Screen says C-P can withstand cuts

By JIM McDonnell
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The city-parish should be able to withstand the budget cuts implemented by state government this year with no employee layoffs or reduction in services, Mayor Pat Screen told members of the Metro Council's Finance and Executive Committee on Wednesday.

With the state and the city-parish operating on different fiscal years, only a portion of the cuts enacted by the Legislature in the recently concluded session will affect local government's 1986 budget. The impact of this year's portion can be offset with money on hand, Screen said.

Next year, however, city-parish officials will have to deal with a $3 million hole in the 1987 budget created by the state cuts unless state government manages to restore the funds between now and then.

The $3 million that will be missing from next year's budget does not include the money taken from municipal police and firefighters, who saw their state supplemental pay reduced this session by an average of 26 percent. That money goes directly from state government to eligible municipal employees and is not reflected in the city-parish budget.

Early in the year, the administration set aside $1,805,602 to deal with federal and state cuts. Screen introduced a budget supplement, approved by the committee Wednesday, appropriating $805,602 of the $1.8 million to cover the federal shortfall. The $1 million left is $63,680 short of the total amount lost in state aid for the remainder of this year, but that $63,680 can be taken care of out of the roughly $149,000 left in an undesignated fund balance left over from last year, Screen said.

"Baton Rouge is fortunate to have had a mayor and council that had the foresight to place that $1.805 million in a contingency fund," commented Mayor Pro Tem Mike Roubique afterward. "If we hadn't put that money aside, we'd be in $2 million worth of trouble right now."

Screen said that, as far as he knows, Baton Rouge is the only city in the state that does not have to make major cuts this year because of the state's actions. The city-parish wound up with about $3 million more than anyone had predicted at the end of 1985 because of the settlement of some large claims stemming from sales and use tax audits by the Finance Department's auditing division.

The year-end windfall combined with some unexpected revenue increases in categories other than sales taxes and the savings realized through last year's budget slashing measures made to avoid a deficit following a sales tax shortfall left Baton Rouge more than $8 million in the black at the end of last year.