

Washington Legislature still split over taxes

The Legislature could be here a long time.

By [Andrew Garber](#)

Seattle Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — The Legislature could be here a long time.

A weekend of negotiations between the governor and Democratic leaders in the House and Senate apparently led nowhere when it came to the impasse over taxes.

The Senate still wants a temporary general sales-tax increase to help close a \$2.8 billion budget shortfall, and the House does not.

With the Legislature in its second week of a special session, no one seems optimistic about wrapping up soon.

"I'm concerned we're going to be here longer than I hoped, perhaps much longer," said Sen. Ed Murray, D-Seattle, chairman of the Senate Democratic caucus.

The special session started March 15 and can last 30 days. Gov. Chris Gregoire said she wanted the Legislature to be done by this past Sunday.

Both the House and Senate have agreed to raise roughly \$800 million through taxes to help close the shortfall. And they've even agreed on certain steps, such as boosting the cigarette tax.

There's also broad agreement to make several hundred million dollars in cuts and to use one-time fixes such as federal aid and reserves to help bridge the gap.

Lawmakers have been unable to compromise on the sales tax. The Senate first proposed a temporary three-tenths of a cent increase and recently dropped it to two-tenths of a cent.

Murray said Senate Democrats met Monday and reaffirmed the caucus' support for increasing the sales tax.

House leaders have said they don't have the votes to boost the sales tax. However, House Majority Leader Lynn Kessler said it may be time for her caucus to count votes again and see if there's been any change in support. "Then you'd know how rigid the impasse is," she said.

Kessler, who supports a temporary sales-tax increase, said she brought up the idea with House Speaker Frank Chopp, D-Seattle, but no decision has been made. Chopp has opposed increasing the sales tax.

Andrew Garber: 360-236-8266 or agarber@seattletimes.com