

Absent lawmakers still drawing per diem pay

By William L. Spence of the Tribune
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BOISE - House lawmakers continued to collect their per diem Thursday, a day after adjourning the 2009 session.

Only a handful of representatives actually showed up - mostly Democrats and a couple of majority leaders - but they'll keep getting their taxpayer-funded per diem (including weekends) whether they're here or not, until such time as the road funding dispute ends and the Senate joins them in adjourning.

Legislators who live within commuting distance of Boise receive \$49 per day during the session; those who rent an apartment or rooms here receive \$122 per day.

Although conversations continued Thursday between House and Senate leaders and the governor's staff, there's no evidence of a pending resolution to the impasse. The governor is maintaining his call for at least \$75 million per year in new revenue for highway maintenance, which is about \$50 million more than House Republicans are willing to approve.

"The House has been emphatically clear on its position, but we're willing to entertain offers," said Assistant Majority Leader Scott Bedke, R-Oakley.

Democrats held a brief news conference Thursday morning, noting their desire to work towards a constructive solution; however, they didn't have a specific proposal to offer. They have previously suggested several alternatives, including a voter-approved local option gas or transportation taxes, delayed implementation of a new gas tax, and re-examining the state's 81 sales tax exemptions - which collectively cost about \$1.6 billion in lost revenue each year - to see whether they're still needed.

The Senate was in session for about two hours in the morning. It addressed about nine bills before adjourning for the day. It will be back today and again Monday, the 113th day of the session, when the House is expected to return.

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