

GOP budget plan cuts spending 6 percent

By MATT GOURAS
Associated Press

The budget battle moves to the Montana House floor on Friday with the Republican majority aiming to cut enough spending to meet conservative expectations — while beating back criticism from opponents that their proposed cuts will hurt the poor and could result in college tuition hikes.

A tally of GOP budget actions so far in committee shows that

spending of state tax money would go down about 6 percent from the current budget, to about \$3.7 billion. That is about 3 percent less than what Gov. Brian Schweitzer proposed in his budget offering to lawmakers.

Overall spending, including federal money, is reduced 10 percent largely because there is no federal stimulus money as



there was in the last two-year budget plan and Republican budget crafters are rejecting about \$120 million in federal money for social services.

Republicans say they are spurring the federal money because they believe it creates future obligations for the state, while Democrats argue it is wrong to cut programs funded by federal money that

does not create a burden on state taxpayers.

The full House is scheduled to vote on the budget Friday, Saturday and Monday.

It is unlikely that any of the chamber's 32 Democrats, who feel ignored by the majority, will vote for the Republican budget plan.

That means Republicans will likely need to get 51 votes out of their 68 members to send a budget plan to the Senate. Republican leaders will be woo-

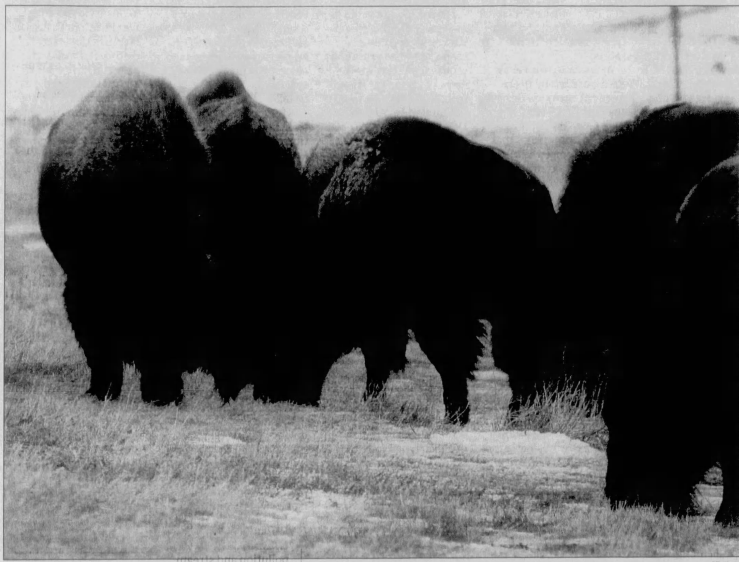


Milburn

ing the ardent fiscal conservatives in their rank, many who have campaigned heavily on cutting government more than 6 percent.

House Speaker Mike Milburn, a Cascade rancher, said Thursday that he is confident there are votes in the House to pass the

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Bison graze near the U.S. Route 89 highway just outside of Gardiner on Feb. 14. Hundreds of bison have left the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park this winter in search of food.

Emergency injunction denied

Yellowstone | Judge rules request to stop capture, killing of park bison had no merit

By EVE BYRON
Independent Record

A federal court judge in Helena has refused to grant an emergency injunction halting the capture and killing of wild bison that roam outside of Yellowstone National Park, saying that no emergency exists that warrants the prohibition, especially in light of Gov. Brian Schweitzer's executive order that prohibits transporting the bison into Montana for slaughter for 90 days.

In his order issued Wednesday afternoon, U.S. District Court Charles Lovell wrote that by the time Schweitzer's order expires, the bison no longer will be exiting the park and "any claimed emergency" will have expired.

"This Executive Order alone

seems to have utterly decimated Plaintiffs' argument for injunctive relief; however, Plaintiffs have filed two briefs since the date of the Executive Order without even acknowledging its existence, let alone its effect as to the pending motion," Lovell wrote.

He added that Yellowstone's chief of aquatic and wildlife resources says they have no immediate plans to ship bison to slaughter — although the park service doesn't concede away its right to do so — and a Senate bill, if passed by the House of Representatives and signed by the governor, would prohibit free-roaming bison, or moving bison, into Montana.

"This Court has determined that Plaintiffs are not entitled to succeed on the merits of the underlying litigation and that

Plaintiffs have not presented serious questions on the merits," Lovell wrote in the 26-page decision. "No emergency exists. Plaintiffs have not shown that they are likely to suffer imminent, irreparable harm."

"Finally, the public interest is not served by granting the interim relief requested."

The lawsuit was brought by a variety of wildlife conservation groups, headed by the Western Watersheds Project and the Buffalo Field Campaign. The groups said that plans to capture and send to slaughter several hundred wild bison in and around Yellowstone National Park would cause "irreparable harm" to them and the environment, and the injunction was necessary to preserve their rights and interests. Representatives from those groups

couldn't be reached for comment late Wednesday.

Yellowstone National Park was a defendant in the case and Al Nash, park spokesman, said while they haven't had time to fully review the order, not having an injunction gives the park service more latitude to deal with bison that migrate out of the park in winter searching for food at lower elevations. He said they've captured about 600 bison outside the park so far this year, and are holding them at two facilities, west and north of the park's boundaries, where they're being tested for exposure to brucellosis.

About 60 percent are testing negative for the disease and will be released back into the park in the spring. Those that

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Digital PBS coming to Helena

By SANJAY TALWANI
Independent Record

Montana Public Television has a plan to upgrade its analog, over-the-air signal to digital, allowing the transmission of five separate program streams — including one in high-definition — on its channel.

First, Montana PBS plans to raise about \$50,000 for purchase and installation of digital transmission equipment.

Now, Helena viewers can watch Montana PBS over the air on Channel 49. Because that is a "translator" signal, it has not yet been required to convert to a digital signal as full-power stations have.

"We don't have cable or satellite TV in our home because frankly, except for PBS, most of the programming isn't worth it, and advertising is an annoyance," Helena resident Christine Deveny wrote in a letter to Montana PBS. "With a converter box and rabbit ears attached to our 15-year-old TV, we are currently

able to receive clear digital signals from the major networks and we long to be able to view with equal clarity the terrific commercial-free programs Montana PBS offers."

Missoula, Billings, Great Falls and Bozeman have the digital signals with local origination. Butte has a digital translator like the one sought for Helena. Elsewhere in the state, a handful of analog translators provide scattered over-the-air coverage. Engineering plans are already in place awaiting the funds, said Montana PBS Development Director Lisa Titus. She anticipated the project could be completed this year.

The digital signal enables transmission of multiple program streams over one traditional channel. The Montana PBS lineup includes its main channel (in high-definition); MontanaPBS Kids; MontanaPBS Create, with programs on cooking, home projects, travel and

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Bill would elect Supreme Court justices by region

By CHARLES S. JOHNSON
IR State Bureau

A Bozeman senator wants voters to change state law to elect or appoint Montana Supreme Court justices from seven regional districts instead of running statewide as they do now, but critics said it tries to solve a nonexistent problem.

Senate Bill 268, by Sen. Joe Balyeat, R-Bozeman, would put the issue before voters in June 2012. As a statutory referendum, it won't go to Gov. Brian Schweitzer for his signature or veto if it passes both houses. Instead, it would go directly to the ballot.

"Having a broad cross-section of Montanans serving in the Legislature brings multiple perspectives resulting in bal-

anced legislation," Balyeat told the House Judiciary Committee on Thursday. "Likewise, a Supreme Court similarly spread across Montana would reap the same benefits and reflect the diverse perspective favored by each local district."

He said it's not a good idea to have a court made up mostly of "folks with an 'inside the beltway' Helena mindset." The court needs both the perspectives of the flatlanders from eastern Montana and the people from the mountains from western Montana.

Chuck Denow, representing United Property Owners of Montana, a landowners' group in central and eastern Montana, said he looked back to



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Two men charged in Craigslist prostitution

By ANGELA BRANDT
Independent Record

Two men face charges for soliciting prostitutes from a Missoula-based teenage prostitute ring on Craigslist.

Police cited Emmet McMahon, 28, of Boulder on Wednesday. McMahon is set to appear today in Helena Municipal Court on the misdemeanor charge, which alleges he used a Craigslist listing to set up an exchange of money for sex at a Helena hotel room in May.

Keith Reimund, a 45-year-old Helena man, also was cited for soliciting a prostitute. He allegedly used Craigslist to set up a rendezvous with a teenage prostitute at an RV park in May, according to Helena Police Chief Troy McGee. Reimund is slated for an initial appearance in Justice Court on Monday.

The men are each facing a fine of up to \$1,000 and a jail sentence of up to a year.

McMahon and Reimund are added to the list of about a dozen other men in the Missoula area who have been cited for misdemeanor prostitution charges stemming from a ring run by two men.

One of those men — Anthony Braginton — was sentenced Tuesday in District Court to 10 years with six suspensions for posting ads in the "casual encounters" section of the online classified site. Braginton pleaded guilty in January

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Helena man accused of holding woman hostage

By ANGELA BRANDT
Independent Record

Police arrested a 30-year-old Helena man Wednesday on two felony charges of intimidation for allegedly holding an ex-girlfriend hostage for two days.

Grant M. Kopp allegedly threatened the woman in order to keep her in an apartment, according to documents filed in Justice Court. Kopp accused of pointing a handgun with a round in the chamber at her head and telling her if she tried to leave again he would kill her.

Court documents state the incident began Tuesday morning when Kopp reportedly grabbed the woman by the neck and threw her against a door. It is also alleged the woman told police Kopp "would not let her leave the residence at any time from the point of the assault occurred until she escaped."

Kopp is accused of taking her phone and cell phone, making it impossible for her to contact anyone for help. He also faces two charges of tampering with or destruction of a communication device and one count of unlawful restraint, all misdemeanors.

At one point Tuesday night, the woman was able to escape and ran toward the Law Enforcement Center, but Kopp allegedly caught up with her and threw her over his shoulder and took her back to the residence.

Bond was set at \$50,000, which Kopp posted Thursday night.

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