

Local school official, statewide groups slam state cuts to local budgets

Sunday, June 8, 2014

By David DeWitt



A representative from the Athens City Schools joined a conference call Thursday criticizing state budget cuts impacting local governments and school districts across Ohio.

Assistant Superintendent Tom Gibbs joined the call organized by One Ohio Now, a coalition of more than 100 progressive advocacy groups, labor unions, and health and human service organizations.

The group recently launched a website at CutsHurtOhio.com that allows users to click a given county and obtain a figure on how much the area has lost in state budget cuts to education and local government.

In Athens County, the website shows \$2.6 million in cuts to education and \$3.6 million in cuts to local government funding, for a total loss of \$6.2 million.

Statewide, the site shows \$349 million in cuts to education, and \$1.5 billion in cuts to local government, for a total loss of \$1.86 billion.

Ohio Gov. Kasich, meanwhile, has continued to tout his handling of the state budget, stating in press materials that between 2011 and 2013, Ohio created more than 170,000 private-sector jobs and the unemployment rate fell from 9 percent to 7 percent.

He's also extolled \$2.7 billion in tax cuts as the force driving this job creation. On Kasich's website, he champions his work under a subsection titled, "Ohio's Comeback Story."

"Our state has only just begun to reach its true potential," his campaign site states. "John Kasich's independent and bold approach to governing will allow Ohio to build upon the progress made and gain strength for years to come."

The members of [One Ohio Now](http://OneOhioNow.com) and those who joined them on the conference call Thursday didn't seem to agree.

In addition to Gibbs, Cincinnati City Council member Chris Seelbach was on the call, along with Wendy Patton from Policy Matters Ohio, Stephen Dyer from Innovation Ohio, and Gavin Leonard, the state director for One Ohio Now.

"The idea of this was to build a site that simply explains the effect of state budget changes at the local level," Leonard said. "With our think-tank members, we pulled together all of the county data on the changes since 2011."

Seelbach said that in Cincinnati, the city's current budget deficit matches almost exactly the amount of money that has been cut from its revenue stream at the state level.

"Just yesterday we passed our city budget, and we filled a \$21 million deficit that is exactly the same amount we got cut from the local government fund," he said. "At the local level, we're doing really well. We're increasing our population. Things are going well, but we're still having to make cuts because the governor is taking money away."

Gibbs said he joined Athens City School District this past year, and previously worked in Washington County.

He said that with state level funding flat-lining, school districts across the state have had to cut services, cut busing, cut teachers and do whatever they can to decrease costs.

"I took the job here in Athens and found that they had closed an elementary school (Chauncey), reduced multiple teaching positions," he said. "Right now, I have our five-year forecast, and we are deficit spending again, and it's accelerating each year."

He praised the local community for passing tax levies.

"But the tax burden on individual families in Athens is considerably higher than it is for other districts in the area," he said.

Original Article:

<http://www.athensnews.com/ohio/article-42577-local-school-official-statewide-groups-slam-state-cuts-to-local-budgets.html>