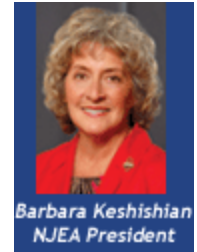


NJEA Report on Education

Feb. 28, 2010

A billion here or a billion there?

Pretty soon, you are talking about real consequences



There aren't many easy choices for balancing the state's budget this year and next. The deficit is real, and the state simply does not bring in enough revenue to meet its obligations. But some of the cuts being made this year and floated for next year deserve a closer look.

Earlier this month, Gov. Christie, without any input from the legislature, issued an executive order which raided \$475 million from local school districts for the remainder of the school year. He claimed that his unilateral action would have no effect on the quality of education offered, but soft-pedaled the fact that his assurance was only good through June.

In reality, the decision to grab nearly half a billion dollars from districts will have a devastating impact next fall, with many forced to lay off teachers and staff, cut academic programs or raise taxes. Most will do all of the above just to deal with the funds lost to Christie's budget-balancing gimmick.

Then, with the ink barely dry on that executive order, the Christie administration began dropping hints that the worst was yet to come, warning districts to be ready for cuts of up to 15 percent in next year's state funding for schools. That would amount to more than \$1 billion in additional cuts for local districts next year. It's a doomsday scenario for families, who would see class sizes shoot up, programs eliminated and property taxes soar.

New Jersey already ranks 45th in the nation in the proportion of state funding of schools. As a result, local property tax payers shoulder a huge burden. Gov. Christie's plan to reduce the state's commitment to education funding will only make that problem worse. Local communities will either have to make up the difference through local property taxes or see their children denied even the basics of a decent education.

Higher property taxes or devastating cuts to education? It's a terrible choice, made even worse by the fact that there is a third option available to Gov. Christie that he refuses to consider. This year, a law imposing a slightly higher tax rate on New Jerseyans who make more than \$400,000 per year expired. That tax, which affected only those fortunate few who are most able to contribute a little more during a tough time for everyone, brought in nearly \$1 billion annually to the state.

A billion dollar funding cut for schools or a billion dollar tax cut for the wealthiest New Jerseyans? In a time of genuine economic crisis, it seems like a very easy choice. Unfortunately, Gov. Christie has placed the interests of the super-wealthy ahead of the needs of New Jersey's students. He has not been willing to keep that tax in place, choosing instead to present New Jersey with just one set of options: cuts, cuts and more cuts.

In a time of crisis unemployment, thousands of jobs are on the line if Gov. Christie keeps slashing school budgets. Much worse, more than 1.3 million New Jersey public school students could see their education suffer and their future prospects dimmed.

New Jersey residents deserve to know there is a better option

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