

FOR THE RECORD

Republicans have yet to show their cards in budget gambit

By JOSH FLORY

As lawmakers flee Jefferson City for spring break, they leave behind a looming budget shortfall and a giant philosophical gulf on the issue of taxation and state spending. But the gulf isn't necessarily along party lines.

In the House, Republicans are adamantly opposed to tax increases. This week they adopted a budget plan for next year that is approximately \$700 million smaller than that offered by Democratic Gov. Bob Holden, who wants a gaming and cigarette tax hike to balance the bottom line.

But Holden isn't the only one who sees the need for a tax increase. Sen. John Russell, the influential appropriations chairman, told the Associated Press yesterday that in order to balance the budget he could — unhappily — support as much as \$300 million in tax increases.

That tax clash will define this year's legislative session, and one of the most interesting factors to watch will be how the House and

Senate respond to their leadership.

The House is packed with Republican freshmen who campaigned against the "spending crisis" that afflicts state government. Up close, the situation apparently became murkier, because the new GOP majority subsequently abandoned its traditional responsibility for crafting a line-by-line budget, opting instead to allocate lump sums to state



departments and let the Holden administration figure out where to slash-and-burn. While questionable from an accountability standpoint, that decision illustrated the willingness of the GOP youngsters to defer to the leaders who brought them into power.

There might be a different story in the Senate. While traditionally considered the more pragmatic body — last year senators acquiesced to Gov. Bob Holden's demand for money from a state savings account, while the House blocked the measure — it is also less cohesive.

Because individual senators have far more power to gum up the works, it's harder for leaders like Russell, R-Lebanon, to impose their will

from the top down. Besides that, term limits in November vaulted several House members into the Senate, including six who voted against tapping the "rainy day" fund.

With session's end scheduled for May 16, lawmakers have less than two months to hammer out a compromise, while voters wait to see what kind of medicine a Republican-dominated General Assembly comes up with to alleviate the budget hiccups.

Quick, guess how many paid holidays state employees get? The answer is 12, but that could change. In a memo to fellow House members, Rep. Roy Holand, R-Springfield, said he might file a bill to cut the number of holidays in half, eliminating Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Truman's Birthday, Veterans Day and Columbus Day.

"There's been apprehension on the part of the state employees, that they haven't had a raise in a couple years, and I respect that," he said in an interview yesterday. "At the same time I think the public believes that" eliminating those paid holidays "would make a lot of sense in difficult budget times, and that some sort of parity with the private world is reasonable."

News from the Claire Watch...

At least one Missourian is taking the governor's race into his own hands. Steven Reed of Springfield has filed paperwork with the Mis-

souri Ethics Commission to form a committee called Citizens Supporting McCaskill for Governor.

For those who aren't Democratically aware, the McCaskill in question is Claire, Missouri's state auditor who is mulling a primary challenge to Holden. In an interview yesterday, Reed said McCaskill "inspires people" and the state needs a new economic team. His committee was formed without McCaskill's knowledge, although Reed said he talked with her last week and "she appreciated the support."

Two years ago, Reed gained approval for a pair of petitions seeking a tax increase to pay for the development of technology parks and passenger rail service. Neither petition made it to the ballot.

Faithful readers will remember that, two weeks ago in the spirit of Oscar season, I asked for submissions regarding the best political movie of all time. The response was less than resounding.

In fact, state Rep. Jeff Harris of Columbia was the only participant, which means that his two favorites — "The Candidate," starring Robert Redford and "The Manchurian Candidate," starring Frank Sinatra and Angela Lansbury — are the clear winners.

Apparently I need to hire a better pollster. Josh Flory covers politics and the General Assembly for the Tribune. Reach him at (573) 815-1719 or jflory@tribmail.com.

OBITUARY

Robert Morris

Robert Frank Morris Jr., 80, of Ashland died Thursday, March 20, 2003, at his home.

Services will be 11 a.m. Saturday, March 22, at Robinson Funeral Home in Ashland with the Rev. Jim Smith

Bush drafting new rules on documents

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Bush administration is...

IN BRIEF

Search on Garth results in arrest

Police on Thursday night arrested a Columbia man on suspicion of possessing marijuana after serving a

other equipment. Several vehicles parked outside the building also were broken into and rifled.

Police learned of Parsons after he allegedly left a convenience s the Highway 62 C.

Terror panel seeks witnesses for 9/11 inquiry

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