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Local News

Updated: Thursday, January 19, 2006 12:53 AM CST

Lawmakers react to governor's speech RSS

By MATT ADRIAN – H&R Springfield Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD - Local lawmakers' reactions were mixed Wednesday to Gov. Rod Blagojevich's State of the State speech.

The annual speech was largely without surprises as he renewed calls for a statewide construction program to pave roads and build schools.

As Blagojevich called for an end to "partisan politics," he looked directly at Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson, R-Greenville, who controls the caucus where the governor is at least four votes shy of getting \$3.2 billion in bonding authority for his public works program.

Watson held his right hand to his ear like a telephone and said, "Call me."

"There has been no contact between this administration and my office to talk about (a capital budget)," Watson said after the speech. "He gets out in the press and talks about it, but there isn't really substance to what he says. He needs us and he knows it, and we're willing to participate. But we won't if we are not asked."

Blagojevich said the program would include money for widening U.S. 51 south of Decatur.

The governor also heavily criticized the federal government for everything from education to the econo device that was widely criticized by Republicans.

"I wish he would just quit and run for president," said state Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington. "His intere Illinois. Every other paragraph was about Washington, D.C. I wish he would focus on the problems in preoccupied by a long-term run for national office."

State Sen. Dale Righter, R-Mattoon, agreed

"I thought I was coming to hear the State of the State, and what we heard was a campaign address, c

The administration defended the speech's tone.

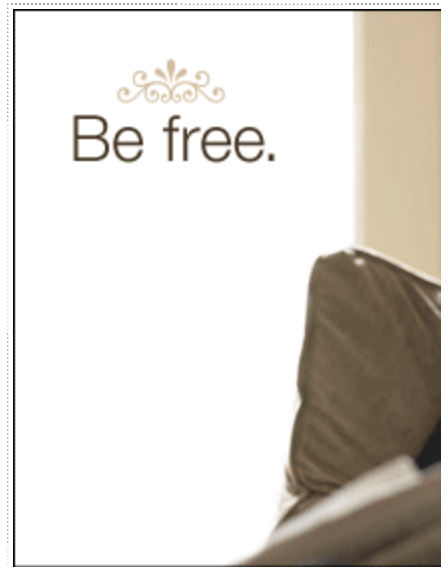
"So much of state government is affected by what Washington is doing," said Rebecca Rausch, a Blag spokeswoman. "There is definitely a difference between what the governor is doing and what Washing

State Rep. Bob Flider, D-Mount Zion, said he liked the governor's focus on extending health insurance

"In principle, we need to take care of those who defended our country," Flider said.

However, he was leery of the governor's push for an assault weapons ban, which could be too broad a that many people use for hunting.

Blagojevich also outlined a \$1,000 tax credit for parents whose children maintain a B average in colleg



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only last two years.

State Rep. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth, was puzzled by the push for higher education after Blagojevich's slash from Richland Community College in the fiscal year 2006 budget along with other deep cuts to institutions of State University.

"All of a sudden he is the higher education governor in an election year," Mitchell said. "This is Blagojevich and the governor starting his re-election campaign."

Other lawmakers likened the tuition credit to the Merit Scholar program that was cut last year.

"You had that last year," said Rep. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet. "His office cut it completely, and now he's the one who put it back. I mean, come on"

State Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, said the tuition tax break, along with a proposed tax break for property taxes, were both old ideas.

"I was stunned, in the speech, the number of ideas that have been held up for years that are now going to be implemented."

Last week, Blagojevich called for keno, sometimes called quick draw lotto, as a way to pay for a school construction program. However, the controversial proposal was absent from the governor's remarks.

"I think he, by not mentioning it, spoke volumes," Eddy said.

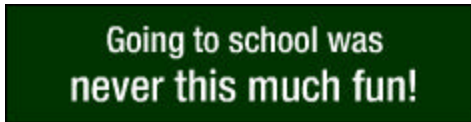
Rose suspects the governor doesn't have enough support to go forward with keno.

"Maybe he's getting the picture that it's not quite as popular as he thought it would be," he said.

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