Rainy Day Fund and Other Solutions to Budget Shortfalls

Introduction	Utah has generally been acknowledged as a well managed, fiscally responsible
	state. The state is the recipient of the highest bond ratings by the various rating
	agencies and continues to be highly ranked by national publications relative to
	financial management. However, state governments in general have fiscal
	structures that pose a particular problem during economic recessions As the
	economy enters a downturn, falling employment slows growth in state
	revenues, while rising poverty and unemployment increase the demand for state
	expenditures. This problem widens the gap between expenditures and revenues
	during periods of economic recession. Therefore, it becomes important that the
	State of Utah have plans in place to deal with this eventuality.

Budget Shortfalls The annual budgetary operating balance (surplus or deficit) is the difference between current revenues and current spending in any given fiscal year. Budget shortfalls are inevitable in government finance. There are several causes of budget shortfalls, and because they are interrelated they often arise simultaneously. Budget shortfalls can either be short term or structural in nature.

Short Term (Cyclical) Deficits

Generally, short term deficits arise out of recessions. Reductions in rate of revenue growth occur while demands for state services increase. However, over economic cycles of growth and recession, surpluses and deficits tend to cancel each other out.

Structural Deficits

Structural deficits occur when a state spends at a higher rate than it grows over a long period of time. Current revenue sources falling short of current service requirements can be covered by short term surpluses. But when a downturn occurs, a state with an underlying structural deficit may not be able to cover current service requirements.



The following chart compares the rates of growth of both revenues and expenditures over ten years.

Historically the rates of growth of revenues have exceeded the rates of growth of expenditures. However, in the last few years there has been a lot of fluctuation in the expenditure pattern. Most of this variability can be attributed to expenditures for transportation. Based on the historical patterns Utah should be safe from structural deficits over the next few years. However, if spending patterns increase significantly the state could face potential structural deficits.

State governments have little choice when it comes to balancing their budget. Forty-nine states are required by law to balance their budgets. Therefore, when economic downturns occur, the state must be prepared to implement measures which will allow this balancing act to occur. However, in order to implement these measures, we must first review the potential causes of shortfalls.

General Causes of Inaccurate Revenue and Expenditure Projections

Budget Shortfalls

Once forecasts are accepted and a budget is adopted, it is essential to track both the economic variables and revenues against actual results. Analysts need to keep abreast of changing economic conditions to ensure that they can prepare realistic estimates of future revenue and to understand economic reasons for differences between forecasts and actual collections. State revenue projections are certain to differ from actual collections, the challenge is to minimize the difference. Under the best conditions, forecasters' projections are within a couple of percentage points of actual revenues. For the state of Utah a two percent error would amount to approximately \$65,000,000 in FY 1999. This is significant in that Utah's Rainy Day Fund is only estimated to be \$92,390,660 for FY 1999. Hence, to address budget reductions resulting from a two percent error in revenue forecasts, approximately two thirds of the Rainy Day Fund would be required.

The following table shows the forecast error between the original revenue estimates and actual revenue collections.

Year	Error Percent (Increase or Decrease)
FY 1990	8.86%
FY 1991	4.65%
FY 1992	3.64%
FY 1993	2.92%
FY 1994	6.13%
FY 1995	6.10%
FY 1996	5.66%
FY 1997	0.60%
FY 1998	1.48%

Federal Actions

Federal actions have implications for both spending and revenue Uncertainty in federal revenue allocations makes budget determinations difficult. When federal funds don't materialize the state is forced to determine if these funds should be replaced by state funds. In Utah this could prove to be a significant problem for Transportation, Human Services, and the Olympics. Other expenditure problems include unfunded mandates and mandated inflationary increases particularly in the areas of health and human services. For example in the Office of Recovery Services, federal mandates have caused a slowdown in the growth of collections.

On the revenue side, many states link income tax to the federal system. Therefore, federal changes which increase or decrease exemptions or deductions, affect state revenues.

Excessive Earmarking

Earmarking is the process whereby funds are set aside from the free revenues of the state for a specific, statutorily defined purpose.

States need the flexibility of being able to adjust to budget shortfalls using both revenue and expenditure options. Budget flexibility is limited since earmarking reduces the revenue available to cover any shortfalls. In the past five years the Legislature has allocated approximately \$162,200,000 in new revenues to restricted use. The largest portion of this allocation has been for highway construction, with other significant funding going for water programs. Additionally, Utah's largest funding source, the Uniform School Fund is dedicated exclusively for the use of education which further limits the flexibility of the Legislature in times of budgetary crisis. Transportation fund revenues have also been restricted in their use.

Advantages of Earmarking:

- 1. Earmarking can link a particular government service to taxes paid by users of the service.
- 2. Earmarking can guarantee that particular programs are funded at some minimum threshold level.
- 3. Earmarking can support desirable purposes for which it is otherwise difficult to secure sufficient funding.

Disadvantages of Earmarking:

- 1. Expenditures financed by earmarked revenue sources are not generally subject to the same level of oversight as other items budgeted by state government.
- 2. Earmarking impacts the budget process. Expenditure levels for earmarked programs can reduce funds available for other programs.
- 3. Separate accounting and audit scrutiny may increase the cost of administering programs financed by earmarked revenue sources.

Excessive tax cuts as	A potential problem facing state governments is the imposition of long term tax				
a cause of budget	breaks in periods of unsustainable economic growth. States create the potential				
shortfalls	for structural deficit when these tax breaks are not made in conjunction with				
	long term spending decreases or tax base expansions. Tax systems must create sufficient revenue to cover spending needs that existing policies generate.				
Growth in State	Growth in State revenues is often correlated with the growth in the economy, at				

Revenues Crowth in State revenues is often correlated with the growth in the economy, at the national as well as the State level. Economists continue to marvel at the strength of the national economy. The national economy is experiencing the longest period of peacetime expansion since the end of World War II. However many signals indicating a slowing of this expansion are present in the economy.

For example, debt is increasing and savings rates are decreasing. State budget analysts are continuing to see growth in revenues but are also noting signs of economic slow down. Economic growth at the State level can be heavily influenced by certain sectors of the economy, which has the effect of driving the growth in revenues. However, other sectors of the State economy may not experience parallel growth patterns. The most effective example of this in the current State economy is the growth of construction.

As an illustration of slowing economic indicators, the following charts illustrate the growth in construction employment and permitted values over a ten year period.



Source: Council of Economic Advisers: Revenue Assumption Committee



Source: Council of Economic Advisers: Revenue Assumption Committee

Diversity as a	A key to economic stability is diversity. The combined revenue from all sources				
Stabilizing Factor	is more stable than the revenue from any one individual tax. Lack of balance and diversity in a state's revenue system is often a precursor to budget problems. States with narrow tax bases are more vulnerable to economic downturns. Utah, fortunately, has a diversified economy and tax base. However, Utah has not been immune to the changing nature of the American economy. Specifically, consumption has shifted from goods to services but the tax base has not shifted to take this into account. Over time this could prove to have significant revenue implications. It is also important to remember that changes in tax laws and tax rates also influence tax revenue. Special attention must be paid to distinguish fluctuations related to the economy from fluctuations related to legislative action.				
Expenditure Forecasting Models	In an attempt to better address budgetary needs states are beginning to develop expenditure forecasting models. Expenditure forecasting models utilize caseload trends, economic variables and cost analysis to measure future demands for state resources. The Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst is in the process of developing interactive expenditure models for the FY 2001 budget cycle. These models will be used in the budget process to view how changes in economic variables and federal action would affect major budget				

areas. It is hoped that these models will allow the Legislature to see which factors are driving government growth. Expenditure models will help in long term financial planning.

What Can States Do to Manage Budget Shortfalls?

The choice of a strategy will often depend on the amount of time remaining in a fiscal year and the severity of the shortfall. States must also decide if the shortfall is short term or structural in nature. Structural deficits require long run solutions. Strategies to manage budget shortfalls can be listed in the following general categories:

Short Term Measures

- 1) Delaying or eliminating capital expenditure and maintenance or shifting them from current funds to bond finance.
- 2) Delaying payment to state employees or payments to vendors.
- 3) Deferring tax refunds into the beginning of the next fiscal year.
- 4) Eliminating sales tax vendor compensation fees.
- 5) Reducing employee related expenses such as travel, or imposing hiring freezes.
- 6) Shifting money to the General Fund from sources with a surplus.
- 7) Tapping budget stabilization funds. (Rainy Day Fund)
- 8) Accelerating tax collections.
- 9) Postponing payments to or changing investment assumptions for state retirement systems.

Budget Reductions

Budget cuts are a common strategy in the elimination of budget shortfalls. The effect of a budget cut is immediately apparent. Budget cuts have the advantage of forcing agencies and the legislature to take a serious look at spending priorities. As an alternative to budget cuts some states have implemented budget hold back provisions which require that a certain percent of an agency budget be reserved and not spent without legislative approval.

Revenue Increases

As an option to budget cuts, the Legislature could choose to raise revenue during periods of economic downturn. Increased revenue alternatives include:

- 1) Removing earmarking provisions
- 2) Reducing state allocations to local government
- 3) Raising or imposing fees
- 4) Increasing excise taxes
- 5) Imposing new taxes
- 6) Increasing tax rates

Before imposing increased revenue requirements, the existing system should be evaluated with respect to current tax rates and levels, distribution of taxes, and the effects on business climate.

Slowing Economic Utah's growth as measured by employment and migration, peaked in 1994 and has consistently slowed since. This move to more sustainable levels of economic growth occurred with relatively little disruption to the state. This is due to the positive economic characteristics operating in Utah such as a diversified economy, strong labor force, and an attractive business climate. Growth of construction has been a major factor in the economy's stability, and should continue to be closely tracked.

Utah is in its 11th year of economic expansion. However, the expansion cannot continue indefinitely and the state should decide in advance what measures to implement in times of economic slowdown. The circumstances producing economic growth cannot continue indefinitely. The rapidly escalating costs of many state programs have strained the ability of revenue systems to produce sufficient funds for these programs.

The following table compares the rates of expenditure growth for three of the high growth areas of government to total General Fund expenditure growth.

Year	Corrections Growth	Courts Growth	Medicaid Growth	GF Growth
FY 1991	14.9%	8.1%	20.0%	7.4%
FY 1992	9.5%	9.2%	12.6%	5.5%
FY 1993	8.7%	10.2%	20.1%	7.4%
FY 1994	5.5%	1.2%	5.0%	6.4%
FY 1995	15.8%	13.4%	17.9%	10.8%
FY 1996	18.4%	8.2%	9.4%	10.1%
FY 1997	12.0%	4.2%	6.1%	13.6%
FY 1998	10.9%	11.3%	4.2%	(2.5%)
FY 1999	9.7%	7.2%	2.7%	5.1%
FY 2000	7.3%	3.9%	6.0%	3.5%

If growth in key areas of state government continues to exceed state expenditure growth as a whole, there is the potential for state structural deficit.

Budgets can be affected by declining economies either through decreases in revenues or increases in program expenditures triggered by increased unemployment and poverty Changes related to the move towards a global economy can also trigger changes in economic well being. For example, the move towards electronic commerce and the shift toward a service economy lead to an erosion of the taxable base.

Indicators of Economic Slowing				
Economic Indicators	FY 1994	FY 2000		
Population Growth	2.7%	1.7%		
Migration	22,800	3,200		
Average Wage Increase *	2.4%	4.4%		
Car and Truck Sales	10.3%	(1.0%)		
Taxable Sales	10%	5.2%		
* Wage increases put downward pressure on profits.				

Source: Council of Economic Advisers: Revenue Assumption Committee

Action for consideration: Rainy Day Fund

Budget stabilization funds, or Rainy Day Funds, are the most common tool states have developed to cope with budget shortfalls. Forty five states have budget stabilization funds. Thirty two states have capped the size of the fund. However, very few states have reached their legal cap. The concept of the fund is fairly simple: Revenues are saved when state finances are healthy and made available when the state's revenues take a downturn.

Stabilization funds will help to steady the fiscal resources of the state in periods of economic slowing. Economies are not isolated. When the economy is weak and revenues decline, the demand for needs-based services rises forcing governments to cut other services and/or raise taxes.

Utah set up its Budget Reserve Account, July 1, 1986 to create a reserve for operating deficits or other emergencies. According to UCA 63-38-2.5 twenty-five percent of any year-end General Fund surplus is transferred to the Rainy Day Fund. The fund is capped at eight percent of the General Fund appropriation amount for the fiscal year in which the surplus occurred. Appropriations may only be used to cover operating deficits or retroactive tax refunds. Due to changes occurring in the 1996 Second Special Session, the Rainy Day Fund may now be used to fund operating deficits in Public Education when authorized by the Legislature.

Utah's Rainy Day Fund was used in 1993 and 1994 to settle a class action lawsuit filed against the State by federal retirees. In 1994 and 1995 the Legislature appropriated a total of \$35 million to replenish the fund. The balance in the fund as of FY 1998 is \$88.5 million, which equates to approximately 2.9 percent of the GF/USF appropriations.



The following graph shows the historical balances in the Rainy Day Fund.

Rainy Day Fund -	Surplus from the Uniform School Fund is not currently transferred to the Rainy
Uniform School	Day Fund. The Analyst recommends that a Rainy Day Fund for Education be
Fund	set up which would transfer 25 percent of the Uniform School Fund surplus in a
	given year. This would allow the Legislature to help hold education harmless in times of economic downturn.

The following graph shows how much would have gone into a Uniform School Fund budget stabilization account had this policy been in place:



By establishing reserves, Rainy Day Funds provide more assurance that a budget plan can be accomplished and enhance budget stability thus building taxpayer confidence. The existence of reserves reduces the likelihood that unexpected mid-year budget cuts will be needed and reduces the magnitude of cuts if they can't be avoided. Rainy Day Funds also provide a formal plan for dealing with revenue shortfalls. Prudent financial management requires not only paying today's bills in a timely manner, but also providing for an uncertain future.

Basic Arguments in Favor of Rainy Day Funds:

- 1) They promote budget stability by allowing state officials to avoid ad hoc budget cuts or tax increases during budget shortfalls
- 2) They buy time for state officials to make better informed decisions about longer-term solutions to budget problems
- 3) They serve as repositories of excess revenues, reducing the use of one-time revenues to fund ongoing expenditures
- 4) They weigh in the state's favor with bond agencies

Basic Arguments Against Rainy Day Funds:

- 1) They contain excess revenues that could be returned to taxpayers or used for programs.
- 2) They serve as a temporary crutch to address budget problems, which

delays permanent solutions to budget problems

- 3) They serve as a tempting source of revenue to fund programs before shortfalls occur
- 4) They may be inaccessible in cases where bond agencies threaten to lower a states bond rating

Wall Street analysts recommend maintaining a budget stabilization balance between 3 and 5 percent of general fund budgets. However, most states fall significantly below recommended levels. Utah is currently carrying a Rainy Day Fund of 2.9 percent of the General Fund/Uniform School Fund Budget and 1.4 percent of the total budget. Appendix 1 shows the budget reserve amounts from other states. Appendix 2 details the Rainy Day Fund requirements for each state.

Some economists contend that Wall Street's three to five percent recommendation was not intended to serve as a guideline for states preparing for a recession. They assert that reserve balances of this size were only estimated to be large enough to carry states through normal economic contingencies, such as an error in forecasting tax receipts. As mentioned previously, a two percent error in forecasting revenues would eliminate two thirds of the existing Rainy Day Fund. These economists state that a five percent reserve balance would not be sufficient to counteract even a mild recession. However, they acknowledge that in some states such as Utah, which is experiencing higher than average population growth, diversion of large amounts of money into a contingency fund may be inadvisable if it causes other critical spending needs to go unmet.

Bond rating companies are especially interested in the contingency plans of states during times of economic recession. Bond rating companies review state finances to see if there are revenue balances or reserves, which could be called upon in the event of revenue shortfalls. The ending General Fund balance and stabilization fund are the most common forms of revenue available to meet an issuer's contingencies. Ratings agencies acknowledge that a budget stabilization fund equal to five percent of the GF/USF budget is a prudent level to put aside for an economic downturn. However, Utah would require an additional 63.6 million in order to reach this level.

Utah is still in a strong position economically. Employment growth for example is estimated to average 2.8 percent in FY 1999. Additionally average annual wage growth is strong at 4.5 percent for FY 1999. However, there is still a concern about whether the state is adequately prepared for an economic downturn. In FY 1980 and FY 1981, the last major recession and budget shortfall period, GF/USF appropriations were cut by 4 percent and 3.5 percent

What is an appropriate Rainy Day Fund balance?

respectively. At that time the state did not have a Rainy Day Fund. If an equivalent shortfall were to occur the state could survive on its Rainy Day Fund balance for less than one year. In FY 1986 revenues dropped by approximately \$25 million. However, unallocated balances resulting from the flood tax increase were used at this time to prevent expenditure reductions. Utah's unallocated balance at this time is extremely small.

Medicaid Restricted Account

In 1996, the Medicaid Transition Account was created to capture all unexpended General Funds appropriated to the Division of Health Care Finance at the end of each fiscal year for future use in providing medical assistance coverage. State funds for Medicaid are used to draw down federal dollars at nearly a three to one match.

The account held a high of \$19.8 million in FY 1998, but is estimated to decrease to \$11.7 million at the end of FY 2000 because appropriations have been made from it. The Medical Assistance Program's annual budget is \$732.2 million for FY 2000, of which \$145.0 million are General Funds. The \$11.7 million held in the Transition Account is only 1.6 percent of the total Medical Assistance program, and 8 percent of its General Fund portion. As a result caution is recommended before any withdrawals.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) was created as a block grant program by Congress in 1997 to replace the federally funded Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program. TANF removes the entitlement character of AFDC and is an employment-based approach to assistance. Utah must maintain a specified level of State funds to satisfy a "maintenance-of-effort" requirement. State funding reductions have brought Utah to the minimum required State funding level.

Recent changes at the federal level have authorized TANF dollars to be used to replace other federal funds, including Social Services Block Grant Funding and Child Care Block Grant. A transfer of TANF funds was made for FY 1999 to replace \$5,300,000 in Social Services Block Grant funding, freeing a commensurate amount of General Fund which was used by the Legislature for other purposes. Projections estimate that approximately \$2,900,000 of TANF funding will be transferred each year of the remaining TANF Program allocation.

The 1999 Legislature did not fully fund a Child Care State match funding request to obtain the full allocation of federal Child Care Block Grant funds. This will require additional TANF funding to offset increases in Child Care

Action for consideration: Cautious expenditure of other reserve accounts. needs. The "Rainy Day" Fund is the balance of the federal allocation of TANF funds through 2002 and not an additional discretionary fund. Latest projections estimate that Utah may break even under the current economic conditions, but could experience a funding shortfall if the economy takes a downturn and there is a significant increase in new cases.

- Recommendations
 1. The Analyst recommends the creation of a new Rainy Day Fund for education which would be funded from 25 percent of the Uniform School Fund surplus in any given year. The criteria for transfers in and out of the fund would be the same as with the existing fund.
 - 2. The Analyst recommends that the Legislature consider placing up to 25 percent of the tobacco settlement revenue in the Rainy Day Fund.
 - 3. The Analyst recommends the development of "hold back" provisions to be readily implemented if needed.
 - 4. The Analyst recommends extra caution be considered prior to the FY 2001 appropriation of funds for general state purposes from the temporary assistance to needy families (TANF) Rainy Day Funds and the Medicaid Transition Account.
 - 5. The Analyst recommends the process of budget reductions should be considered more in terms of controlling growth than actual reductions. Any growth funding should be the result of economic need as discussed in the growth model section.

	Budget Stabilization	Funds (as a % of	f General Fund)		
	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999		
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New England	\$1,196.4	\$1,700.1	\$1,896.8	5.2%	5.5%
Connecticut	241.0	336.9	498.6	3.5	5.0
Maine	45.7	69.5	64.4	3.7	3.0
Massachusetts	799.3	1,177.3	1,213.3	6.6	6.6
New Hampshire	20.0	20.0	20.0	2.2	2.1
Rhode Island	55.3	60.4	62.8	3.2	3.1
Vermont	35.1	36.0	37.7	4.5	5.0
Middle Atlantic	\$1,511.0	\$2,051.1	\$2,313.0	2.6%	2.8%
Delaware	92.9	100.9	114.1	5.3	5.0
Maryland	490.1	616.2	632.4	7.9	7.5
New Jersey	388.4	500.7	500.7	2.9	2.8
New York	317.0	400.0	400.0	1.3	1.2
Pennsylvania	222.6	433.3	665.8	2.5	3.7
Great Lakes	\$2,446.8	\$2,352.6	\$2,411.9	4.0%	3.9%
Illinois	0.0	0.0	0.0	none	none
Indiana	466.1	486.9	510.7	5.8	5.8
Michigan	1,152.4	1,003.0	994.3	11.7	11.3
Ohio	828.3	862.7	906.9	6.0	6.2
Wisconsin	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Plains	\$1,314.4	\$1,634.8	\$1,728.9	5.8%	5.6%
Iowa	430.0	439.2	437.4	10.1	9.7
Kansas	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Minnesota	697.3	863.2	963.2	8.5	8.5
Missouri	121.4	170.0	175.0	2.6	2.5
Nebraska	41.0	132.6	118.2	6.7	5.3
North Dakota	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
South Dakota	24.7	29.8	35.1	4.2	4.8
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Southeast	\$2.375.2	\$2,589.9	\$2,926.4	5.0%	3.3%
Alabama	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Arkansas	0.0	0.0	0.0	none	none
Florida	686.0	786.9	843.9	4.6	4.7

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1 (CONTINUED)

Budget Stabilization Funds (as a % of General Fund)					
	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999 Eat		
Georgia	333.9	333.5	Est. 355.5	2.8	3.0
Kentucky	200.0	200.0	230.5	3.3	3.7
Louisiana	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mississippi	209.0	221.0	233.0	7.6	7.5
North Carolina	500.9	522.5	562.3	4.6	4.5
South Carolina	127.0	130.4	137.6	2.6	2.8
Tennessee	101.0	101.0	127.0	1.7	2.0
Virginia	160.0	227.0	365.0	2.6	3.6
West Virginia	57.4	67.6	71.6	2.7	2.8
Southwest	\$760.2	\$817.7	\$900.5	2.2%	2.3%
Arizona	307.1	375.8	465.2	7.1	7.9
New Mexico	136.2	128.9	119.1	4.2	3.8
Oklahoma	308.9	254.4	254.4	5.6	5.2
Texas	8.0	58.6	61.8	0.2	0.3
Rocky Mountain	\$227.0	\$331.4	\$325.9	3.1%	2.8%
Colorado	166.7	187.2	207.0	4.0	4.0
Idaho	27.5	36.0	36.0	2.5	2.2
Montana	0.0	0.0	0.0	none	none
Utah	82.8	82.9	82.9	2.7	2.6
Wyoming	0.0	25.3	0.0	5.0	0.0
Far West	\$3,929.1	\$5,698.1	\$4,726.1	7.7%	6.0%
Alaska	3,338.1	3,496.1	3051.1	148.2	131.9
California	462.0	1,782.0	1,255.0	3.3	2.2
Hawaii	00	0.0	0.0	none	none
Nevada	129.0	129.0	129.0	8.8	8.3
Oregon	0.0	0.0	0.0	none	none
Washington	0.0	291.0	291.0	3.1	3.0
Other Jurisdictions					
District of Columbia	\$0.0	\$0.0	\$0.0	0.0%	0.0%

Source: NCSL