

Find courage to hike income tax to aid schools

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The state budget dilemma as it relates specifically to school funding has reached a crisis level. Why? Because the madness that surrounds both the Senate and the House can only produce one result, increased property taxes. The advent of Senate Bill 850, when simply analyzed, proposes using stimulus money simply to maintain the school funding formula levels and dismantles the governor's proposed increases for public education. Worse yet, there is no consequential thinking whatsoever about what will happen two years out in 2011, when the stimulus money dries up.

Allow me to offer a scenario about why the Senate plan is not only flawed but also dangerous. First, a cliff will be created once the stimulus money dries up, with a multi-million-dollar hole in school funding. There can only be two possible repercussions, draconian cuts in school programs or increased property taxes. Second, the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is geared to stimulating the economy, not offsetting current costs. We may be shut out by President Obama as the federal Education Secretary [Arne Duncan](#) has suggested about the inappropriate proposed use of ARRA moneys by Arizona, [Texas](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) legislatures.

If anyone thinks that we can pull ourselves out of this national economic decline without a strong educational program, they are foolish -- it just will not happen! If anyone believes that property taxes can simply continue to increase without causing even more economic pain and impact, they too are foolish. The property owner simply cannot handle any more increases in levies. The state legislator who worries about his or her future will keep on pushing costs off on local school boards because it is the cowardly way out. I have said it before, and I will say it again. "The legislators do not have the intestinal fortitude to do the right thing -- raise the necessary revenue to support public education." The Constitution calls for it; yet they even ignore their constitutional duty.

There is a solution! Increase the personal income tax by .5 percent with a three-year sunset provision that reduces the tax rate .5 percent to today's rate, after three years of implementation. Two previous governors used this solution and Gov. Rendell has proposed it again. This tax is less regressive than the property tax. This tax historically can be and was reduced. Property taxes are never reduced. This tax is a soft impact tax, deducted weekly or biweekly from our paychecks. This tax would not affect pensioners, senior citizens, or those families earning less than \$32,000.

What does it take to make this move to a .5 percent increase in personal income tax? Just a little intestinal fortitude? Just the guts to stand up and say we need to do the right thing!

Nobody wants weaker schools! Nobody wants fewer children meeting with success! Nobody wants higher drop out rates, increased juvenile detention centers, and increased entitlements! This will be the landscape of our community if we let our schools become little more than buildings with 35-40 students in a classroom, with no supports in reading and math, perhaps no athletic program, and no ride to school.

How can you help? Call, e-mail, and write your senator and representative and implore them to support our schools with adequate funding, not shell game mentalities and shortfalls. Insist that they raise the PIT for three years only, to support a free and appropriate public education for all. That is the very least we owe our children.

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