



## **Our view: Maintain Pa. budget's focus on education**

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Pennsylvania media spent some time this week marveling at the surprises contained within Gov. Ed Rendell's budget proposal for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

We're not sure why. That fiscal year promises to be a doozy at all levels of business and government, so there was probably good reason to expect some unconventional ideas.

After all, it's not like governments can count on broad based taxes to cover services and shortfalls.

Voters have made it clear they generally prefer to borrow and spend rather than tax and spend, and woe betide the elected official who thinks of the solvency of future generations.

So Rendell -- and every budget steward, large and small -- must consider unorthodox, out-of-the-box ways to scare up revenue.

The interesting thing about Rendell's \$29 billion budget proposal is the way it mixes such unconventional tactics with an admirable focus on traditional priorities, primarily education in this case.

Rendell increased the state's share of education funding by \$300 million, both to lessen the pressure from property taxes and to invest in local schools. He also proposed the use of legalized video poker revenue to send thousands of students to Pennsylvania universities.

The budget also includes a \$35 million increase in Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency tuition grants.

It also will provide \$10 million in grants to nearly 10,000 additional community college students.

Rendell's budget also doubles capital funding for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education to \$130 million -- to augment their high-tech infrastructure. The budget also continues Rendell's annual commitment of \$100 million in funding for projects at the University of Pittsburgh, Penn State University, Lincoln University, and Temple University.

In the coming weeks, there will be much philosophical consternation and loud ideological wrangling over the budget, and its provisions will likely change.

But we hope the spending for education remains intact, because it represents an investment in the future, a way to move forward while everything else screeches to a halt.

In an economy like this one, standing still is just as bad as moving backwards.

So we must fight the temptation to hunker down and stop spending, because one day the recession will lift and when it does, Pennsylvania's recovery will be that much slower.

*-- By Matthew Major, on behalf of Public Opinion's editorial board*