

Lack of persuasion

Published: September 1, 2011 - 11:48 PM

John Kasich would do well to consider the essence of power in the public realm. It involves influence, or persuasion, its absence resulting in a leader with too few followers, or little to lead. The governor talks often about the imperative of challenging the status quo, about Ohio doing things differently to prosper and improve its quality of life. If the task is so important, and it is, then take care in getting the execution right.

Don't engage in excess when reshaping collective bargaining for public employees. Don't leap too far ahead when discussing the idea of centralizing at the state level the collection of municipal income taxes. Aaron Marshall of the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported this week about Mary Taylor, the lieutenant governor, and Joe Testa, the state tax commissioner, airing the concept of a state takeover of city tax collection.

The move may make sense. Taylor and Testa see the change as part of easing the burden on businesses in a state where companies encounter a wide array of jurisdictions applying levies. Write one check to the state, and then state officials would distribute the money to city governments. The state already does something similar with the collection of the "piggyback" tax that counties add to the state sales tax.

Taylor sees the idea fitting into the Common Sense Initiative, the plan to reduce red tape for businesses. The proposal deserves exploration. What lacks common sense is springing the idea on cities that have yet to cope with the impact of the beating they have taken in the new state budget.

Let's recall: The Local Government Fund will be cut in half by the end of the biennium. The state cast aside another commitment that involved reimbursing cities for revenue lost due to property tax reductions. The estate tax has been eliminated. Policy Matters Ohio, a Cleveland-based think tank, noted in a report released this week that cities and other local governments face a \$1 billion reduction in state money during the next two years.

Any surprise that mayors responded unhappily to a state takeover of city income tax collection? They understandably flagged concerns about enforcement and auditing. One mayor described the move as a "money grab." The state surely would want to pick up a processing fee.

At times, the governor and his team seem to take a certain pride in knocking heads and bruising feelings. Pushing change is no easy job. Yet the sales pitch matters, especially when the stakes are so high. Unfortunately, the Kasich approach too often isn't about listening. A governor must be powerful to enact an ambitious agenda. That requires influence. Which starts with persuasion.