ASCENSION JURORS CUT PROPOSED BUDGET AGAIN

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GONZALES — Ascension Parish police jurors Tuesday night continued to cut the parish's proposed 1987 budget and tentatively planned to lay off employees from some parish-sponsored agencies.

After slashing the general fund budget by nearly $400,000 last week, jurors picked up their budget-cutting ax again and reduced the proposed budget nearly $100,000 more at a special finance committee meeting here.

But the cuts are still not enough to make up for declining tax revenues locally and the loss of many state and federal dollars, Secretary-Treasurer Gwen LeBlanc said.

"That is not enough to balance the general fund," LeBlanc said.

The cuts recommended Tuesday must be ratified by the jury at its regular meeting Thursday night. Without more cuts, the general fund will experience an operating deficit of $575,487 next year and a year-end deficit of $306,000, LeBlanc said.

The loss of traditionally reliable revenue sources, including federal revenue sharing and state transportation funds, has left the jury's proposed 1987 budget unbalanced, LeBlanc said. The loss could total $2.3 million.

To complicate matters further, the parish's expenses have been increasing as more services were demanded by residents.

"Our revenues have not matched our expenditures in the past few years, resulting in operating deficits," LeBlanc said.

LeBlanc said parish department heads are cooperating with a 10 percent budget cut imposed by the jury last week.

"They're going along with the wishes of the jury," she said. "I don't think we'll have any problem with the response that we're already getting."

Jurors voted to recommend that two of the parish's four courthouse janitors be laid off and that the remaining janitors double-up on their work load. The layoffs would save the parish about $20,000 next year and $27,300 in following years.

Jurors Joseph U. Pierre and Raymond Julien voted against the recommendation. Pierre, who has said he opposes any proposed layoff, said he wants more time to think about the proposal.

"I think it's better than laying off four," Pierre said.

The finance committee also will recommend that civil defense duties be turned over to Sheriff Harold Tridico. The parish would realize a savings of about $1,300 in the transfer.

The switch would result in the removal of J.C. "Cobby" Walker and Bruno Ruggiero from their positions as civil defense coordinators. Julien, Pierre and Juror Thomas "Moose" Pearce voted against the proposal.

Jurors also voted to eliminate $35,000 from the proposed budget for flood control. Juror Darnell Martinez said the National Flood Insurance Program will reimburse residents with expenses for sand and sandbags incurred while fighting floodwaters.

Also cut was money for two clerical employees in the parish's municipal numbering system, whose layoffs will save the parish $16,700 next year.

Jurors tabled a proposal to lay off three food stamp workers, which would have cut $13,000 from the budget.

Other cuts still under consideration are laying off three workers from the parish Council on Aging, at a savings of $26,000 next year, and the removal of $7,600 from the county agent's budget for telephones and utilities.