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■ INSIDE POLITICS

Senate spares itself in budget

While cutting much else, it's renovating offices

These are hard times for Kentucky state government.

Few departments, agencies or functions of state government have escaped the pain. Law enforcement, public defenders, schools, social services and others have seen budget cuts slice into their operations. Road projects are being delayed. Major capital construction projects – such as the expansion of the Northern Kentucky Convention Center and the revamping of Florence's Mall Road – are on hiatus.

There isn't even enough money – about \$3 million is all it would take – to build, staff and operate a badly needed adult substance abuse treatment facility in Northern Kentucky.

College tuition is rising. More cuts are on the way when the new "austere budget," as Gov. Steve Beshear has put it, kicks in July 1. And with the legislature failing to move on casino gambling or a cigarette tax in-



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crease, there are no major sources of new revenue for state coffers.

Most disturbing, most rattling and most egregious is the cold, hard truth that somewhere in Frankfort, a state senator is being forced to conduct the public's business on the public's dime in – and if you're squeamish or easily frightened, please read no more – a **SMALL OFFICE!**

Now, please, please, before you launch into hysterics, back way from the ledge; Senate President David Williams and the Kentucky General Assembly will solve this cruel injustice.

Yes, at a time when the budget ax is falling all over the state, the Kentucky Senate is expanding and remodeling its own digs.

In a story the Lexington Herald-Leader broke late last week, it was revealed the state requested bids for construction on the Capitol Annex's second floor, to build new Senate offices, caucus rooms with kitchens, a news conference room and a Senate

lounge.

Don't forget, this new project follows the \$639,000 the Senate spent a couple of years ago on a renovation that included the installation of a new 60-inch flat-screen plasma TV in Williams' office.

The ever-glib Williams promised the latest makeover will be "nothing extravagant."

"Each one of the senators will have an appropriate office now," Williams told the paper. "We have at least one senator who has a rather small office."

You know who else is in a small space? The 4,400 kids in the Boone County Schools who spend at least part of their day in a trailer instead of a classroom due to the lack of construction funding.

You know who could use the money being spent on the senators' kitchens? Some of the 52,000 Kentucky children who are eligible for health insurance coverage but are not enrolled in the state's program because there isn't enough money to cover them, a fact Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, pointed out in the Herald-Leader story.

Let them eat cake, is basically how Williams' responded.

"You're talking about people who you couldn't print enough money for," Williams said in his best Marie Antoinette. "I don't accept the premise that they're cutting anything to the bone."

Well, with this sort of behavior, the public will demand off with their heads in Frankfort.

The amount of the renovation hasn't been determined, and in the scheme of a two-year \$19 billion budget, it will certainly be minuscule.

Where is the leadership? Where is the recognition that a state senator getting a better office doesn't play really well with a public paying higher tuition at state colleges and technical schools? What happened to our elected legislators sharing some of his pain?

Flat screen TVs and caucus rooms with kitchens just doesn't get it.

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