Calif. Dems pass austerity budget; Brown expected to sign it

By Shane Goldmacher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — The Legislature passed an austerity budget Tuesday night that would cut from universities, courts and the poor, shutter 70 parks and threaten schools but would not — by officials' own admission — restore California's long-term financial health.

The UC and Cal State systems would face about a 23 percent funding cut, among the steepest in the proposal. Cash grants for the needy would fall, a program to help thousands of teen mothers get an education would be suspended and hundreds of millions of dollars would be siphoned from mental health programs.

The state park closures would be the first ever. Courts would face what the state's chief justice has described as crippling reductions.

In an optimistic forecast, lawmakers built in an extra $4 billion of revenue. If all that cash does not materialize, K-12 schools — which had so far survived negotiations relatively unscathed — would face a cutback equal to shortening the academic year by seven days.

"These cuts will forever haunt our conscience," said Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield (D-Woodland Hills), who chairs the budget committee in the lower house. "However, those of us who do vote for this budget can take comfort with the knowledge that we did what was necessary to move ourselves toward stability."

Many of the cuts were adopted in March; more were undertaken Tuesday as a rare summer thunderstorm blanketed the city shortly before lawmakers began passing their second budget in as many weeks. Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed the first one but is expected to sign the new package before a fresh budget year begins Friday.

Brown lost his months-long bid to win enough Republican votes to extend temporary taxes that would have helped balance the books. Instead, he forged a deal with Democrats, who do not have enough votes to raise taxes alone.

As a result, temporary sales and vehicle tax hikes enacted in 2009 will officially come off the books Friday.

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