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In order to be responsive to the latest legislative developments, MOCPA continually monitors proposed legislation. The society utilizes both professional and grassroots lobbyists to ensure the CPA profession has a voice in Jefferson City. By keeping members informed, MOCPA is empowering you to contribute to the legislative process.

Update provided by Chuck Pierce, CPA, MOCPA government relations consultant

Session Update

The Legislature returned to Jefferson City this week, but it was far from business as usual. The only items taken up were bills tied directly to the supplemental budget. In order to comply with the orders on small groups and social distancing, the Legislature modified its rules, and followed processes that even weeks ago would have created howls of protest by both the public and legislators.

Every year, the Legislature takes up a supplemental budget to adjust various changes that have occurred during the fiscal year. Most years it is a routine process. This year, however, was quite different. For the state to have the authority to spend the federal dollars authorized for responding to the COVID-19 crisis, the current year budget required substantial adjustment to make it to the June 30 year end.

Before leaving for spring break, the House had approved and sent the Senate a supplemental budget totaling approximately \$400 million. While this is certainly no small amount, it was not unusual. After adjusting for the anticipated federal assistance and providing for some other contingencies, the supplemental budget approved this week totaled more than \$6 billion. This spending authority is an estimate of the additional amount needed to get the state to the end of this fiscal year on June 30. To put this in perspective, the state’s total budget for an entire fiscal year is approximately \$30 billion.

The amount of the supplemental budget was historic, but even more historic was the processes the Legislature followed to pass this legislation. The Capitol and the legislative process is normally extremely accessible to the public. The concept of social distancing is also very foreign to the legislators. Desks on the floor are close together,

committee rooms are small, and one-on-one conversations are common. None of those were present this week.

Public entry into the Capitol was restricted to one door, and anyone entering had to go through a COVID-19 screening process. Once inside, they were only allowed to go to one hearing room or the public galleries. Very few people even attempted this. The hearing and chamber proceedings were live-streamed, so that was the method used to track the legislative activity.

The legislators also adapted their behavior and methods for safety. Most of them wore masks. The only hearing was in the Senate, which took place in a large committee room with the Senators sitting six feet apart. Some legislative and budget staff were in attendance. In normal times, a budget hearing like this would have been packed with lobbyists and state employees from several agencies. On the Senate floor, the Senators spaced out in the chamber, limited debate and voted in cycles to avoid being in close contact.

The House process was even more unusual. During the debate on the bill, only the member speaking was on the floor. After debate ended, representatives were called in four at a time to cast their votes. They entered the chamber from the rear, cast their vote then exited in the front. Compared to the normal unorganized, somewhat chaotic process of House debate and voting, this was surreal.

The legislators adjourned without a plan for when or if, they will return. Legislative leadership said this week was a test case of how they might handle future sessions. It is hard to imagine using this process and attempting to pass any volume of normal legislation. Potentially a few special bills and the budget could be passed this way. Even those limited bills will require an inordinate amount of time to get done.

Considering this, it is most likely that work will be done behind the scenes to attempt to prioritize legislation and develop consensus on those priorities. This would establish a benchmark for how much legislative time that might be needed. Legislative leaders and Governor Parson would then have to evaluate the risk associated with returning to the Capitol to accomplish those tasks before the May 15 adjournment date. The other option would be to agree that cannot be done and begin plans for a special session.

MOCPA will continue to monitor the situation and keep you updated.

For Additional Information

This *Government Advocacy Update* will continue to be included in MOCPA's weekly Friday updates to the membership. If you have any questions on MOCPA's government advocacy efforts, please visit the [Web page](#), or contact [Dena Hull](#) at (800) 264-7966, ext. 105.