

Public Forum

AT THE CENTER OF YOUR COMMUNITY ♦ SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2008 ♦ PAG

Our View

No way to run a railroad

The governor's pronouncement last week to cut state aid to our towns is just another example of how the state's budget has been derailed by decades of mismanagement. While we understand Governor Corzine's position that it could take years to dig New Jersey out of its \$32 billion hole, we strongly disagree with his method of rectifying the problem.

On the one hand, he made a big deal about how aid was increased to school districts but then he takes it from the municipalities. The mayor of Riverdale, for one, is hopping mad at the state's cutting of back on state aid to the towns. In the governor's message, it is noted that the state is paying particular attention to cutting back on towns with less than 10,000 in population. That is in part because the state is trying to coerce towns like Riverdale (estimated population of under 3,000 souls) to consider consolidating with other towns.

The mayor has fired back with a letter to his constituents decrying the \$207,000 in cuts proposed for Riverdale.

(Gov. Corzine) "is balancing the budget on the backs of the Riverdale Taxpayer, and other small towns," states the letter.

Mayor Budesheim is right. In this readership area, nine of our 10 towns are seeing significant cuts in state aid. The state would be better served to cancel the property tax rebates altogether and use the money to reduce municipal property taxes. Another idea we like is that the state immediately examine all grants promised but not yet executed and use as much of that money as possible to start buying down its debt.

Next the state has to get a grip on its pensions. While starting off strong by charging the legislators to find solutions, hard or otherwise, to the state employee pension problem, which they did, he pulled the rug out from them. There were a few months when we thought we were going to get courageous leadership from Trenton. First we thought Corzine was going to deal with the state employees, which in turn allowed us to dream that someone would do something about staring down the state's teachers' union. Instead we are getting déjà vu all over again.

For too long the buck has been passed onto the state's property taxpayers. Corzine, when seeking election, promised to reduce property taxes. Instead he seems to be going in the opposite direction.

