School Board Disappointed With Assembly Vote

Friday, 18 May 2012

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

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The Kodiak Island Borough School District will be making another $456,000 in cuts to its FY 13 budget. The school district was hoping to benefit from extra fish tax revenue, but the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly voted 4-2 against increasing its contribution to Kodiak schools.

"I hope that we can get something done tonight and came as close to this cap as possible and thank you all for participating tonight."

That's assemblyman Dave Kaplan speaking not long before he twice introduced an amendment to a resolution that sets the minimum amount at which the borough will fund the school district. The resolution offers up just over $9.9 million for the district. Kaplan first proposed increasing that amount by $400,000. With assemblywoman Carole Austerman absent and assemblyman Jerrol Friend sitting in for absent Mayor Jerome Selby, the body failed to pass the resolution. Kaplan and assemblywoman Chris Lynch voted for the increase.

Assembly members Mel Stephens, Tuck Bonney, Louise Stuttes and Friend voted against it.

After further discussion, Kaplan again offered up an amendment to increase the borough's education contribution- this time by $200,000. Again, the resolution failed with only Kaplan and Lynch voting in favor. Assemblyman Mel Stephens was the most vocal against the amendments.

"My feeling is that for sometime the school distract has simply shown an inadequate amount of budgetary restraint."

Because the resolution only sets the minimum amount the borough must contribute to the school district, the assembly could come back before June 7th- when their budget is due- and offer up more money. However, only an assembly member from the prevailing side of the vote- those who voted no- would be able to propose such an amendment. Stuttes and Bonney- who voted against the proposed increases- did not participate in any discussion regarding the resolution. Stephens was clear about not wanting to give more money to the school district. Friend also said that he is against increased funding.

"I honestly feel that a lot of the programs, these numbers aren't going to affect the programs as hard as everybody says. The school district is gonna make do, then have in the past and they always will."

"We'll make cuts.
We'll make do but the people who are going to feel it, unfortunately, are our teachers and our students."

That's school board president Melissa Borton giving her reaction after the vote. As part of her testimony to the assembly she pointed out that the school district is the largest employer on the island.

"Currently we employ around 416 employees in Kodiak. We bring a strong economic base and economic stability to this community. In the last four years we've reduced our budget by 34 positions. That's 34 people who no longer hold jobs here in Kodiak."

On top of that, Borton says they've already cut ten positions this year and will have to cut more to gap this nearly half-million dollar budget shortfall.

In FY 12 the district had to dip into its fund balance to supplement its budget. School board member Aaron Griffin says that happened because the budget cycle was late last year and that the school board wasn't expecting flat funding, even though the borough has flat funded the district since 2009. Contracts had already been sent out and signed by the time they realized they wouldn't have the money to meet their obligations. With just under a million dollars left in the fund, he says they will likely not spend any fund balance this year.

Griffin called into the meeting from work to give his testimony. After the meeting he shared his reaction.

"I'm disappointed that the assembly would think that we're being shortsighted. We spend the money that we have. We're not allowed to save money. We're not allowed to have a savings account and that's state law. We spend what we get and, you know, they cut us. At the same time their own personal revenues, their budgets are growing. Like I said, I wish I could say I'm surprised but I guess I really am not. "

The district's preliminary budget came in just over $46 million with an expected enrollment of 2,512 students. The borough will approve its FY 13 budget on June 7th.

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