

# AUSTIN WEEKLY

---

**10/3/2007 10:00:00 PM**

**Democrats host budget hearing**

**Residents say cuts will hurt community services**

**By TERRY DEAN and ROBERT FELTON**

In the wake of last week's heated budget hearing at Austin Town Hall, several West Side politicians have vowed to attempt to override Gov. Rod Blagojevich's \$463 million cuts to the state budget.

Democratic legislators hosted a series of public meetings around Chicago, including Austin Town Hall, 5610 W. Lake, to hear the community's concerns.

More than 60 residents attended the Austin hearing.

The speakers addressed the ramifications the proposed cuts will have on the community, in particular the funding for schools, health services and social services.

Speakers at last Wednesday's hearing, many of whom are opposed to specific cuts, expressed frustration at the loss of much needed state funding.

"It was not an angry or volatile atmosphere at the hearing but people were certainly frustrated," said Don Redmond, a member of Parents for School Choice, after the hearing.

Parents for School Choice specifically opposes the \$3.5 million the governor vetoed from the budget, which was allocated towards the funding of charter public schools in Chicago.

"I have two children at a charter school up north and am a firm believer in giving parents a choice of where to send their kids," said Redmond, who lives in North Lawndale. "These cuts rob the parents of having that choice."

Other programs likely compromised if the cuts go through include those for violence prevention, such as Ceasefire. Funding for various after-school programs that provide extra-curricular activities for children are also vulnerable.

"I don't see how it makes sense to cut programs that are dedicated towards social services and helping prevent violence in the community," said Bob Vandasek, director of the South Austin Coalition. Students from other communities spoke to legislators at last week's hearing.

Two bus loads of elementary students from schools in Pilsen spoke out in support of their after school workshops that would end if the cuts go through.

Among the state legislators in attendance were state Sen. Don Harmon (39th), state Rep. Deborah Graham (78th) 8th District state Rep. LaShawn Ford, state Rep. Karen Yarbrough (7th), and state Rep. Annazette Collins (10th).

After the hearing, Collins gave a candid explanation concerning her theory behind the cuts.

"I think the governor was looking for a funding stream for his health insurance initiative and his Gaming Bill to aid the CTA, but consequently he is hurting those on the West Side who will have valuable services cut," she said.

According to Gov. Blagojevich, the cuts represent "pork projects" and "non-essential spending" that could be allocated towards bolstering the state's health care programs.

The governor assures it could give 500,000 more Illinoisans access to affordable health coverage and services.

"I think it was a great thing to have so many people attend and let us know how they felt about these cuts, and we want them to be addressed," said Collins, insisting that she and other Springfield legislators will work to override of the governor's budget plan.

However, it will not be easy.

For the override to occur, there would need to be 71 votes in the House and 36 votes in the senate.