

June 6, 2017

Dear Senator Oelslager,

I am a retired accountant with a keen interest in government - so much so that I read 3 newspapers and enjoy watching your Budget committee meetings on the Ohio Channel. I always have opinions so I thought you might like to hear them - along with all those other people who testify. But, I'm not one of those experts, although I am more informed than most citizens.

I know that budgeting is not easy - even when I did it for corporations in my former life but especially for the state. I realize that tax revenues are down, so I think that is what needs to be fixed first. There are so many needs in this state - you are privy to all of those wants and needs.

So, I believe we should reverse that pass-through tax relief we gave business owners on less than \$250,000 income. The experts say that the tax relief does not create jobs - partly because it represents too little savings to create even one job. I see it as a gift to more wealthy people at the expense of the needy citizens in Ohio.

By the same token, why does Ohio not tax oil and gas companies any where near the level that other states do. I agree with Governor Kasich about increasing the severance tax. This seems to be another gift to a special interests.

My other tax solution is to raise the tax on gasoline and diesel fuels. It hasn't been raised in decades. It is the most sensible way to fund roads and bridges maintenance - and it should be indexed to inflation. Two thirds of the states have raised gas taxes and auto fees for this. I believe that legislators are too cowardly to do this but I think it could be sold to the voters if you tied it to infrastructure maintenance.

While I feel for the smokers out there, I do think that cigarette taxes help lead to smokers stopping. However, I would use this money for stop-smoking and prevention programs - especially for ads aimed at kids. I read that these programs really do work. I know you can't measure bang for the buck on this issue, but it helps the state if we can help keep people healthy and working and paying taxes- and saving us health care costs.

Another way to save money which has a lot of support is to stop imprisoning so many non-violent offenders. I have watched a number of programs on PBS about how prison does not prevent crime and that we don't realize how cruel it is for some prisoners. So, we should only imprison those who are dangerous. We do need to spend money to rehabilitate, to help people with addictions and the mentally ill. But, we need to get rid of the mandatory minimum sentencing and let judges decide what is right for each offender. We spend so much money on prisons - our country leads the world and Ohio leads almost all other states - and that is not a good thing to be a leader of.

Then, with all the savings from above:

I am a Christian who believes we have a responsibility to the poor, which includes helping to pay for health care via Medicaid expansion - without all the obstacles that have been put in HB 49. Too many people have difficulty finding work due to lack of skills, addiction problems, having to take care of family, and health issues. I also don't like the cuts in Official Foodbank Assistance - keep to the Governor's request and please ax the work requirement.

The most important function of state government and what is spelled out in our Constitution - is to provide an adequate education to our children. This does provide the most bang-for-buck - especially since we have almost a crisis in Ohio in training people to make them employable and in keeping the college graduates in the state. I know that back when I went to school, teachers were mostly women who accepted low wages because it was assumed they were supported by husbands. I had a great education as a result of this. That was then - this is now. Education is going to cost more - forever. But, it is essential to our future. And, we need to include art, music, languages, and physical education in our funding. Many kids will go into these fields, and besides, we need a well rounded electorate. Needless to say, I think we do a poor job of teaching civics in this country. Young people rarely vote. That's outrageous. They will have to run this country some day - we need to adequately prepare them for that. And, that includes higher education. Ohioans pay among the highest tuition in the country. The state expenditures for schools and higher education should go up with inflation and enrollment. But, it needs to increase even more to make up for the last decade or two of declines.

While we're at it, I am dismayed at the war that rural legislators have been having with the cities. The cities - at least the ones near me - have lots of problems - poverty being a main one. I don't approve of constant cuts to funding for cities. And, what about home rule - let the cities do what they do better at a local level - isn't that what Republicans are supposed to support - government delivered at the lowest level possible. (Lead paint is a prime example and drilling in local parks)

Other items:

The Plain Dealer has done a fine expose of the state of nursing homes in Ohio and the state's role in protecting us from unscrupulous nursing homes. Ohio needs many more nursing home inspectors to meet the standards for regular inspections. Ohio is the 4th worst in the country in this category.- largely because they refuse to pay them like professionals. I am absolutely afraid of ever needing to go to a nursing home. Hopefully, I would have the ability to choose suicide instead. We must protect the most vulnerable from the neglect in some of these places. Do unto others..... I believe that the Governor is the only one at the statehouse who doesn't cower to the nursing home lobby.

I also consider myself an environmentalist so I , of course, want to see adequate funding for Lake Erie - also at the Federal level. As an accountant, I believe we need to take good care of our assets - and Lake Erie is an asset that's irreplaceable. I also hate the idea of drilling in our state parks and logging in our state forests. These belong to all of us and shouldn't be squandered like this. It takes 100 years or more to grow these big trees.

Another pet peeve of mine and probably most citizens is the slipping into the budget of extraneous amendments by privileged reps and senators - especially when the budget is in Conference committee. It is really very selfish. (Example: the Grendell parks amendment) I'm glad that the Governor has veto power, but now I hear that things are carefully worded so that he can't veto a portion of a line item on Medicaid. This interferes with the separation of powers between legislature and administration.

I have a whole file of clippings about issues of interest to me but the above all pertain to the budget. Can I submit this letter as testimony before the budget committee and get copies to everyone on the committee? I will also send a copy to my Senator LaRose.

Sincerely,

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PS - Please don't close the rest stops on scenic highways - we older folks, especially, need them when we spend our retirements on car trips.