

# Education cuts can really hurt in long run

Much of last week's news had to do with the budget mess Michigan is in. Gov. Jennifer Granholm took a second whack at the state's budget deficit for this fiscal year, announcing an executive order cutting nearly \$160 million in spending this fiscal year.

■ A 1.4 percent cut in spending for state departments, mostly by not replacing employees who have left.

■ A 12.5 percent reduction in grants going to the Life Sciences Corridor, a program funded by the tobacco settlement that's supposed to fund biotech research at universities and hospitals.

■ Cuts in the budget for the governor's office (including a 10 percent cut in Granholm's \$177,000 salary), the Legislature (\$2.1 million) and the Judiciary (\$1.1 million).

Granholm's cuts were promptly approved by the Legislature. In response to Granholm's suggestions for cutting legislative salaries, several lawmakers countered by proposing sale of the governor's mansion on Mackinac Island. No doubt they reckoned the estimated \$1.5 million sale price would take a big chunk out of the \$160 million deficit.

Gov. Granholm has also been going around the state delivering a PowerPoint tutorial to explain how the state's deficit for the coming fiscal year grew to \$1.9 billion, 20 percent of the \$9.9 million general fund. By all accounts, her performance has been impressive. At the Detroit Women's Economic Club last Wednesday, she used an interactive voting system to let the audience choose which programs should bear the brunt of the cuts. The majority chose to preserve spending for K-12 schools, prisons and health care, while community colleges and universities would get cut.

Higher education leaders were dismayed. Already reeling from two rounds of budget cuts — former Gov. John Engler's \$42 million reduction last year and Granholm's recent \$30 million reduction — universities were hardly happy at Granholm's offhand comments to the effect that "there is fat in colleges and universities."

Certainly, Michigan colleges and universities should be expected to shoulder their fair share of whatever budget cuts are required. But the fact of the matter is that Michigan universities get about \$1,000 less per student in state funds than competing states. The issue here is how much of a cut to higher education can be made without causing serious, long-term damage and unendurable tuition increases. To her credit, Granholm also

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hinted that the \$30 million or so of (so far unscathed) public money that now goes to private schools should go on the chopping block as well.

Plainly, the risk here is that things can go too far, too fast in the urge to slash. A good indication comes from a legislative leader, Rep. Marc Shulman (R-West Bloomfield), who is chair of the House Appropriations Committee. Over the years, I've had several interesting talks with Shulman, a thoughtful guy who wisely passed up a chance to run for the state Senate in order to try to bring common sense to an appropriations process that will need every bit of it.

"If you can find a silver lining in all this chaos," Shulman said, "it's that it gives us a chance to look closely at what the state budget should really be composed of. In the past, it was easy to just cut 3-4 percent across the board, but this is not necessarily the most effective thing to do or the best in the long run."

There are some areas where cuts are appropriate and others where we should be careful. Education, for example, is an investment in our stock of human capital and skills that drives our economic growth and keeps our best people here in Michigan. Some states have cut education funding, and we're going to discover that can really hurt in the long run.

Shulman has introduced legislation calling for creation of a Government Efficiency Task Force that would review the relationship between state government spending and the efficiency of programs receiving state funds. "Now is the time to scrutinize carefully a lot of programs in detail," he said. "There are grants and contracts that don't require federal matching that come to \$640 million. That's a lot of money, and we need to look carefully at whether we are really getting full value for money from these."

Shulman's approach — thoughtful, careful — is just what I would hope would be the legislative response to Granholm's budget proposals, which are bound to be radical once she starts looking at the estimated \$1.8 billion deficit for the fiscal year that starts this October.

Phil Power is the chairman of the board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2047 or at ppower@hometownlife.com.

# Our Lady of Sorrows 'shared time' isn't parish's whole story

There has been balance to the coverage of the discussion over the shared time issue involving Our Lady of Sorrows School.

However, your Jan. 30 editorial page contained three letters, all of which expressed disapproval with the prospective implementation of the shared time program and our pastor's handling of the process and the debate.

The letters cast the school administration and our parish, I believe, in a negative light. It is this possible negative perception that I would like to address.

Regardless of the merits of the shared time program or the manner and circumstances surrounding the debate and implementation, I believe it is difficult to deny the strength and vitality of our parish and school.

Our Sunday Masses (seven of them) are not only well-attended (at least two of them are regularly standing room only), but, more importantly, are effectively proclaiming the Gospel. I am able to visit the

school on a weekly basis, where I see respectful, well-behaved children, seemingly eager to listen and learn. I also see dedicated teachers, staff, administration and parent volunteers, who, I must conclude, may care more about our children than they do about maximizing their financial well-being.

When my wife and I moved to Farmington Hills 15 years ago, and joined Our Lady of Sorrows Church, the buildings including the school and grounds were in need of update (though they certainly weren't in disrepair), as all facilities need over time. My recollection is that enrollment at our school was at about 500 students.

Today, the church, rectory, offices and grounds have been updated and expanded. A family activities center has been added. All this has been done to meet the growth of the parish and the school, and to provide for the future.

There are now over 1,100 students in our preschool through eighth-grade school. I am confident in speculating that our parish membership has grown substantially during this time also.

Two weeks ago, we hosted a weeklong homeless shelter in our church basement. Over the weekend, our PTG hosted a sold-out fund-raiser for the benefit of our school. These are merely recent examples of the many substantial and effective ministries.

Our weekly bulletin promotes activities for old and young. It evidences an outreach and aid to our community and to the needy in

other communities. It evidences a community that prays for each other and for all in need of prayer. It evidences what our parish is: a thriving and well-rounded faith community.

Through the growth of the faculty, staff, administration and school facilities, there are hundreds of families that are able to provide a Catholic education for their children, who would not have been able to, were it not for the growth of our school. These families are not only from Farmington and Farmington Hills, but surrounding communities.

There are parishes that do not have the resources to provide for the spiritual needs, ministries and school facilities as we do at our parish. There are also parishes that are not able to take on the challenges of growth.

Our parish and school families have done this to provide for these needs and to fulfill a dream for many Catholic parents to send their children, despite the sacrifice, to a Catholic school.

All of our parish families and school families have made this growth and vitality possible through their hard work, sacrifice and financial support. I don't know that I could emphasize this enough except to state that this support is obviously indispensable.

However, any long-term program such as we've been through at our church and school could not be possible, either, without able leadership. Maintaining a sense of community in a growing, and economically and culturally diverse membership, along with providing and implementing a vision for the future does not happen without strong leadership — I'm sure all agree that it requires it, and we've had it during this period of growth.

This is not meant as a letter advocating the merits of the shared time program. Its purpose is not to be a letter of support for Monsignor Hurley, although it certainly is that. It is intended to provide balance to inform the Farmington/Farmington Hills community that I believe Our Lady of Sorrows Church continues to be a strong and vital part of our community, ready to meet growing membership and growing needs.

Despite obvious disagreements, it is not a parish torn and adrift, as it may appear from some of the public discourse.

I am proud to be a member of Our Lady of Sorrows, and am grateful for the work and support of our parish and school families, and our leadership, that benefit, and I'm sure will continue to benefit, our faith community, our two cities and other communities in need.

Kevin J. Hammer is a Farmington Hills resident and parishioner at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church in Farmington.



Phil Power



Kevin J. Hammer

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