



Opinion

Guest Column: Willing to make a sacrifice for Pa.'s future

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By SID HOLMES, Times Guest Columnist

All Pennsylvanians who want their taxes increased, raise your hands!

Me neither, but this is the wrong question to ask. A more appropriate one is, are we better off making drastic cuts to children's health care, child care, education and a host of programs protecting vulnerable families in our communities? Or should we be penny-wise and pound-foolish with Pennsylvania's future?

Let's face it, in the interest of self-preservation, shouldn't we admit there's not enough money in the coffers and that we need a tax increase during this difficult economic time?

Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed a temporary personal-income tax boost amounting to less than \$5 a week for a \$50,000 wage earner that exempts seniors, families earning less than \$32,000 and the unemployed. If the state adopted this budget proposal a lot of programs would still receive cuts. But at least the educational gains Pennsylvania has made over the past few years would be continued without cutting education and health insurance for kids at a time when they need it most.

The governor's proposal helps the Legislature and administration keep the promise of supporting the funding formula adopted last year that raises Pennsylvania from the bottom of states in its contribution to public education (number 44) to approaching the middle of the pack. This is year two of the six-year commitment to get there; we can't abandon it now.

Luckily, we don't have to. By using the stimulus funds designated for education we can keep the momentum, moving us closer towards becoming a state with a workforce ready to take on the jobs of the 21st century.

With the nation in the throes of recession, carrying through on this commitment is even

more important as there is no greater assurance of brighter economic days ahead than an investment today in the commonwealth's future.

Foresight demands an understanding that educational mediocrity in an increasingly competitive nation and world is a surefire prescription for lagging even further behind. For certain, one day the current economic downturn will be over and recovery will begin. And when potential employers begin to open factories and businesses, they'll locate them where they are confident a supply of skilled, educated workers will be readily available for hire.

So, doesn't it make sense that in a graying state (number 3 in population 65 and older) with middling educational achievement (number 27 for residents with a high school diploma), providing our school districts with the resources they need to prepare all our state's young people for the highly-skilled, global economy awaiting them — and us — is our collective responsibility?

I, for one, am willing to sacrifice the price of a latte, pack of cigarettes or couple of beers weekly as insurance for the prospect of better days ahead. The question is, are you? If so, then contact your state legislators and tell them to do the right thing and not take the short-sighted, easy way out that handicaps Pennsylvania's future. Do it for our kids.

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