Gov. Scott Walker's aggressively austere budget is one step from becoming law, but state officials say its effects are already being felt across Wisconsin.

The state Senate on Thursday night passed the $66 billion plan, which uses a combination of budget cuts and corporate tax breaks in an attempt to close an estimated $3 billion budget hole while trying to spur the economy and promote business growth.

The measure passed at about 10 p.m. on Thursday on a 19-14 party line vote, and Walker said he will sign it before June 30.

"I remain confident that the Senate and Assembly passed a budget that met and exceeded the goal of balancing the budget by cutting spending and not increasing taxes," Walker said.

Across the state, professionals in the areas of health care, education and business say final passage is really just a period at the end of the sentence.

"If you are looking for when this stuff will hit the fan, you can stop looking," said Miles Turner, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators. "It is already happening."

Senators began their debate over the budget about 1 p.m. on Thursday, some 10 hours after the Assembly wrapped up its 13-hour session. The Assembly passed the measure 60-38, with all Republicans and one independent voting for it and all 38 Democrats against. The 99-member Assembly has one vacant seat.

During the contentious session, Democrats painted Republicans as heartless and Republicans accused Democrats of being naive. It didn't take long Thursday for the discussion in the Senate, considered by some the more deliberative body, to match that tone.

"The Republican Party has disdain for the working class," said state Sen. Bob Jauch, D-Poplar. "They are abandoning everything that is good about this great state."

"(This budget) takes away from the many to give more to the few," said Senate Minority Leader Mark Miller, D-Monona.

But Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau praised the plan, saying it will fix the "mess" left by Democrats.

"We kept our promises to the people of Wisconsin, and we did it without pushing the problems off to the next generation," he said.

"This budget brings a long-overdue change to a broken government."

Walker's budget has been controversial since it was introduced in March. The measure aims to reduce the state's structural deficit by about 90 percent by 2013, from $2.5 billion to $250 million. To do this, it cuts more than $1 billion from public schools and the University of Wisconsin system. It also holds property taxes practically flat, which severely limits local officials' ability to recoup lost revenues.

The budget takes some $500 million from Medicaid programs, and places an enrollment cap on Family Care, a program aimed at keeping poor, elderly people out of nursing homes. It also eliminates a significant amount of state and federal funding from nine Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin health centers.

The centers provide medical exams, cancer screenings, birth control and testing for sexually transmitted diseases to more than 12,000 uninsured women in communities like Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Eau Claire and Kenosha. Abortion care is not provided at health centers that receive public funds.

"That's about $1 million in state and federal funding that we use to help thousands of women who have nowhere else to go," said Teri Huyck, President of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin. "This cut will hurt."
Huyck said officials with Planned Parenthood are already trying to figure out how to cover all of their clients, despite the drastic reduction in funds. She said the budget also jeopardizes Wisconsin's BadgerCare Family Planning Program, which helps more than 57,000 people get preventive reproductive health care throughout the state.

"This irresponsible agenda is going to cost all of us," she said.

Turner feels similarly stressed about the budget. He said school systems have been dealing with fallout from the budget since December, when officials started planning for the next school year.

"Budget cuts, layoffs and retirements," he said. "It's already happening and it's been happening for months."

Officials have not tallied the total for teacher retirements statewide, but according to Dan Rossmiller, government affairs director for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, reports suggest the number has doubled over recent years.

More than 130 Madison teachers are retiring this month, a 62 percent increase from the average number of retirements over the previous five years. And while the district plans to fill all of the positions, officials said the loss of so many more veteran teachers could have a noticeable effect on students and novice teachers.

But for every person who fears the passage of Walker's budget, there is another one who applauds the measure's fiscal restraint. They feel the governor's approach will ultimately lead to putting the state on better financial footing.

Already, the country's three major credit agencies affirmed Wisconsin's credit ratings, something Walker said is a sign of the state's improved economic climate.

Fitzgerald said he's hopeful for the future of the Legislature as well as the state.

"I'm hopeful that with the conclusion of this vote we're about take was can move forward as a Senate and develop a strategy that's bipartisan and work together," Fitzgerald said.

As he spoke, a protester in the gallery called out that she wants her "democracy back."