "balanced budget framework" on June 19. That plan counted on \$933 million in slots revenue and \$2.4 billion in cuts to fill a \$3.2 billion state budget shortfall for fiscal 2010-11.

Asked again about when he might offer an alternative, Harris repeated that Strickland should use his executive authority to approve the slots rather than seek legislative approval.

On Monday, Harris said Strickland told him during a June 19 meeting that he would unilaterally order the slots -- an assertion that Strickland and Budish, who was also present, dispute.

Democrats say they are baffled that seven Senate Republicans, including Harris, could vote for video racing terminals for racetracks in 2007, but not support video lottery terminals in this state budget. In addition, 10 current Republican senators voted to approve a 2003 amendment when they were House members that would have added racetrack slots to balance the budget, according to the Associated Press. That plan was ultimately dropped.

Harris raised new questions about the governor's slots plan, saying he wanted legislative hearings to answer questions about revenue estimates and how Ohio Lottery vendor Intralot got an option in its contract to handle the software application for the slots plan. "I wonder how that got in there," he said.

Budish said a second seven-day extension, introduced by House Democrats Tuesday, was available just in case it was needed. But it was also likely intended to serve notice to Harris that House Democrats are prepared to wait for an alternative plan from Republicans if Strickland's plan remains blocked.

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