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Variety

Gov. Tom Wolf said Monday afternoon that he will allow a \$32 billion spending plan to become law without his signature after the governor and lawmakers failed to come to an agreement on how to overcome a \$2 billion shortfall. "I am going to let this general appropriations bill become law without my signature in the hope that we can continue to work together on a sustainable budget solution that sets Pennsylvania on the right path," Wolf said in a statement.

The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual. ~ Vince Lombardi

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to rely more heavily on recurring revenue, such as tax increases, to close the shortfall.

"Just last week, we received a warning that if we did not do the hard work to balance our budget, Pennsylvania's credit would be downgraded. This independent call to action made it clear we must avoid gimmicks to protect from a downgrade, as we have been able to do since I took office," Wolf said. Republicans have been resistant to tax increases, and lawmakers in the House and Senate were divided over how to legalize new gambling alternatives.

Lawmakers are returning the Capitol on Tuesday to try to ram through budget-related bills, but there is no immediate indication of a breakthrough on what's been a controversial bid to raise hundreds of millions of dollars by expanding gambling. To make the budget balanced, lawmakers won't pass legislation to release funding to the four state-related universities — Penn State, Pitt, Temple and Lincoln — until the revenue plan is balanced, said Stephen Miskin, spokesman for the House Republican caucus. The state is scheduled to provide those four universities \$563 million in this fiscal

This is the third straight budget Wolf has allowed to become law without his signature. In his first year in office, Wolf, a Democrat, and the Republican-controlled Legislature engaged in a nine-month standoff after Wolf vetoed the entire 2015-16 budget. He later used his line-item veto to withhold school funding to try to force lawmakers to revisit the budget. In March 2016, he finally allowed the budget to fully become law, while still refusing to sign it. Last year, he also allowed the spending plan to become law after 10 days but refused to sign it.

Wolf has insisted throughout budget negotiations that the tone of conversations has been more positive than in prior years. Monday he said he hopes a solution can be reached "in the coming days." Negotiations down the home stretch got bogged down as Wolf insisted that legislative leaders present a strategy

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year, budget documents show. That's a little more than the \$560 million they got from the state last year.

Wolf and lawmakers have said that they plan to borrow about \$1.5 billion to make up a shortfall aggravated by lower-than-expected tax collections in 2016-17. That money would be repaid with a portion of the annual payment Pennsylvania receives in a settlement from a lawsuit against the tobacco industry.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle expressed frustration at the situation. "With Gov. Wolf refusing to sign a budget for the third year in a row, it makes me wonder whether he even wants to be governor," said state Rep. Aaron Bernstine, R-Beaver. "I am looking forward to him starting to act like a governor and do his most important job, sign a budget."

State Rep. Bryan Barbin, D-Johnstown, said Republican legislative leaders shoulder some of the blame for refusing to make the tough decisions to provide a budget that is balanced in a way that won't have the state playing catch-up again next year. The situation has been worse because so little of what's being considered to pay the state's bill has been vetted in public as budget negotiations have been conducted behind closed doors, he said. "It's all being negotiated in the dark," Barbin said. "That's wrong." When the state government fails to come up with a plan to adequately pay the bills, it trickles down and makes it more difficult for counties and school districts to do their jobs, he said.

"If the votes aren't there to raise the necessary revenue to pay for the budget, then maybe significant cuts need to happen," said **Frank Burns, D-East Taylor**. **"Leaders are floating bad ideas such as raising taxes on cable TV, electricity and telephone service.** I've even heard they want to tax the drink you buy at the bar. Another bad idea is borrowing money to balance the budget." That's "another temporary fix that will cost more in the long run," Burns added. "Instead of doing any of these things we should look at closing the Delaware tax loophole and removing special interest tax exemptions, in addition to (legalizing) video poker machines in bars and clubs to solve our budget shortfall."

State Rep. Lynda Schlegel Culver, R-Northumberland, said that the budget process is never easy. "I know it can be frustrating to us, to the public, and anyone who relies on state funding," Culver said. "This is a fluid process. Getting 203 people in the House and 50 people in the Senate to agree, it's hard."

State Rep. Garth Everett, R-Lycoming, said he doesn't have a problem with the governor's move to allow the budget to become law even after the Legislature missed the deadline to pass revenue bills. "We're going to be doing things to get it balanced in the next couple days," Everett said. Once those revenue bills are ironed out, the Legislature will be able to pass the legislation to release the university funding, he said.

State Rep. Mark Longietti, D-Mercer, said he's concerned about the move to cover much of the shortfall by borrowing. Still, he didn't object to Wolf's move on Monday. "There was bipartisan support for the spending bill," Longietti said. "From that standpoint, he's honoring that." House Minority Leader Frank Dermody, D-Allegheny, told reporters "Wolf did the right thing," by letting the bill become law on Monday. He too pointed to the bipartisan support for the spending bill. The legislature "voted for the spending plan," he said. "Now we have to pay for it." – **Community Newspaper Holdings; more from [Associated Press](#) and [Harrisburg Patriot-News](#)**

Microsoft Corp. plans to put its lobbying and financial muscle behind a long-shot technology that taps unused television bandwidth to bring broadband access to underserved areas of America. In a speech Tuesday in Washington, Microsoft president and chief legal officer Brad Smith is expected to announce support for so-called TV white-space technology, which the company says is a frugal way to address the digital divide between U.S. cities and rural areas.

He also plans to encourage the Trump administration and Congress to ensure white-space spectrum is available on an unlicensed basis in every market in the country, and to consider the technology as they develop a new national infrastructure proposal. The Federal Communications Commission estimates **more than 23 million people in rural areas lack "fast" internet access**, defined as having minimum download speed of 25 megabits a second. Cities commonly have service speeds that top 100 MB a second.

Microsoft, which has **advocated white-space technology for years**, said it will form partnerships with rural telecommunications companies to invest in at least 12 projects in 12 states over the next year, hoping to bring broadband connectivity to two million people in rural America by July 4, 2022. The company declined to say how much it will spend on the effort. Mr. Smith in an interview referred to the spending

as a “civic investment,” but acknowledged bringing high-speed connectivity to rural areas will likely bring new customers to the software giant as well. “It’s going to be good for everybody in technology, including Microsoft,” Mr. Smith said.

The technology Microsoft is championing harnesses unused bandwidth between TV channels to wirelessly deliver access. To use that spectrum, telecoms set up base-station radios, which can send and receive signals up to 10 miles in rural areas. Those radios transmit to antennas attached to homes, which connect to Wi-Fi routers inside.

The promise is that TV white space could provide access to the distant reaches of the country at a fraction of the cost of other options. Microsoft estimates it would cost \$10 billion to \$15 billion to connect rural America with broadband access using TV white spaces, compared with \$15 billion to \$25 billion using fixed wireless technology, and \$45 billion to \$65 billion running fiber-optic cable to homes.

The broadcast industry doesn’t share Microsoft’s support. In a letter to the FCC on Monday, National Association of Broadcasters associate general counsel Patrick McFadden said there are only 800 white-space devices registered in the U.S.—many just test devices. “Microsoft has been making promises about white spaces technology for well over a decade,” he wrote. “Yet there remain few tangible consumer benefits associated with white spaces deployments across the U.S.”

The trade group is concerned that the spectrum Microsoft hopes telecom partners will use for white-space services could interfere with broadcast TV channels. Moreover, broadcasters have complained they don’t have enough spectrum of their own. In response to the broadcast group’s criticism, Microsoft noted “most new telecommunication technologies have taken over a decade” from the regulatory authorization to commercial adoption. “TV White Spaces have been no exception,” a company spokesman said.

While the technology hasn’t taken off in the U.S., Microsoft has financially backed white-space efforts to bring internet access to 185,000 people in 20 projects globally, including rollouts in developing countries such as Kenya, Colombia and the Philippines. Microsoft is betting it can catalyze the market in the U.S. now, in part, because the technology is improved and a business model has been established abroad. It plans to help rural telecoms cover capital expenses and take a share of revenue generated to recoup its costs.

Microsoft already has doled out \$250,000 to Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corp., said Tad Deriso, chief executive of the southern Virginia telecom. With another \$500,000 from the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission and \$250,000 of its own money, Mid-Atlantic Broadband plans to bring white-space service to 1,000 customers by year-end.

The service, which residents acquire through local schools, provides free internet access to a limited number of education-related sites at speeds of about 3 to 4 MB a second. Customers can access the entire web at the same speed for \$10 a month, or pay \$40 a month for service that hits 8 to 10 MB a second, though that falls below the FCC’s definition of “fast.” About 90% of homes have opted for the free service, Mr. Deriso said. The money from Microsoft and others is crucial because the cost of deploying the technology is about \$1,000 a home, Mr. Deriso said. “Eventually, we’d like to see it be \$100,” he said. — *Wall Street Journal*

The state Senate on Saturday unanimously confirmed the reappointment of [John F. Coleman Jr.](#) to a second five-year term as a member of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission. Coleman, 56, one of two Republicans on the five-member PUC, has focused on public safety efforts, including an [ongoing campaign to strengthen](#) Pennsylvania’s One Call Law, which requires utilities to mark underground infrastructure to warn construction workers. His June 19 nomination by Gov. Wolf and [June 28 hearing](#) before the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee were conducted with little public fanfare. Coleman was president of the Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County when Gov. Rendell first nominated him in 2010 to fill an unexpired term. He was re-nominated in 2012 by Gov. Corbett to a five-year term. His new term will expire March 31, 2022. — [philly.com](#)



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