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House and Senate Approve \$47 Million for USF Poly

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TALLAHASSEE | Construction money for the new University of South Florida Polytechnic campus and for badly needed repairs to buildings at Polk State College are in the budget following a weekend of negotiations between the Florida House and Senate.

The House, which had no money for Public Education Capital Outlay funds in its original budget, has agreed to \$289 million, about the amount of the fund the Senate had included in its version, Sen. J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales, the Senate's budget chief, said.

At least half of that amount is for renovation and repairs for colleges and universities. The remainder is for construction and includes the \$47 million for USF Poly building construction at the proposed new campus in the southwest quadrant of the Interchange 4 and Polk Parkway interchange, money that was vetoed by Gov. Charlie Crist last year in an apparent feud with Alexander.

If the agreement holds and Gov. Rick Scott allows the allocation to stand, the construction money will be available July 1.

Alexander, however, warned that while budget negotiators reached agreement over the weekend, there is no guarantee until both sides sign off on the entire budget.

"It's not over until it is over," Alexander said Monday. "But we have agreement on almost everything in the budget except health care."



An architect's rendering in April, 2010, shows the proposed layout of the new USF Poly campus near I-4 and the Polk Parkway.

Officials at PSC, however, are still holding their collective breaths waiting to learn if the \$10 million renovation for the learning center/library is there.

"We know we have \$400,000 for repairs and we are appreciative, but we are still hoping for the library renovation money as well," Polk State President Eileen Holden said.

Both House and Senate sides still are far apart on health care with the House having more money for Medicaid while the Senate has less.

"It's going to be a long night," Alexander said Monday.

Both House and Senate must agree on a budget by midnight today in order for the Legislature to end Friday, the final day of its 2011 session.

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