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Slots won't be part of special session

By Stephenie Steitzer

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FRANKFORT, Ky. -- The governor plans to call a special session today to begin June 15 to address a projected revenue shortfall, but he said a bill to allow video lottery terminals at racetracks won't be on his initial agenda.

"I still have under consideration other issues and will likely be amending the call in the next few days as we develop more consensus on some of those issues," Beshear said after a meeting this morning with legislative leaders.

House Speaker Greg Stumbo, D-Prestonsburg, said education and Medicaid will be spared from cuts in the 2010 fiscal year, but other areas will see a 2.9 percent cut, on top of the 4 percent cuts they took this fiscal year.

Stumbo said the governor's budget includes a 1 percent raise for teachers and slight funding increases for the Department of Corrections, prosecutors and state parks. The budget "lives up to the commitment of funding" areas such as the public defenders, student financial aid and teacher's retirement.

"I think the plan is certainly a reasonable, prudent approach to balance the coming year's budget," Beshear said. "It doesn't involve any tax increases."

The state's economic forecasters last week projected a \$996 million revenue shortfall from what the legislature budgeted to spend in 2010 during the 2008 session.

Stumbo said yesterday that he thinks he has enough votes to pass an expanded gambling bill in the House. Asked this morning where the issues stands, Stumbo referred questions to the governor.

Stumbo said yesterday that the governor was drafting his own version of an expanded gambling bill and that he hadn't seen it.

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said the Senate will return to Frankfort upon the governor's call, even though he doesn't believe a special session is necessary. Williams has said the governor had the authority to make the cuts without the legislature's authority.

But if the governor does make the call, Williams said he thinks the legislature could reach a consensus on other issues left hanging at the end of the regular session, including a bill to create a mechanism to fund the Ohio River bridges project.

Williams said he does not believe the special session should last longer than five days. Beshear did not say how long he expected the session to last.

In addition, Williams said the \$60,000 a day for the special session should come out of the legislature's budget.

Check back for more updates.

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