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**State News****Beebe: Arkansas unlikely to again have \$919 million surplus**

By *ANDREW DeMILLO*  
Wednesday, April 4, 2007 2:44 PM CDT

LITTLE ROCK - Gov. Mike Beebe said Wednesday it would be a mistake to assume the state would again have a \$919 million budget surplus, the day after the Legislature concluded its 86-day session.

"I wouldn't look for that again. I'd love to see it two years from now, but I wouldn't look for it again," Beebe told reporters in a news conference at the state Capitol. "I think it would be a mistake to count on it again in terms of those numbers."

Beebe signed several bills Wednesday from the session, including legislation that sets spending priorities for \$8.8 billion in general revenue over the next two years. Beebe also signed a bill that sets aside \$456 million of the state's surplus for a program to repair dilapidated school buildings.

Beebe praised the Legislature for setting aside about half of the surplus for school facilities, and for the House and Senate agreeing to split \$40 million for various projects. Beebe will have roughly \$188 million to spend on various projects.

Also coming out of the state surplus will be \$36 million for a matching fund for a cancer center at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, \$44 million to pay a debt the Department of Information Systems owes the federal government, \$4 million to replace the state police plane used by Beebe and \$1 million for the family of a mentally disabled man shot dead by a state trooper.

The governor said he was concerned at the beginning of the session that the surplus would cause discontent among legislators.

"I was cognizant of that because when you have more money you have more people pulling and tugging and the acrimony gets even tougher than if you had less money and people knew they had to tighten their belts," Beebe said. "In this case...ultimately they spent the one-time money in responsible manners looking toward the future and the constitutional mandates required of state government."

Though he has not yet vetoed any legislation from the session, Beebe said there are a couple bills he is considering rejecting. The governor would not say what bills he may veto.

"We may see some. There are a couple we're looking at right now that are appropriations bills that may have escaped our scrutiny in terms of the constitution questions about them," Beebe said.

Beebe said he was pleased with the session, but said he was disappointed that lawmakers did not pass legislation funding a statewide trauma center.

He said he was also disappointed that a Senate committee rejected a House bill to fine payday lenders every time they charged anyone interest above 17 percent. He said he had talked with members of the Senate committee that rejected the additional fines to try to

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convince them to vote for the measure.

The Senate, however, approved a separate payday lending measure that would have allowed the industry to continue charging interest above 17 percent. The proposal was defeated in the House after opponents said it would do little to reform the business.

"I thought the Senate bill was not much," Beebe said.

A day earlier, Beebe told lawmakers they should be proud of the bills they prevented from becoming bad law. When asked to cite an example Wednesday, Beebe mentioned a proposal to ban homosexuals and unmarried couples from fostering or adopting children.

"I had serious constitutional concerns...on the gay foster parent and gay adoption issue so I think the House did a good job in addressing that," Beebe said.

The bill, which passed the Senate but was rejected by a House committee, would have reinstated a gay foster parent ban struck down by the state Supreme Court.

Backers of the ban have said they're considering gathering signatures to place the proposal on the 2008 ballot as a constitutional amendment or initiated act.

Beebe said some unresolved problems remain with health care and highways that he wants to address in the future. The governor said he also wants to eventually remove the rest of the state's sales tax on food, now that half of the 6-cent tax will be eliminated July 1.

"We'll continue to try to remove the sales tax on food, and we'll continue to try and address the sales tax on utilities for manufacturers," Beebe said. "Our first priority will be to do what we said we would on the sales tax on food. We'll do it in a responsible fashion that takes in the account the revenue we have and the state services we need."

Among other bills Beebe signed into law Wednesday was legislation giving state employees one day of paid leave each year to participate in their children's school activities. He also signed a measure creating needs-based college scholarships.

A service of the Associated Press(AP)

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