



Your suggestions — other revenue Write in your ideas for raising money.

Reopen Quinn Bill / CAP STATECITY PENSIONS @ \$30,000.00; SALARIES @ 100,000; NO NEW REVENUE

Put taxes back to their 1999 levels. Don't cut services.

On May 18, this space was devoted to a state budget worksheet that invited Globe readers to choose among dozens of recommended program cuts and revenue increases to close a projected \$3 billion budget gap. This is your report.

The project was difficult to complete, and we were gratified to receive 172 thoughtful responses. Many attached letters or additional comments, which you can read below. Of the 172, only 54 (or 31 percent) successfully found the \$3 billion. "This was tough work," wrote one Salem reader. "Let's get the Mass. economy rolling again."

One striking feature was how innately fair most respondents were—splitting the difference between some program cuts and some tax increases. At least 70 percent chose to cut something from state government, and 83 percent chose raising some taxes.

The most popular area to cut was the so-called Quinn bill, which costs the state and municipalities \$100 million a year in salary premiums for police officers who earn education credits. This was followed by cuts in the state's share of employee health insurance premiums. The most popular revenue enhancer was applying

the 5 percent sales tax to liquor purchases, followed by an increase in the gasoline tax.

The least popular areas for cuts were home-care programs and prescription drugs for the elderly, and the least popular tax increase was applying the 5 percent sales tax to groceries.

The chart below aggregates the replies for each of the program areas and revenue-raisers that were on the worksheet. It shows the percentage of respondents overall who chose to cut that program or raise that revenue and the average of the amount to be cut or raised. For example, 31 percent of respondents would cut health coverage for the long-term unemployed, and the average

cut, including those who would not touch current funding, was \$15 million.

Obviously, this exercise is not a scientific sampling. But most of the readers who wrote in seemed to gain a new respect for the difficulties facing state legislators as they try to reconcile the cost of government services with real human needs. "This will make people realize the real dilemma," wrote one woman from Scituate.

Our thanks to the staff at the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center in Boston for aggregating the data and to all the Globe's readers who tried to understand the state we're in.

2004 budget worksheet report

PROGRAMS YOU COULD CUT	% of respondents who would change item	Average change (of the 165 returns that filled in chart)
Health Care — \$8.087 billion total spending		
Health coverage for long-term unemployed	31%	-\$15 million
Health Care Expansion initiatives	33%	-\$37 million
Nursing home care	33%	-\$76 million
Prescription Advantage program	23%	-\$10 million
State employee health insurance	68%	-\$46 million
Education — \$4.970 billion total spending		
Local education aid	40%	-\$242 million
Early Education for 3- to 5-year-olds	35%	-\$21 million
Class size reduction program	24%	-\$3 million
MCAS extra help	42%	-\$17 million
Community college system	42%	-\$26 million
State college system	36%	-\$23 million
UMass system	44%	-\$73 million
Privatize UMass. Med. School	38%	-\$11 million
Human services and elders — \$4.557 billion total spending		
Welfare/cash assistance	30%	-\$28 million
Community-based residential services for mentally disabled adults	28%	-\$29 million
Adult mental health and support services	28%	-\$24 million
Home care	15%	-\$6 million
Public safety and courts — \$2.011 billion total spending		
Closing courts and restructuring judiciary	38%	-\$12 million
Quinn bill	74%	-\$31 million
State Police	38%	-\$26 million
State prisons and county jails	57%	-\$147 million
Local aid — \$1.272 billion total spending		
Unrestricted local aid	42%	-\$143 million
Cut lottery payouts.	58%	-\$143 million
Other cuts suggested		
■ Stop free parking for state employees		
■ Cut from the richest cities and towns. Let them raise their property taxes		
■ Cut amount of government payments to nursing home providers		
■ Eliminate salary for state Legislature		
■ Eliminate Bulger's office		-\$80 million
Average of all cuts		-\$1.217 billion
WAYS TO RAISE REVENUE		
IMPLEMENTED THIS YEAR		
Closed corporate tax loopholes	98%	+\$129 million
Increased fees at registries of deeds	98%	+\$229 million
OTHER REVENUE POSSIBILITIES		
Increase court fees	47%	+\$3.7 million
Increase firearms licensing and identification card fees	66%	+\$2.4 million
Increase income tax	64%	+\$563 million
Increase the sales tax	43%	+\$306 million
Make alcohol subject to the sales tax	69%	+\$46 million
Extend sales tax to groceries	8%	+\$36 million
Raise gasoline tax	66%	+\$79 million
Other ways to raise money		
■ Tax every mutual fund and stock transaction		
■ Tax lottery proceeds above \$1 million.		
■ Hire more tax auditors		
■ Tax R-rated movies — a sin tax.		
■ Increase gambling: Why should Connecticut and Rhode Island get it all?		
■ Open liquor stores on Sundays		
■ Legalize marijuana and tax it at the same rate as tobacco		+\$7.4 million
Average new revenue		+\$1.403 billion
Average amount of spending cuts and new revenue		\$2.620 billion

More of your suggestions

NAMING RIGHTS ON ANNUAL BASIS FOR PUBLIC BRIDGES, RECREATION CENTERS ETC

(*) Buy Prescription Drugs from Canada in Bulk.

The legislature must show some backbone, because we know Romney won't raise taxes.

A public discussion

The principle should be to spread the costs widely and keep cuts to a minimum.

Any budget cuts leading to loss of services will cost the state eventually anyway and in the meantime bring real hardship to many without other resources ... Making substantial budget cuts looks like trying to squeeze blood from stones, unless one is willing to let the burden of the budget problem fall most heavily on the poor, the sick, the mentally ill, children, and immigrants. These categories include large numbers who can't or don't bother to vote.

The politicians don't want to bite the revenue bullet. But where is money supposed to come from if not from tax payers? It has gotten almost impossible to have a rational public discussion about raising taxes, but what if Massachusetts took a national lead? California, and the rest of the country, haven't recovered from the binge of tax cutting that was begun with Proposition 13.

At least we're having some kind of public discussion rather than leaving it just to Tom Finneran!

Colleen J.G. Clark
Cambridge, MA

Growing divide

I have been in despair over the myopic, inhuman turn our state and country have taken. I know people with disabilities who can no longer work without the supports they've had, friends who've been out of work over a year, and children missing weeks of school while MCAS is administered.

Don't we want a healthy, well educated state population? We are creating a dangerous situation with more people relying on drugs and alcohol and less able to get the help they need. The growing divide between rich and poor will create many angry people who don't have the education or support to rise out of poverty.

Thank you so much for giving me an opportunity to express my views on the budget.

Leslie Lockhart
Newton

Shorter thoughts

"Create a national health insurance system to replace Medicaid, Medicare, and cover uninsured with mandatory participation. Without such a plan state and local budgets will face continued crises most years."

Ben Lieberman
Maynard

"There needs to be a way to flush out adults who may be disabled but are abusing the system (drugs etc.) because they can work. Increase fines for crimes rather than sentence time."

R. Inoue
Bedford

Furthermore

"Need to recognize that cutting taxes is a two-sided coin. Lower taxes on one side, reduced services on the other."

"Let's pay for things we need now — it will only cost more later."

"Reorganize state government. Having worked as a state employee for 13 years, the waste and duplication and unnecessary expenses would put a private company into bankruptcy."

"Reduce the size of every department of the state by at least 15 percent. Half of the jobs are patronage jobs. Also, no bonuses for state employees."

"Triple registration fees for SUVs and luxury vehicles over \$40,000. Triple luxury tax on furs, boats, etc."

We cannot reconcile the budget in one year — let's face it!

"Much more should be done to make all state employees really earn their pay. Too slack! Need to streamline government services."

"If the state can't/won't foot the bill for state mandates, they should be repealed! Don't pass costs for these mandates onto the localities. Towns cannot afford them, didn't ask for them, and they are re-restricted by [Proposition] 2 1/2"

"Make Mass Health recipients have co-pays like everybody else."

"Stop political patronage jobs at all state agencies. Eliminate pay raises, high pensions, waste, inefficiency. Start here and stop taxing the rest of us to death with scare tactics, making us feel bad if we don't go along."

"Major hike on cigarette tax. Cut services to everyone who is here illegally. Tax on property of Harvard, BU, and other universities."

"Allow towns to easily change their tax structures to make up shortfalls. Town should not have to petition the state for such changes."

Spread the pain

Enclosed is my proposed budget worksheet. It's based on these principles:

1. No tax increase, except for the \$360 million already implemented. 2. No borrowing. 3. The pain of the budget ax has to be felt by everyone!

My big complaint with the state government is that it refuses to face up to the fact that expenses must meet revenues. Instead, the first response of our arrogant government is always to raise taxes, even in difficult times. That is just plain stupid.

Here's a breakthrough idea: How about all executives in state government, including judges and legislators, taking a 5 percent pay cut? That would sure make it easier for the rest of us to stomach the budget cuts.

David E. Kelch
Carlisle

"Limit incarceration costs of \$44,000 per prisoner to the costs of one year college at Harvard (currently \$37,000). Minimal savings, but gets an idea across."

Louis Kleinrock
Walpole

"Tax all religious property at 20 percent of assessed value. Tax all nonprofit property at 20 percent of assessed value. End of deficit!"

Anthony Boff
Beverly

"Increasing the gasoline tax will reduce driving and pollution. Increasing firearms fees may reduce murders."

Ralph Kodis
Newton

"We have too many legislators by half. It is not going to save billions, but cut back the legislators' expense money. Who checks if these guys are claiming this money legitimately?"

"Encourage people to start businesses. Working for a pay check is a sucker's game!"

"Vote Republican!"

"During downtimes be careful not to penalize folks who are out of work. Education is critical to long term health of the economy. No casino gambling. Problems far outweigh potential benefits."

"Place a toll on routes 93 and 3. Those who chose to live in New Hampshire yet work in Mass should at least help pay for the roads they travel everyday."