The Kansas Board of Regents has asked Gov. Kathleen Sebelius to submit a $47.7 million budget amendment as a down payment on repairs to state universities.

The action comes as lawmakers today start working on the final state budget and as available revenue shrinks because of natural disasters, a costly settlement with the federal government for Medicare expenses and already-approved tax cuts.

“As you know, this is an issue that only becomes more expensive and more dangerous the longer it is ignored,” Reginald Robinson, regents president and chief executive officer, said in a letter to Sebelius about the repairs at universities.

Budget experts met Monday to review state revenue and emerged announcing that the economy is in good shape but the state budget cupboard is bare.

And that means many critical areas — taking care of social-service waiting lists and fixing crumbling classrooms at universities — may get shortchanged.

Shannon Jones, spokeswoman for a coalition of human service groups, noted lawmakers approved tax cuts and expanded gambling during the first part of the regular session but failed to address key social service issues. And that concerns her.

Regents officials have been lobbying lawmakers all year to address the backlog of $663 million worth of deferred maintenance and repair projects. But lawmakers have failed to come up with any solution.

In his letter to Sebelius, Robinson said the proposed $47.7 million would pay for the top needs at each regents school. That would include $8.8 million at Kansas University to repair and replace deteriorating utility tunnels and $7.9 million at KU Medical Center for repairs at the Applegate Energy Center.

“If we intend to keep the best and brightest students in Kansas, we must invest in and protect our state university infrastructure,” Robinson said.

Sebelius’ office declined to say whether the governor would issue a budget amendment for the funds, although she has said in the past that the Legislature must address the problem.

Sebelius’ budget director Duane Goossen said the governor will make budget requests today of at least $53.5 million to correct problems the state has had with the federal government involving Medicaid.

Essentially, the federal government has ruled that the state has taken too much money for Medicaid expenses related to special education, and it will cost $37.4 million to cover a decrease in federal funds coming to Kansas and $16.1 million to cover the reduced federal share going forward.

In addition, Sebelius will request approximately $20 million in disaster funds to help with repairs associated with a major storm that hit western Kansas.

Added to funds locked away for school finance and tax cuts, there’s not much left.

Despite the financial strain, budget experts Monday said the state economy is in good shape, avoiding some of the problems experienced in other states.

Sebelius said the economic news was “very encouraging.” She urged the Legislature to focus on health care and early childhood programs when it returns. The full Legislature starts its wrap-up session April 25 while budget committees started work Tuesday.

House Speaker Melvin Neufeld, R-Ingalls, said that while $36 million in tax cuts approved by the Legislature put a squeeze on revenue, the cuts
will, in the long term, help the economy.

“I am confident the Kansas economy will remain strong,” Neufeld said.

The state revenue projections for the budget also don’t include funds expected from expanded gambling, officials said.
Two of Jefferson County were among 68 University of Kansas students who spent spring break on service-learning projects around the country.

Claudia Alterman, daughter of Kerry and Lori Alterman, McLouth, spent time at Chicago Cares working in health-related programs. Molly Sailors, daughter of Paula Kellogg and Gordon Sailors, Perry, was at the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind in Spartanburg. Both are freshmen.
Political dialogue needs a little more humor like what Bob Dole used to disarm critics and amuse supporters, Howard Baker told a Lied Center audience Sunday night.

Baker, a former U.S. senator, presidential candidate and President Ronald Reagan’s chief of staff, was in Lawrence to receive the Dole Leadership Award. It is named for Dole, a former U.S. senator from Kansas, and is presented annually to someone who promotes politics as an honorable profession.


“There was no place in the wedding ceremony that we had to support the same person for president,” Baker told a University of Kansas crowd of about 750 Sunday night.

But it’s too early for anyone to really know how the 2008 campaign will unfold, said Baker, who ran for president in 1980. There are so many candidates, he said, and each one who stays in the race for the duration will be under intense scrutiny.

“Anybody who says they can tell you how the election is going to turn out is not realistic,” he said. “I’m going to try to get a Republican to win.”
MEETING IN TOPEKA

Hoarder problem gets state attention

BY DEB GRUVER
The Wichita Eagle

The idea of hoarding — collecting food, trash, odd bits of hardware, even animals — often brings raised eyebrows and sometimes brings chuckles.

But it's a serious problem that can affect people's health and public safety, the director of the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging said Friday.

A statewide meeting about hoarding begins today in Topeka as leaders of several agencies get together to talk about the issue.

Annette Graham, director of the agency's Central Plains region, said it's difficult to know how often hoarding occurs because usually it goes unreported.

It often starts behind closed doors.

Unused spare rooms get filled to the point where doors won't open.

Please see HOARDING, Page 5A.

Now you know

SIGNS OF HOARDING

• An accumulation of items that seems out of hand and beyond normal clutter

• Obsession with keeping items of little or no value

• Piles of belongings that interfere with the ability to use a home the way it's supposed to be used. For example, there may be no room to sleep on a bed. Stacks of books or papers may block a bathroom or bedroom. Or there may be a path snaking through the home.

For more information about hoarding, call Krista Lovette at the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging, 316-660-5222.
As basements or garages are stuffed to overflowing.

The Office of Aging and Long Term Care at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare will release results of a study on hoarding today in Topeka.

A statewide hoarding task force has been meeting for about a year.

The clinical diagnosis of hoarding, Graham said, is the acquisition of and failure to discard a large number of possessions of limited or useless value. When it begins to limit a person's activities, it becomes a problem.

"It can result in code and fire violations," Graham said. "It can lead to extreme rodent or insect infestation. It can be the hoarding of animals, which leads to neglected animals. It can be a collection of debris in and outside the home, which leads to blight."

Blight has become an issue in Wichita, where officials and neighbors have made headlines for trying to get homeowners to clear junk from yards and lots.

Law enforcement and social service agencies usually learn about hoarding after health or other problems come to their attention.

Some cases seem more bizarre than others: In 2000, Wichita firefighters discovered 40 to 60 cats stuffed in plastic bags inside two freezers when they responded to a fire at a home near North Bluff. Several live cats were in the home, too.

The homeowner admitted she hoarded cats, often scraping dead ones off the road and storing them in freezers in her home.

Mental health professionals often consider hoarding a compulsion. Collecting items can provide a sense of security, but the clutter can provoke anxiety — leading to still more collecting.

Hoarding is not just a problem for the elderly, Graham stressed. "It typically starts at a much younger age," she said. "The person may be able to manage the situation when they are younger, but when they become older, they have health problems or cognitive problems and then it becomes apparent to others outside those individuals and their families."

Reach Deb Gruver at 316-268-6400 or dgruver@wichitaeagle.com.
LAWRENCE (AP) — The University of Kansas is cutting some corners in response to an unexpected drop in the amount of money it recoups from research grants for overhead costs.

The money, called facilities and administration dollars, will be about $19.9 million this year, less than the $22.2 million the university had anticipated.

That reduction has left 35 vacant jobs unfilled on the university's Lawrence campus and delayed such plans as installing a chiller at a research building.

Jim Roberts, the university's vice provost for research, said the federal government has kept the total amount of money earmarked for research stagnant in recent years.

"Kansas has done very well in the face of that, but it looks like we might get caught a little bit this year on it," Roberts said.

The university takes a set amount from federal grants received by researchers, usually 44 percent, and combines the money into one account, which is administered by the nonprofit Kansas Center for Research Inc.