

Editorial for Friday, February 26, 2010

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Posted: Friday, February 26, 2010 12:00 am | Updated: 9:35 am, Thu Mar 11, 2010.

GOP ideas deserve a look

Some Republican recommendations for cutting the state budget deserve a hard look, but others could cause more harm than good.

The House Republican Caucus and Sens. David Brinkley and E.J. Pipkin submitted ideas for cutting an additional \$829 million from the budget on top of what Gov. Martin O'Malley has already proposed.

Among the cuts worth considering are reducing the state workforce by about 500, and additional cuts to various programs. The cuts to programs, however, should be looked at in a greater, long-term context so that progress made isn't wasted or set us back from other goals.

The \$20 million earmarked to help protect the Chesapeake Bay from pollution is one example. The Republican proposal calls for cutting that, but it would be wiser to look at the efforts under way and determine which could be reduced, what could be put off a year or two or what could be eliminated entirely because they aren't providing a return on investment.

The state has worked for decades to improve the health of the Bay. And the Obama administration last year got the federal Environmental Protection Agency involved, saying the EPA should take the lead in regional Bay restoration efforts. That may provide additional federal dollars for programs, but if it doesn't, cutting out spending for protecting the Bay could set the state back in the long run and cost us more later than we would be saving today.

Another proposal that would shift a portion of teacher pension payments to local jurisdictions is just more of that money juggling that the Republicans are always quick to condemn O'Malley for. The proposal does nothing to reduce costs, it merely passes the bill on to local governments which already are suffering from reduced state funding in many different areas.

In the long run, someone is going to have to pay. Republicans in the state legislature may be happy that they can say they avoided the need to raise taxes, but the chances are pretty good that local jurisdictions would have to increase taxes to pay for the additional burden thrust upon them. If the pension system is too costly now then it needs to be looked at with an eye toward reducing those costs, not shifting them elsewhere.

In total, the Republicans in state government did a good job providing a list of additional ways to potentially save money. Democrats who control the State House and O'Malley need to give the proposals a hard look and adopt those that don't just shift the burden elsewhere or have the potential to cost us more down the road than we would save today.