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Virginia Gov. McAuliffe tells agencies funds won't be lost if unused

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By Dave Ress, dress@dailypress.com 9:04 p.m. EDT, June 2, 2014

Since Virginia's money is likely to be tight going forward, the use-it-or-lose-it approach many managers in government and business take to spending as they come to the final days of a budget year is not a good idea now, Gov. Terry McAuliffe's office is telling top state officials.

State agency chiefs should be looking at the money they have in hand now and be thinking about designating it to offset possible budget cuts next year, Chief of Staff Paul Reagan said in a memo circulated late last month.

He's asking them to say by the end of this week if they expect spending to come in under budget, and if so, if they'd like to use those savings to ease the pain of possible budget cuts next year.

Reagan is asking because the state's revenue is coming in more slowly than expected.

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"This is saying it won't be lose it if you don't use it," McAuliffe spokesman Brian Coy said.

Spending often runs under budget - last year, state government spending was \$562 million, or 3 percent, less than budgeted, state financial reports show. Revenue was 2 percent higher than budgeted.

Unlike most local governments, though, the state doesn't make public quarterly or monthly reports on how closely spending is tracking the budget. It does monitor revenue - mostly taxes - monthly.

Coy said Reagan's request to state agencies is meant to get a handle on actual spending from the general fund - the pool of money raised from state taxpayers for general purposes.

State officials had been counting on collecting about \$165 million more this year for the general fund than the year before, an increase of just under 1 percent. As of April 30, they were running about \$162 million ahead of the fiscal year 2013, but collections took a dip in early May, running about \$300 million below 2013 levels.

If June comes in close to last year's level, the state will start its next fiscal year with about a \$180 million unreserved balance instead of the \$478 million both the House of Delegates and the state Senate are currently counting in their dueling versions of the state budget.

Legislators have zoomed in on the May shortfall and are saying the budget for the next two years, which they have yet to agree upon, will likely need spending cuts on the order of \$1 billion to \$1.35

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billion. They want to do that to build up the state's reserves.

Virginia's been running down its general fund reserves for some time now - the state started its current two-year budget with a reserve of \$1.35 billion.

In his letter to agency heads, Reagan said it is likely that this year's revenue will come in under budget, but that it is too soon to say exactly how Virginia will end its fiscal year on June 30.

But the large cash balances built into this year's budget mean no cuts are necessary in the final weeks of the year, while those balances could be carried over to ease any hit to budgets in fiscal year 2015, he said. For agency heads, the downside of the move is that if they designate money for next year, they won't be able to use it this year.

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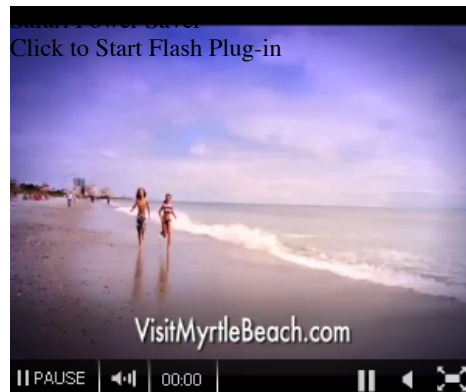
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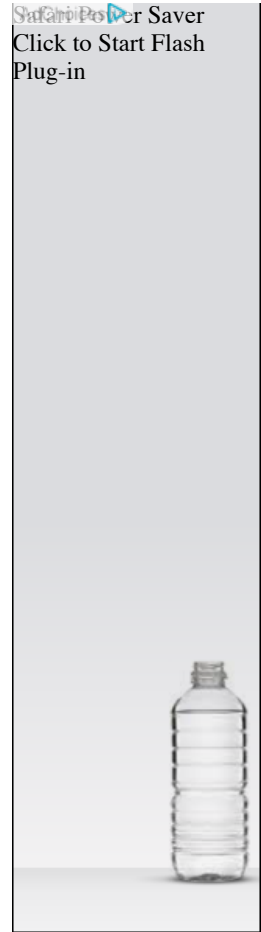
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