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State budget deal appears far off

By [Kate Clements](#)

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SPRINGFIELD – A looming deadline and hours of closed-door meetings did little to move Democratic lawmakers closer to a budget deal on Monday.

"I think the lines in the sand have been drawn so deep, it's been very difficult to come to some type of agreement," said State Rep. Marlow Colvin, D-Chicago.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich is still unwavering in his support for health coverage for all state residents and big increases for elementary and secondary education. He has repeatedly vowed not to raise the sales or income taxes, and pushed for a \$7.6 billion gross receipts tax on businesses instead.

Lacking support for his tax plan, Blagojevich agreed to look at an alternative that Senate President Emil Jones, D-Chicago, proposed last week. That plan would raise about \$5 billion by ending various business tax breaks, applying the corporate income tax to businesses that are not currently subject to it, imposing an alternative minimum tax on corporations that claim zero income tax liability and significantly expanding gambling.

"There are things in that proposal that aren't perfect, but they still get us to health care for everybody, record investments in our schools, full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes, better quality teachers, so I'm willing, as I said, to compromise and make adjustments," Blagojevich said on Monday night. "We're not quite sure where the House Democrats are, and we need Speaker (Michael) Madigan and the House Democrats to tell us what are they for, what are they against, how far do they want to go. If they don't do it, you can't reach resolution."

Madigan declined to take questions from the press on Monday, but several of his members said they were wary of such a major expansion of gaming, and suggested that at least some of Jones' tax proposals could be in trouble. Others cited concerns with the size and scope of the governor's health care plans.

"A lot of members asked questions as to why we're not fixing some of the problems in the current system, for example, the fact that there are no doctors in All Kids, trying to get more doctors and more hospitals to participate as opposed to going through the full-blown \$3.7 billion to \$4 billion program expansion," said state Rep. Frank Mautino, D-Spring Valley.

State Rep. Jack Franks, D-Woodstock, said there were questions about the need for such a dramatic increase in state spending.

"I think a lot of it's going to deal with the House Democrats at this point, because if we're not willing to put forth a lot of revenue, they're going to have to scale back their programs," he said. "We're not going to be bullied into voting for things that we don't agree with."

Time is running out to meet the May 31st deadline. After that date, budget legislation will need a three-fifths majority, bringing House Republicans into play. House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego, has proposed a limited-growth budget that includes no tax hikes and a \$200 million increase for elementary and secondary education. Blagojevich warned that such a budget would mean painful cuts, and said he is still hopeful that it won't come to that.

"We should do everything we can to get the business of the people done on time and have a budget so that we don't empower the House Republicans," the governor said. "We know what their proposals are and what that means to the things that we Democrats care about."

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