



My Turn: Temporary tax increase better than cutting social services

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Aristotle said you can judge a society by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. For many years, Vermonters have made a commitment to supporting, empowering, nurturing, and protecting the most vulnerable among us. This commitment resulted in forward-thinking policies and years of investment in programs and services that have helped children, families, and communities thrive. These investments put us on the path towards a bright and prosperous future for all Vermonters.

Today, that future is slipping away from us. As more and more Vermont families and communities are struggling in the economic downturn, the state's response has been to cut programs and services while putting more pressure on our communities by increasing property taxes and shifting costs – and the Governor is not done yet. His current budget proposal further increases property taxes and the burden on moderate- income families while slashing essential services that help and protect the most vulnerable among us.

These difficult economic times do not change our responsibility to each other – in fact, this is the time when we need each other the most. We've spent years building a public system that can respond to the needs of Vermonters. And now, when those needs are the greatest, our Governor and policymakers are proposing to dismantle much of that system – disabling our state's ability to protect our most vulnerable citizens, strengthen education, and preserve or create jobs.

Is this really what Vermonters want for each other? Do we want families struggling to make ends meet to face even greater barriers to obtaining economic security? Will we stand by as children living in our poorest families lose the last small but essential income supports they have? Are we okay leaving seniors and individuals with disabilities without access to essential daily care services? These cuts are not just lines on a spreadsheet – they have concrete impacts on the lives of struggling Vermonters, and their cumulative effect will be devastating to many children and their families.

We cannot shortchange our kids by dismantling the public services and supports we have spent years building. We cannot afford to stop investing in our families, because we cannot afford an undereducated workforce, children growing up hungry and in poor health, and families unable, year after year, to make ends meet. The more we cut the budgets of programs and benefits that serve our families and children, the closer we come to realizing those bleak futures.

Now more than ever we need our state to respond to this crisis – to provide support to and protection for those hardest hit by the economic downturn. Any responsible approach to

addressing the current budget shortfall requires a hard and balanced look at both how we spend money and how we bring it in. Taxes need to be part of that equation.

That is why we support an income tax increase like the one Governor Snelling did during the recession of the early 1990s. These tax increases will be temporary, and will help spread some of the pain of this recession among those of us who can afford to pay a little more. Vermonters want to take care of each other in tough times – and we have systems in place that allow us to do so. Let's not balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable in our society – let's raise some revenue to make sure we get through this tough time without making it harder on the children and families among us who can least afford it.