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Riverdale mayor derides cuts by Corzine

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

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NorthJersey.com

STAFF WRITER

RIVERDALE — Mayor William Budesheim has vowed to persist in his vehement fight against Governor Corzine's proposed budget for fiscal 2009 that would slash \$189 million of state aid to municipalities.

Monday night, he took the fight home at a town meeting attended by some 150 residents at the community center. Budesheim again lashed out at the cuts. And although he's a Republican, he said it's not a partisan issue and he called on the governor to resign "because of his broken campaign promises, lack of leadership and knowledge."

Municipalities such as Riverdale, with 10,000 or fewer residents, would be hit hardest by the cuts due to a penalty designed to encourage them to merge or at least consolidate services with their neighbors. Budesheim said those with populations of 5,000 to 10,000 have averaged losses of 50 percent in state aid.

"He's targeting the small towns," the mayor said. "We have been merging services with other towns. We don't need the governor to tell us how to run our towns."

Budesheim pointed out that with state aid maintained, the new municipal budget would have boasted taxes that would have stayed flat, as they have for several years.

"Due to the state cuts this year, it went up three points," he said.

The topic of merging municipal services has flared as one of the most contentious in the state. But not everyone below the level of state government has voiced strong opposition to consolidation of some form. Bergen County Executive Director Dennis McNerney said in February that his county, in which a large percentage of its 70 municipalities have fewer than 10,000 residents, should be leading the way in shared services.

Budesheim, however, has been one of the most vocal critics in fighting the cuts and consolidation.

On the municipal government's Web site, he has posted a photo of a smiling Corzine with a red diagonal crossbar through it, the universal symbol used to indicate vehement opposition to something.

Budesheim also was among more than 200 mayors and other officials from small towns — those with less than 10,000 population — who met in Trenton early last month with representatives of the Corzine administration to go over the budget and to voice

opposition to the cuts and the idea of consolidation. He said Corzine's failure to show up for the meeting, and the answers from his representatives, were "just a reinforcement of the disregard the state government has to the little town."

"They are determined to force us to merge," he said. "But why don't they break up the big cities to get rid of their expenses?" That's where the most money is spent."

On Monday night, Budesheim treated the assembly to a presentation that argued that the state government itself is bloated and needs a diet. He alleged the state government has 203 employees for every 10,000 residents, which he said is 43 percent over the national average.

"He [Corzine] should clean up his own house," the mayor said, also claiming there are more than 6,000 political patronage jobs at the state level.

Budesheim was preaching to the choir Monday night, as no one offered a dissenting view and there were no state representatives on hand. Instead, many attendees asked what they could do to protest the state aid cuts. There were tentative inquiries about conducting a march on Trenton or a protest rally.

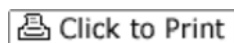
Budesheim suggested writing letters of protest and putting them on the municipal Web site so that the community's state representatives would see them.

Mentioning Corzine's corporate background, Budesheim told residents: "He acts as if he's still on Wall Street" as opposed to: "We're a community of real people, and a community has a heart."

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