

Inslee, lawmakers claim there's a budget deal but won't elaborate



Rachel La Corte / Associated Press

Gov. Jay Inslee is joined by state House and Senate leaders in Olympia on Saturday as he announces an agreement on a new two-year state budget.

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OLYMPIA — State lawmakers concluded a second special session Saturday as their leaders [claimed they had reached agreement](#) on a new two-year budget.

But House and Senate leaders, and Gov. Jay Inslee, refused to disclose any details. They insisted it would be passed and signed before midnight Tuesday to avert a partial state government shut down.

Inslee has called a third extra session beginning at noon on Sunday to give lawmakers time to get all the horse-trading and numbers worked out.

[At a news conference](#) on Saturday, Inslee said the agreement will deliver a “truly historic” budget, even as he swatted away question after questions about its content.

Inslee said he's holding back because budget writers in the House and Senate are going line by line through hundreds of spending decisions that will affect the final tally sheet. That work could be done in time for both chambers of the Legislature to vote on Monday.

What the governor's office did hand out was a [one-page summary](#) which said the budget would spend “about \$38 billion” over the next two years. It would provide pay raises for state workers, a cut in tuition for college students and increased funding for state parks, mental health care and other human services.

Teachers would get a cost-of-living adjustment, according to the governor's office. The budget would have “funds for additional teacher compensation,” though it's not clear if it would be the larger wage hike sought by House Democrats or the one-time bonus pushed by Senate Republicans.

The summary says the budget would make a “major investment” in early learning and would put about \$1.3 billion into public schools to meet the state's constitutional obligations, as identified by the state Supreme Court in a recent case.

There's no mention of how lawmakers plan to address Initiative 1351, the class-size reduction measure passed by voters, which lawmakers are trying to revise or suspend.

The governor's statement says there would be greater revenue through the elimination of certain tax exemptions, but it doesn't say how much. And when asked which tax loopholes would be closed, Inslee replied: “The right ones.”

The lack of information incited questions about the firmness of the reputed agreement.

“Because you would not have the 10 people standing up with all their integrity on their shirt sleeves saying that we have a deal that is going to pass in the state of Washington if we didn't believe that sincerely,” Inslee said, gesturing to legislative leaders crowded behind him.

Inslee said hard compromises by both parties enabled them to reach this point.

Despite the paucity of information, individual lawmakers echoed the governor's confidence there will be no hiccups that would revive the threat of a government stoppage.

“We are going to vote on a budget before June 30, and it's a budget I am going to be proud to come home with,” said Rep. Ruth Kagi, D-Seattle, whose district includes parts of south Snohomish County.

Sen. Kirk Pearson, R-Monroe, said everything is fast-tracked.

“We can't get done” on Sunday, Pearson said, but “we'll be done by July 1,” which is Wednesday. “It is not an option to shut down government.”

Until the budget is written and released, lawmakers can't be sure how their particular priorities and those of their caucus were addressed.

"I don't think I can tell you who won and who lost," said Rep. Mike Sells, D-Everett.

Inslee and legislative leaders of both parties announced their agreement "in principle" early Saturday after a marathon session of talks in the governor's office.

"This agreement ends the threat of a government shutdown on July 1," they said in a joint statement issued shortly before 1:30 a.m.

Thousands of state workers have received notice that they would be temporarily laid off starting Wednesday if a budget isn't adopted in time. In addition, vendors have been told they would not be paid, and campers were warned they will lose out on their reservations for the July 4 weekend if state parks are closed.

The unfinished political drama is reminiscent of 2013, when lawmakers struggled through two special sessions before striking a budget deal on June 27.

Now, like then, it's been a test of wills between a Democratic majority in the House and a Republican majority in the Senate.

They have been at loggerheads for months on how much to spend in the next two-year budget, where those dollars are to be spent and where the money will come from.

In the past week, House Democrats moved the talks forward when they dropped their demand for a capital gains tax. Senate Republicans, who had dug in against the tax and claimed no additional revenue is needed, responded with a willingness to close some tax breaks to raise money.

Also Saturday, state lawmakers continued negotiating a new two-year capital construction budget and a 16-year, \$15 billion transportation revenue package to be paid in part with a hike in the gas tax.

The capital budgets proposed by the House and Senate contain money to build a new cafeteria at Marysville Pilchuck High School, where [five students died from gunfire last October](#), and a new University Center building for Washington State University in Everett. The amounts differ in the two budgets.

Similarly, the competing transportation packages in the House and Senate each steer hundreds of millions of dollars into projects in Snohomish County. But the plans differ on which projects will be supported.

One of the unresolved issues centers on Inslee's push for a new rule requiring lower concentrations of carbon in fuel. The governor offered this week to not impose it before 2018, but Republicans wants to delay the whole process until a later date.

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