



## Debate Continues Over How To Use Medicaid Expansion Surplus

By Ohio Public Radio and Jo Ingles

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Ohio is expected to have a surplus of 400 million dollars as a result of expanding Medicaid.

Some lawmakers want to use the money to fund another income tax cut, while others want it to go to schools and local governments. Ohio Public Radio's Jo Ingles reports.

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If you talk to Dale Butland at the liberal leaning think tank, Innovation Ohio, he'll tell you the state's schools could do a lot with the 400 million dollar projected revenue.

Butland – “400 million dollars, for example, is more than six times what the state spends on K through 3 literacy –that is to say the third grade reading guarantee. In fact there are only four line items in the education budget on which we spend more than 400 million dollars.”

So what could public schools do with 400 million dollars. Butland has a list.

Butland “We could double what we are spending now on gifted education, career tech education, the third grade reading guarantee. We could double funding for bussing around the state. We could double the amount of economically disadvantaged age that we give. We could pay for all day kindergarten or universal preschool in our most economically disadvantaged areas. We could triple the funding for the most profoundly challenged special needs kids that we have. And even if we didn't spend it on particular education programs and just distributed to the 613 school districts that we have, it would make an enormous difference.”

Butland says it could be enough to keep schools from having to go back to local taxpayers for more money. He says local schools and communities are hurting. And he adds a plan that would give money to both has merit, especially in light of recent state funding cuts.

Butland – “This is all a giant shell game. We claim we are cutting the state income tax when for regular people, they get virtually nothing out of it and whatever they get is more than wiped out in what they are paying for increased property taxes and local taxes. This is absurd.”

But Republican State Senator Chris Widener, sponsor of the bill that would give the 400 million dollars back to taxpayers in an income tax cut, says it is not a shell game.

Widener - “Well, I looked at the election results from this November's election and I don't think the voters of Ohio immediately approve all of the levies that are put in front of them, whether it's

schools, MRDD or whatever local services they are asked to vote and that, in our opinion, is where the decisions ought to be made.”

Widener also takes issue with the claim that schools are not getting enough money from the legislature.

Widener – “That’s not true. We gave an additional billion dollars to local schools in the state of Ohio in the current budget and often times, groups like this want voters to forget about that but we are not going to forget about that because basically all of the budget that the senate had by the time that it came from the house, we put it in schools, k-12 schools in the state of Ohio.

Widener says he thinks the priority should be to provide Ohioans with more tax relief. And by adding this 400 million dollar break to the 10 percent tax break they are already getting,

Widener says taxpayers will have more over their hard earned tax money.

There’s yet another factor to consider here. The state is being sued over the Medicaid expansion itself. And if the Ohio Supreme Court puts that on hold, the debate over how to spend projected Medicaid savings will be a moot point.

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