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Op-Ed: Jobs budget good for southwest Ohio

By Linda Woggon, Ohio Chamber of Commerce

Two things are happening in Ohio that hold the promise of a better economic environment. The first is that the economy is slowly rebounding. The second is that the legislature is debating the state budget bill. Ordinarily not an economic driver, this budget is different. It's called the Jobs Budget. It contains significant reforms in the way government operates and it will improve the job creation climate in Ohio.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce represents businesses that create jobs in Ohio, so our interest in this budget is understandable. As part of the Ohio's Campaign for Jobs, we are working with dozens of other organizations to support the budget. Together, we are advocating for better efficiency in state and local governments.

Ohio has 3,700 local governments and 613 school districts. Surely it is reasonable to explore economies of scale, sharing services and resources and maximizing every tax dollar collected. The business community knows this because economic conditions demand more efficiency, reduced overhead costs and better technology to be competitive. Government must do the same and the Jobs Budget contains common sense reforms.

Here's an example. The budget would save \$1.2 billion in Medicaid costs through changes like coordinating healthcare for low income Ohioans. Savings would also come from allowing seniors to choose assisted living or at-home care if they prefer that to a nursing home.

Unbelievably, some low-income seniors are now forced into nursing homes, even though they don't need or want that level of care, because that's where Medicaid dollars are available.

By improving schools, the budget makes Ohio more attractive to businesses that need well educated workers. It calls for changing from a seniority based "last in, first out" retention system, to a merit-based evaluation system. Studies show 80 percent of teachers who lose their jobs because they lack seniority actually accomplish more in the classroom than many of the teachers who get to stay. Poor teacher performance hurts students, schools, and taxpayers. It's time for Ohio to join the 36 other states that have abandoned seniority-based retention. This will protect the jobs of Ohio's quality teachers - and there are many - and it will raise the overall standing of the profession.

One final point: the Jobs Budget closes an \$8 billion gap in the state budget without raising taxes. Ohioans already pay more in state and local taxes combined than those in many other states. Raising taxes, at the state or local level, will not help generate more jobs in Ohio. While the budget does send less state money to schools and local governments, it also contains many tools to help them contain their costs, share services, and operate more efficiently.

Supporting the Jobs Budget is vital because the time is now to change the way things are done in Columbus and at the local government level. Readers may learn more at www.campaignforjobs.com.

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