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Levy aides: Suffolk facing \$224M shortfall for next two years

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Aides to County Executive Steve Levy warned yesterday Suffolk is facing a \$224-million budget shortfall this year and next, but lawmakers tabled Levy's plan for the power to lay off 386 workers if the county unions fail to make \$30 million in concessions by April 1.

The tabling came after Levy aides detailed only \$90 million of the \$119 million needed to make up the 2009 gap and no specifics of how to deal with the 2010 budget hole. Aides later said the economy, state budget and federal help is still too unclear to make such projections.

Even with union concessions, Levy aides also said the promise to avoid layoffs lasts only until the year's end and the commitment does not cover the county nursing home.

Complicating the process, Louis D'Amato (D-North Babylon) and John M. Kennedy Jr. (R-Nesconset) recused themselves from the budget and finance committee vote, and legislative officials later said as many as five of the 18 lawmakers may not be able to vote because their relatives are on the county payroll. To avoid the problem, Levy aides said a new resolution was filed last night that will simply call for layoffs. Aides Ben Zwirn and Connie Corso laid out the magnitude of budget woes, while union leaders and members pleaded against the plan.

Levy declined to be interviewed yesterday. He said he will send out termination notices while aides said he is reviewing whether to press for a vote next Tuesday.

In addition, Levy's plan now calls for \$25 million from the \$130-million tax stabilization fund. Another \$50-million infusion would be needed next year, but Levy has not agreed to taking money from that fund in 2010. He calls for making \$14 million in reorganizations like turning over fuel tank inspections to the state. The plan also assumes \$10 million in restoration of state aid cuts, \$5 million in federal stimulus and \$6.2 million state authority to raise hotel room and phone taxes. Corso said \$28.4 million would be cut by keeping jobs vacant longer and cutting supply and equipment accounts.

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