

# Labor coalition hopes its voice is heard in Gov. Corbett's budget

**A**s the state budget is developed, we urge Gov. Tom Corbett to consider all options available to manage the projected \$4 billion to \$5 billion deficit the commonwealth faces.

Pennsylvania is at a crossroads, and the choices we make this year will lay the foundation for a strong economic recovery or have a devastating impact on working families statewide.



Labor has united to form the Coalition for Labor Engagement and Accountable Revenues.

As a coalition of more than 1.1 million hard-working Pennsylvanians, CLEAR stands

ready to work with Gov. Corbett on a balanced approach to the state budget that includes finding efficiencies, smart budget savings and enacting fair revenues — rather than one that relies on selling taxpayer-owned assets, reckless cuts to jobs and deep cuts to essential government services.

Working families deserve a state budget that protects jobs and positions in Pennsylvania for a strong economy recovery.

Let's be honest about what deep budget cuts mean. Cuts mean laying off thousands of teachers, firefighters, nurses, police officers, corrections officers, safety inspectors, water and sewage workers, bus drivers, parole agents, environmental and consumer protection agents and more. These are the hard-working middle-class families who make Pennsylvania work.

Deep budget cuts mean cutting services such as health screenings for newborn babies, cutting nursing home care and long-term care for senior citizens, cutting teachers' aides who help with special-needs kids and cutting services for abused women and children.

It is not just our most vulnerable and struggling citizens who will be impacted by service cuts. Services for hard-working families such as emergency mortgage assistance to help cash-strapped families avert mortgage foreclosures, worker training activities and workforce development programs and public education will be cut, too.

Layoffs and service cuts will have a huge impact on our economic recovery

in every corner of the state. You have to look only at New Jersey to see the economic consequences of deep cuts.

The Keystone Research Center, a non-partisan statewide policy research group, released a job growth policy brief for 2010 showing New Jersey finished dead last, losing nearly 31,000 jobs. This should serve as a warning to Gov. Corbett that deep cuts in infrastructure, public education and public investments devastate the economic recovery.

As we watch the destructive results of attacking collective bargaining unfold in states like Wisconsin and Ohio, we're prepared to come to the table and work together to find an alternative to a cuts-only approach to balancing the budget.

The draconian and divisive proposal in Wisconsin is not present here.

Therefore, we look forward to working with the Corbett team to find a long-term balanced approach to the state budget involving enacting common-sense revenues that will grow through time such as a severance tax on Marcellus Shale and close outdated corporate tax loopholes. Pennsylvania remains the only state without a tax on natural gas extraction. It is time for a fair Marcellus Shale severance tax that will provide long-term revenue for the commonwealth.

It also is time to end special tax loopholes that allow more than 70 percent of Pennsylvania corporations to pay no income tax. In 2006, during a booming economy, one family earning \$36,000 paid more in state taxes than 84 percent of Pennsylvania corporations. Instead of balancing the budget on the backs of the middle class, we should close tax loopholes that allow major multistate corporations such as Walmart, Home Depot and Toys R Us avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

There is no question this budget will be challenging, given the \$4 billion to \$5 billion deficit. We urge Gov. Corbett to deliver a state budget that benefits all hard-working Pennsylvanians and their families instead of a state budget that makes devastating cuts and sells public assets.

CLEAR is ready to work with Gov. Corbett to ensure that budget decisions best serve our hard-working families.

David Fillman is executive director of AFSCME Council 13 and chair of CLEAR.