



## **Lawmakers, governor at odds on how to spend \$80 million**

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Missouri’s governor is facing a showdown with the Legislature over what to do with an unexpected budget windfall.

On the table is \$80 million, which had been set aside to help fund the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) over the next two years, in case congressional gridlock blocked the state from receiving additional federal funding. A government shutdown in January further endangered the program’s future.

Now that full federal funding has resumed, there are competing visions over what to do with the state money that had been set aside.

Republican Gov. Eric Greitens wants to pump more money into rural Missouri. The chairmen of the Missouri House Budget Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee, meanwhile, want to restore at least some of Greitens’ proposed cuts to higher education.

“I’m prepared to go toe-to-toe with anyone when it comes to what we need to do,” GOP Sen. Dan Brown, the appropriations chairman, said Thursday.

Higher education funding was facing a crisis, Brown said. If the proposed cuts aren’t avoided, “the weight’s gonna fall on shoulders of the students and the parents.”

On Thursday, the governor announced a “Rural Growth Plan” that would use the newly available money to expand broadband access and fund water projects, river ports and biodiesel plants. Greitens spokesman Parker Briden said the administration hopes to identify what parts of the state needed faster internet the most, and to offer grants for building broadband infrastructure.

Briden declined to say whether the governor would be willing to scale back his proposal in the face of legislative resistance.

Greitens’ administration understands “there will be a lot of perspectives,” Briden said. “But we just felt that, at this time, this was our priority.”

The governor’s 2019 budget plan would give colleges and universities \$92 million less than originally budgeted for the 2018 fiscal year and \$68 million less than they actually are expected to get based on cuts Greitens previously made to the 2018 budget.

Brown said he wants to use the money that had been set aside for CHIP to avoid the \$68 million in proposed cuts.

There is some agreement between the governor's goal and Brown's. Both want to use some of the money originally allocated for CHIP for new water projects and to pay into a biodiesel fund.

Yet, two representatives are also pushing back against the governor's office.

Last week, House Budget Committee Chairman Scott Fitzpatrick said "tens of millions" of the CHIP dollars could be used to alleviate the proposed higher education cuts, although he declined to give specific numbers. In addition, Republican Rep. Charlie Davis proposed changes to a bill this week that would allow colleges and universities to raise tuition an unlimited amount "if the institution did not receive an increase in state funding during the immediately preceding fiscal year."

Lawmakers will start making budget decision later this month.