Gov. Quinn addresses MAP funds, pension in budget

LAUREN DUNCAN
Daily Egyptian

Gov. Pat Quinn's proposal to boost funding for college students might come at the cost of significant cuts.

At his budget address Wednesday in Springfield, Quinn told legislators he plans to refrain from cutting higher education spending and increase grants for students in the next fiscal year. Much of his speech, though, focused on his idea to cut Medicaid spending, change the state's government pension systems and close state facilities, including one in Murphysboro and one in Carbondale.

"This budget contains truths that you may not want to hear," Quinn told the legislators.

In Quinn's $33.8-billion budget, he did not make cuts to higher education. In both 2010 and 2011, SIU received less state funding than the previous year, which caused administrators to make cuts on campus.

Chancellor Rita Cheng said she was relieved to hear cuts for universities weren't proposed.

"There are definitely significant cutbacks and really hard decisions that they are going to have to be made overall, and higher education has been spared in many respects," she said.

Quinn also proposed a $50-million increase in Monetary Award Program funding to provide more college students with grants. Cheng said there are about 4,900 students who receive MAP funding at SIU, but almost 1,200 more could have had MAP grants last spring if the fund hadn't been depleted.

SIU President Glenn Poshard said the MAP funding is a big issue for SIU.

"It would make more students eligible, meaning that hopefully it would help open the door a little bit to those middle- and low-income students that need help," he said.

Cheng said an increase in MAP funding means there will be more students who can afford to enroll and stay in SIU, which can benefit the state because the university ensures that graduates are prepared for jobs.

Although increased MAP funding would be good for students, State Senator Dave Luechtefeld said it might be hard to accomplish with an overall budget deficit.

"I think there are a lot of legislators whose eyebrows would go up, because it's hard to say we're in debt almost to the point where we're going to be bankrupt and then in the next breath say we're going to increase spending," he said.

"That just doesn't fit together."

House bill may give Board of Trustees student representatives a stronger voice

TARA KULASH
Daily Egyptian

Legislation being discussed in the Illinois House could give the SIU Board of Trustees' two student members a vote in all of the committee's decisions.

The Carbondale and Edwardsville campuses each have a student representative on the board to speak for their peers. While both members vote on decisions at meetings, only one student's vote is counted.

The bill, which is sponsored by Daniel Briere, D-Alton, was introduced Feb 15 and applies only to SIU. Beiser could not be reached for comment after several phone calls.

The student representatives' voting power is supposed to alternate each year between the campuses, but the previous student keeps the voting power if the governor fails to appoint the vote to a member.

This has led to one campus' representative to have the vote two or three years in a row. SIU President Glenn Poshard said.

"Carbondale had the voting representative last year and this year also," he said. "The Edwardsville people feel disenfranchised by the vote."

Poshard said it makes sense for both campuses to receive a vote in decisions since the Edwardsville campus is growing. He said sometimes there are issues that differ from campus to campus.

"If only one student has a vote, I think the other campus feels like they maybe don't have a vote on something that's very important to them," Poshard said.

Roger Herrin, Board of Trustees chair, said he did not know enough about the bill to comment.

SIUE student trustee Jeffry Harrison, a senior from Red Bud studying business administration, said he thinks the change would be positive for the Board of Trustees.

"Future student trustees will both have their votes counted equally," he said in an email Thursday. "As sister institutions, this is crucial, as we'll move forward together as a unified university system."
The Weather Channel® 5-day weather forecast for Carbondale

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The DAILY EGYPTIAN, the student-run newspaper of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, is committed to being a trusted source of news, information, commentary and public discourse, while helping readers understand the issues affecting their lives.

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Correction
In the Wednesday edition of the Daily Egyptian, the story “Burn barrel fire spreads in DeSoto shed” should have read, “The DeSoto Township Fire Protection District responded to a fire in a shed on Crane Road, about a mile west of DeSoto, Wednesday afternoon.” The Daily Egyptian regrets this error.

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Pensions and Medicaid

While education was a priority of Quinn’s for increased funding, the governor proposed cuts or reform in many areas, including Medicaid and pensions. His proposal includes a $2.7 million cut in Medicaid spending, and calls for reform of the state’s pension systems. Quinn said for the past three years the state has paid the minimum it can for pension costs. Additionally, he said, 90 percent of retirees pay nothing on their health insurance premiums.

“This lack of fiscal accountability has cost us dearly today,” he said.

This year’s general-revenue fund payment for public pensions is $5.2 billion, he said, which is three times as much as it was in 2008. Today, he said, pension payments make up 15 percent of the state’s funds.

“For these reductions to work, we must also stabilize and strengthen our public-pensions systems once and for all,” he said.

Last year, Poshard said legislation would affect pensions of employees hired after Jan. 1. This spring, he said, the reform is intended to grapple with issues surrounding pensions of the employees who were already employed.

“That’s going to be more difficult, because these are employees who may have 25, 30 years already in service,” he said. “You’re going to change the system on these people, so that’s going to be highly controversial.”

Poshard said there is a law that states a person’s current retirement benefit cannot be diminished, but he said the law will affect future employees.

Cheng said there has been talk among legislators of a shared solution for pension costs, which she said means the employees in the State University of Illinois will likely be asked to pick up some of the costs of employee pensions.

“The concern is that we’ll have to cut some other expenditures in order to fund pensions, which means we’ll be cutting back again,” she said.

Cheng said if the university has to take on extra pension costs, there may not be extra money for other programs on campus.

“I was hoping to go into next year without having a budget cut,” she said. “Ever since I’ve been here, I’ve been cutting budgets, and it would be really nice not to have to do that.”

Cheng said every UI employee is covered under the state pension plan.

There is an $83 million shortfall of funding for the state’s pension system. Quinn said a pension-working group will provide a possible solution by April 17.

Closer

Quinn also announced the closure of 14 state facilities or consolidation and closure of 59 others. He announced the closure of The Southern Illinois Adult Transition Center in Carbondale, which, according to the proposed budget, has 17 employees and 65 inmates, and will save $1.3 million in its closure. The Illinois Youth Center in Murphyboro, which has 91 employees and 59 juveniles, will save the state $6.8 million with its closure.

The Illinois State Police Forensic Lab in Carbondale, which has 17 employees, will be consolidated, he said, with the new facility being built in Belleville, and 20 state police communications centers will be consolidated to four, including the Du Quoin center. A family-transition center in Carbondale will also be consolidated.

“These consolidations and closures are hard but necessary,” Quinn said. “They impact every region in our state, but the need for lower spending in our budget gives us no choice.”

Voters

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Registration requirements include U.S. citizenship, residency in precinct area for at least 30 days prior to election and being at least 18 years of age by the election date.

Reinhart said the amount of students who have voted in recent years breaks the college-aged-student stereotype.

“That being said, there are many more students who could be registered to vote,” he said.

Reinhart said because students make up a large amount of the Jackson County population, their votes could make a difference.

Jenny Mick, a junior from Carbondale studying psychology, said she has not registered to vote yet because she has had no interest in politics until now.

“I have always been ignorant to politics up until this point in my life,” she said. “I’ve just recently made an effort to be informed about presidential candidates. I feel like voting and not knowing why you’re doing it is just as bad as not voting.”

McClurg said students should be interested in local elections.

“For some reason students don’t consider Carbondale to be their home when in a year they probably spend at least 75 percent of their time here,” he said. “While they think that local issues might not affect them, the reality is that it is the exact opposite.”

McClurg said everything from parking to zoning is under local politicians’ jurisdiction, and these things play a role in everyone’s daily life.

Greg Gaul, a freshman from Buffalo Grove studying sports administration, said he thinks voting is the American thing to do.

“Local or not, we are expressing a right we earned, a right that we as Americans should not be able to have if we didn’t live in this country,” he said.

Reinhart said he expects a great turnout for this fall’s elections.

“A county this size, when students come out it makes a tremendous difference,” he said.

“In Jackson County we will see a 10,000 vote jump from local elections to the presidential election.”

According to the Jackson County website, 25,716 people voted in Jackson County for the 2008 presidential election.

Reinhart said students are part of the community and they have every right and reason to exercise their right to vote.

Ashley Zborek can be reached at azborek@dailyEgyptian.com or 536-3311 ext. 268.
Harrison said he thinks the student trustees’ opinions weigh heavily at the meetings because they are on campus every day and bring insight to what their peers want. He said he always feels encouraged to share his thoughts with other members.

“(The encouragement) could be from the comfortable atmosphere and respect the Board of Trustees has for its members,” he said.

As a board member, Harrison said his job is to represent the SIUE student voice in all board matters by collaborating on issues with faculty, staff, administrators and students. Harrison said his position has given him the opportunity to learn about the SIU university system and make networking connections. A board member since July 2010, he said he has not had a chance to work closely with an SIUC student trustee.

SIUC’s previous student trustee, Michelle Hook Dewey, a graduate student in health law and policy, resigned from her position last week, said Misty Whittington, executive secretary of the board. Whittington said Dewey was unable to be reached for comment.

State Rep. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro, said he does not support the bill. He drafted and sponsored the original bill that gave university board memberships in 2000. At the time, the bill appointed both students as full members of the board but gave neither of them a vote.

He said he made an agreement with SIU that he would not push the bill forward for students to have a vote, so he plans to stick to his commitment.

Bost said he thinks the student trustees play a key role on the board because they give good insight, but it could be a conflict of interest if they vote.

“They’re great for advice, but because it would affect them personally on a lot of votes, it’s almost like it would be controversial,” he said.

Bost said the students could be the deciding factor if there is ever a split vote.

Just about every university has the same situation, Bost said.

For example, Posthard said University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has three campuses with a student representative from each. He said the bill may influence the university to do something similar.

Tara Kulash can be reached at tkulash@dailyEgyptian.com or 536-3311 ext. 255.
Lowery said Sce's is the clear leader of the team because he's one of the only players who hasn't been suspended, ineligible or in trouble. Sce came to SIU after he spent a year at Southeastern Illinois College in Harrisburg.

Before his time at SIC, he lived in Dakar, Senegal, and was a three-time MVP for University Cheikh Anta Diop.

Sce said he came here in hopes of making it into the NCAA tournament.

"It's really tough when I decided to come here, because way bigger teams that were ranked wanted me," Sce said. "I was thinking if I come here with last year's team, with Carlton (Fay) and Gene (Teague), at worst we'd make the NCAA tournament."

Sce said he still holds hope to make the NCAA tournament this year, even though SIU will be the ninth seed in the Missouri Valley Conference tournament, which starts Thursday.

Northern Iowa is tied with three other teams (Illinois State, Indiana State and Evansville) for the fifth seed, and they beat SIU 58-49 Jan. 31. SIU had a lead late, but UNI finished the game on an 8-2 run, sparked by guard Deon Mitchell's 17-point performance.

UNI's leading scorer, Anthony James, missed the game due to an injury, but he'll be back for Saturday's game. He's averaging 13.1 points per game.

Tip-off is set for 2:05 p.m. Saturday at the SIU Arena.

Joe Raygus can be reached at jraygas@dailyegyptian.com or 536-3311 ext. 269

LYNETTE OOSTMEYER | DAILY EGYPTIAN

Freshman forward Antonio Blyer, left, guards senior forward Mamadou Scek Tuesday at the SIUC Arena. Scek led the team in scoring and rebounding with an average of 13.1 points and 7.8 rebounds per game.
Cancer — Today is a 7 — You’re in a search for what’s next, and there’s nothing stopping you. Excessive attention to detail could annoy others, but don’t take it personally.

Leo — Today is a 7 — The financial situation is unstable today, so postpone gratification. Don’t let loved ones dig into the piggy bank, either. Make a cool snack. Perhaps for your latest project.

Virgo — Today is an 8 — It’s okay to be a perfectionist, but don’t beat yourself up when you fail. It’s all part of the process. It could even be fun. Where will you risk failure next?

Libra — Today is an 8 — Better check your schedule again. With all the activity and intensity, you could forget small details. Try to be as clear in communication as possible.

Scorpio — Today is a 9 — Focus on making money today, but don’t forget to stay attached to the results. Money isn’t everything, and you know that. Leave room for a surprise, and it could be a good one.

Sagittarius — Today is a 6 — Focus on doing creative projects that you love. You’re becoming more passionate and more attractive. Let your sweetheart set the schedule.

Capricorn — Today is a 7 — Time to clean up a mess. Figure out what you want, and then go for it. You may take some extra effort, but it will be worth it. Stay home tonight.

Aquarius — Today is an 8 — Strained relationships improve greatly now. Spend some time in nature to stretch your legs and enjoy your ideas. Fresh air does you good. Take it easy.

Pisces — Today is a 9 — Focus on the projects that you’re best at. Bring more buckle for the bang. Remember what you love. The thing that makes you happy just goes better.