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Residents urged to speak out against Taft's budget

By Kendall S. Cable, kcable@advertiser-tribune

Tax cuts proposed by Gov. Bob Taft are harmful to Ohio citizens, an activist told a group of local officials Thursday.

Attica, Venice Township, and Seneca East Public Library representatives gathered Thursday at the Attica Village Office along with Dale Butland, Campaign to Stop Ohio's Slide (SOS) communications director, for a press conference to voice disapproval of Governor Bob Taft's proposed budget.

These representatives encouraged Seneca County residents of the 13th Ohio Senate District to contact Senator Jeffry Armbruster to voice their disapproval of the measure and recommend that he go back to the drawing board.

Representatives were themselves encouraged to join SOS, a newly-formed, non-partisan organization in opposition to the proposed budget with membership including: Ohio Federation of Teachers, Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, Service Employees International Union 1199, Ohio Head Start, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, Organize! Ohio, Lorain County Sheriff's Office, Lorain Education Association, and Ohio State Troopers Association.

"First of all, the tax cuts that are a part of that (budget) are overwhelmingly favoring the wealthiest Ohioans," Butland said.

"When I say wealthiest, I mean people earning over \$200,000 a year. To pay for this giveaway, they have enormous budget cuts at the local level for cities, villages, townships, libraries, law enforcement, police, fire, EMS and so on.

"We (SOS) just think that it is not a very good thing because it is basically a shell game. If you are at the local level, you are either going to have to go without those services or you are going to have to raise your taxes locally to pay for it. In that sense it is a shell game."

Butland continued by explaining that personal income tax rates would be reduced by 21 percent, but taxpayers in the middle to low income brackets would barely, if at all, be impacted by this tax break due to other tax

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increases proposed in the budget including electricity, cigarettes, and alcohol.

"According to figures by Policy Matters Ohio, a non-partisan think tank, a person earning \$43,000 annually will actually go up \$12 once the tax increases are factored in," Butland said.

"If you earn \$200,000, your taxes will be cut by \$6,800. If you earn between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year, the average tax cut would be \$166. If you earn even up to \$66,000 a year, your taxes will be cut by less than \$100 and that is before those tax increases are factored in."

Butland said that in order to pay for these cuts as well as make up for reductions in corporate tax revenues, the state is looking to local governments to pick up the tab.

"State aid to Ohio's cities and counties will get cut by 20 percent," he shared. "Aid to villages and townships gets cut by 10 percent. State funds to local libraries get cut by 5 percent."

These cuts are what Attica Village, Venice Township and Seneca East Public Library fear.

"What we need to do is get a grassroots effort out there to let the public know and let the senators and state legislatures know that the time has come that we can't afford to have anymore cuts at the local level," said Attica Mayor Gregory Martin.

Larry Dunson, Attica Clerk added, "The council is going to have some tough decisions to make. If we get cut 10 percent, is it going to be the swimming pool cut down or the police that start losing hours on the street?"

Venice Township received \$35,575 last year from the local government fund, which was used for cemetery maintenance, EMS funds, insurance, utilities, auditing, and administrative fees. Making up approximately 60 percent of the township's total budget, other income is received, but earmarked.

"We receive through the township gas tax money, funding from other sources, but it comes from the state and is all earmarked where you can spend it," Venice Township Trustee Tom Weaver said. "The general fund is the miscellaneous fund. That is where all of your little things come out of.

"ÉPeople don't understand that. We've cut ours' (general fund) to the bare bones."

The Seneca East Public Library, which received \$163,369 from the local government fund in 2004, would lose approximately \$8,165.

"We built that 8,000 square foot building there expecting that the state would continue their commitment to libraries," Vicki Eckenrod, library director said. "We expected a continuous, stable, reliable source of income and that just has not happened."

Eckenrod explained that funding levels are currently at the same point they were in 1998, but costs of material, utilities, etc., have increased since that time. She mentioned that the library does not offer insurance to employees, but was looking into the option before the threat of cuts came about.

"That (the cuts) would probably eliminate what is left of the materials budget," Eckenrod shared. "We will probably be looking at reducing hours or eliminating days we are open. We are probably going to have to let people go."

About this Butland concluded, "So in Columbus they are all for OhioReads, except apparently in the library."

Also discussed was the effect the budget would have on schools regarding the Foundation Program. This program incorporates funding for: Special education, career-technical programs, gifted pupil and poverty-based programs, teacher training, transportation, charge-off and excess cost supplements, parity aid, and guarantees that maintain school funding at a certain level regardless of property values.



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